My name is Jim Fleming and this is Our Sunday School.

Our Sunday School is part of Stuart Heights Baptist Church in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

To prepare for this lesson, please go to oursundayschool.com for a copy of today's handout.

Now, let's get to this week's lesson.

Well, good morning everybody and welcome to Our Sunday School. Glad to have you with us this morning.

If you've got your Bibles, we're in... what book are we in?

Philemon. Yes, Philemon.

Multiple pronunciations are accepted. It'll be alright.

So, we're in Philemon. If you've got your blue books...

Thank you all for picking blue, by the way. It's made my life easier.

If you've got your blue books, we're in page 25. So head over there.

So I'm going to read through all of Philemon and then we'll pick up in verse 4 in just a minute.

So, Philemon.

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother.

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker. To Athena our sister.

To Archippus our fellow soldier. And to the church that meets in your home.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers because I hear of your love for all the saints

and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus.

I pray that your participation in the faith may become effective through knowing every good thing

that is in us for the glory of Christ.

For I have great joy and encouragement from your love because the hearts of the saints

have been refreshed through you, brother.

For this reason, although I have great boldness in Christ to command you to do what is right,

I appeal to you instead on the basis of love.

I, Paul, as an elderly man and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus,

appeal to you for my son, Onesimus.

I became his father while I was in chains.

Once he was useless to you, but now he is useful both to you and to me.

I am sending him back to you. I am sending my very own heart.

I wanted to keep him with me so that in my imprisonment for the gospel he might serve me in your place.

But I didn't want to do anything without your consent so that your good deed might not be out of obligation,

but of your own free will.

For perhaps this is why he was separated from you for a brief time so that you might get him back permanently,

no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, as a dearly loved brother.

He is especially so to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would me.

And if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account.

I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it.

Not to mention that you owe me even your very self.

Yes, brother, may I benefit from you in the Lord.

Refresh my heart in Christ.

Since I am confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

Meanwhile, also prepare a guest room for me since I hope that through your prayers I will be restored to you.

Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends you greetings, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Themis, and Luke, my co-workers.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.

Philemon.

So on page 25, we start there with our primary text, which is the Greek New Testament.

And I'm actually going to refer back to this a couple of times in today's lesson toward the end, I believe.

And then we get into the CSB text there, verses 4 through 7 in this particular pericope.

And I just want to focus really quick on the two verses that we're looking at today.

So verses 4 and 5.

I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers, because I hear of your love for all the saints and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus.

And a couple of, so two things.

One, I'm cutting Paul off in the middle of a thought here.

So the rest of the thought is verses 6 and 7, and this aggravates me, but unless you all want to have an 87-minute Sunday school class,

I've got to cut him off in the middle of this thought.

So this is the way the time works.

But a couple of quotes here to help us frame what Paul is doing here in the introductions, if you will, to help set up what is happening later on.

So the first one, the good doctor. I don't think we've quoted the good doctor yet, so Dr. Wright.

The prayer in verses 4 to 7 will be the basis for the appeal in verses 8 through 20.

So this is the setting up.

I think about this, if you've ever seen like four-year-olds play tee-ball.

Ever seen four-year-olds play tee-ball? Yes.

Is it organized and structured and highly efficient? It's just chaos, right?

But there's one thing you know to be true about tee-ball.

The ball is going to be set on the tee.

Because think about how more chaotic tee-ball would be if you didn't have that.

Like how do we wrangle all? You don't.

You have to start with a very structured, organized approach, and that is what Paul is doing here.

Because this thing could go a lot of different ways, right?

Philemon doesn't have to go, "Yes, the gospel is worth it. Jesus Christ is amazing, and my life has changed because of it,

so yes, let's welcome Onesimus back and everything is wonderful."

This could get messy in a hurry.

So this is setting up what's going to happen in the next few verses.

And then Dr. Thompson, Paul's opening prayer, looks ahead to the rest of the letter.

"In anticipation of the continued outworking of God's grace."

And this is the piece that I want us to make sure that we get when we walk through Philemon.

This is not, "Philemon's just a good guy and everything will be okay."

No. Philemon is a wretch, just like us.

And it's only because of who Jesus Christ is and the power of the gospel working in Philemon's life

that reconciliation with this slave is even possible.

So, God's grace to love the Lord's people.

And I don't know how long you've been in church, but that ain't always the easiest thing to do.

Okay? Y'all with me? Okay. Let's keep going.

So, verse 4 on page 26.

Verse 4 on page 26 starts off with,

"I always..." What does that sound like?

Every time. Every time.

"Thank my God when I mention you in my prayers."

So, when Paul prays for Philemon, he is thanking God for Philemon.

And I hope you have people like that in your life.

That when you pray for them, it's a, "Thank you God for this person. This is amazing."

But I don't want us to skip past this word "thank" because this...

I will show you all my cards. I did not do an exhaustive study on this.

I searched in the English.

It's only mildly offensive to me.

But the word "thank" shows up in some type of a variation just under 60 times in the New Testament.

And in the context of praying is...

It's 57 that I found. 56 were in the context of praying.

54 of those were thanking God for someone or something.

It was not thanking that person.

So, Tim, can you bring me your Bible?

Thank you brother. Just stay right up here.

Now, what did I say?

I didn't even think about it.

Who did I thank?

Tim. Why did I thank Tim?

He gave me the Bible.

Can we do that again?

I thank God for you brother.

That's what Paul would have said.

Because that's what Paul did say.

Over and over and over and over and over and over in the New Testament.

He gives us the example of "I thank God for you."

And that hit different, didn't it?

It did, right?

It reminded us that we're brothers.

It reminded us that there's a reason that we can engage in a relationship in a way that's good.

Did you all catch that?

Thank you brother.

I did it again! Thank you God for Tim.

Here we go.

But this is how tricky this is.

So, Zeke, I sent you an email back this week from the quotes.

And Shanda, I sent you an email back this week from the quotes.

And Miss Sandra, I sent you an email back this week from the quotes.

And I did something different that I haven't done when I send these emails back.

I said, "I thank God for you."

And I had to type it like five times.

Because my fingers wanted to say something else.

This is a habit that we can get in, but we need to get in the habit of doing what the example that's in Scripture is for us.

I thank God for you.

That's awesome.

It reorients us and it reorients each other and that's a really helpful thing.

And I hope as you read through the New Testament you go, "He did it there, and he did it there, and he did it there, and he did it there."

It's all over the place and it's beautiful.

This is intensely personal.

So I thank who?

My God.

This is not just intensely personal to the person being shown appreciation to God for what they have done or who they are.

This is also, the Lord's people are a community of believers, but it's individuals that come to Christ.

It's Paul's God.

And he's not saying, "It's my God and not your God, Philemon."

Y'all get what I'm saying here?

This is intensely personal to Paul.

Paul's relationship with Philemon is personal. Paul's relationship with the Lord is personal.

This is a really, really good thing.

So I thank my God, page 27, when I mention.

It's actually, this is odd words in the Greek that we kind of have to smash into a different way,

but the verb there is to make or to do, and then the mention is the noun.

And it's to remember, or when I talk about.

And this happens over and over and over in Paul's letters.

So he says something almost identical to this in Romans 1, Ephesians 1, Philippians 1, 1 Thessalonians 1, 2 Timothy 1, and here in Philemon 1.

And what did all those references have in common?

It's right up front. Right up front. Right up front.

He's telling people, "I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you. I'm praying for you."

And I'm convinced we don't tell people enough that we are praying for them.

Like the habit of the New Testament believer is to communicate that you are in fact praying for someone.

That is really good. Christians thank God for Christians, but Christians share their prayers about Christians with these Christians.

Like we get to tell people what we are doing for them on behalf of the one who can actually do something about it.

What's our due date? Thanksgiving Day.

You could not have teed up any more easy example than this.

We have been praying for you guys that things will go fantastically well.

That you get to witness to somebody in the operating room.

No, no, no, not the operating room. I said the wrong word. In the delivery room. No!

This is why Julie should be listening to my prayers because I will pray for the wrong thing so often.

So often. I cannot tell you guys how many times over the, I don't know, whatever it's been 20 something years I've been teaching,

that I will share a prayer that I have been praying for someone and they'll go, "Oh no, no, I don't want that."

Like, "Help me with better words then." That'd be great.

In the delivery room. Thank you. I knew somebody, I didn't land the plane on what the answer was.

And Darla realized that was still hanging out there. This is Darla's gift.

She's not letting the plane just float around in the air. We're going to find a runway and we're going to land the thing.

Alright, thank you. No! I thank God for you sister. There we go. There we go.

Alright. When I mention you in my prayers...

It's just beautiful. Can we just sit for a second? Like, how beautiful that is. When I mention you in my prayers.

It's beautiful. And I think one of the interesting things that Paul does here is he gives a little bit of an insight into his prayer life.

Sometimes I like commentators who state the really obvious thing, and Melik does a really nice job of this,

of just, "Here is what is happening. Don't get so far down into the Greek grammar gym."

And we're going to go there today. That you miss the... Paul's just telling them what he's praying for.

And it gives an opportunity for gratefulness to God, it gives an opportunity for alignment, it gives an opportunity for rebuke sometimes.

Is it the beginning of those letters? Romans, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy and Philemon?

All of those letters don't have only positive things in them. Like, there's stuff coming that's going to sting a little bit.

Like, it's going to be challenging in a way that's tricky. So, it's OK. You can still tell the truth.

Then we get to the top of page 28. So, I thank my God. I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers because...

Now, I don't understand this. I tried really, really hard this week to understand this.

But I have technical Greek commentaries that I get three to four words out of every paragraph that I can follow.

And they did their best. And it was not good enough to help me understand how to take this verb and understand that the word "because" should be in there.

And it... I don't know. But what I do know is that there's a half a dozen dudes that are super smart and every single one of them said,

"That's the way you ought to translate it." And I go, "OK. I hate trusting people. I really don't like it."

But that's where I'm at right now. So, maybe I'll take some Greek classes, like actual Greek classes, and learn what this is.

But let's look at the verb for just a second. So, this is a singular masculine nominative present active participle.

You're like, "What in the world is that about?" Well, it's about a lot of things.

So, page 28 there, this word here, a "kou" at the top, a present active participle.

Now, what do we know about present active participles?

Continuous. This is the lifestyle. This is the habit. This is the norm. This is the...

We would expect behavior to work this way kind of a thing.

So, where is that word used? Because I hear.

The norm, the regular, the consistent, the habit, the lifestyle of what Paul heard about Philemon was love and faith.

How cool is that?

Like, "What I hear about you regularly is your love and faith."

Yes! I don't...

I feel like we have been on the cookies on the lowest shelf here for a while, because

Colossians had a whole lot of positive accolades directed toward Christians that seemed like the most basic fundamental aspects of the Christian faith.

And that's the point. Like, we actually don't have to get complicated.

We just love God and love people, and that works.

Like, that gets you a shout out in the Bible itself. It's really incredible.

So, because I hear... Now, when did Paul write this?

Paul wrote this in prison, and he writes it, and then he hands it to somebody, and they go walk it to Philemon.

So, when we read "when I hear," it's not when Philemon is reading the letter, or the letter is read to him, it's when Paul wrote the letter.

So, it's a bit... There's a few days or weeks or maybe even months, however long it took him to get there, of a gap there.

So, the regular consistent habit here was somebody was giving Paul updates on Philemon.

Now, watch me. Oh, I better be careful with that.

Sorry. We're not getting into that today.

If we had to guess, who would we guess?

Christmas or...

One of those "E's," right? "E's" or "A's" or "Epaphras" or "Aristarchus" or...

Somebody that was mentioned in the... Yeah, somebody's giving him updates.

How would you have gotten updates?

Hundreds of miles.

And this is what they thought was valuable enough to communicate.

The character of the Christian.

That's significant.

Right? I mean, of all the things you could think of, because I am a...

What are the facts? You should think about the order that you should deliver them in to...

That generates the least amount of questions so that we can be efficient and get in and out.

That doesn't feel like that's what this is. This is a character report on Philemon.

Epaphras, which is really lovely. I mean, just really, really lovely.

So, before we get into love for all the saints and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus...

Excuse me. I want to walk you through a little bit of the structure of the text itself.

Because what we're going to show you right now, there's almost no way you can see this in the English.

You have to kind of peel back just a little bit. So, there we go.

So the CSB orders this because I hear of your love for the saints and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus.

And I've done some coloring here to try to pair things up.

OK, so the next one is... This is the Legacy Standard Bible.

I'm 97% sure this is the translation we'll be moving to when we start the series after Philemon.

Anybody want to know what it is? I'm not telling you yet.

It's because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.

You're like, "Well, that's different." Maybe. Maybe.

What's the one translation or what's the one version we haven't looked at?

The Greek. Let's look at the Greek.

Alright. This is just the English words. I could show you the Greek words.

Is anybody going to be a benefit from that? No, I wouldn't either. I'd have to go look it up.

Because I hear you, the love and the faith which you have toward or in the Lord Jesus and toward or for all the saints.

And that sounds like the Legacy Standard, right?

So let's think about this for a second.

What should love be paired up with?

Could love be paired up with the Lord Jesus and the saints?

Sure. Absolutely. What about faith?

I mean, obviously faith in the Lord Jesus. Should we have faith in the saints?

No! No, we should not.

We're never commanded in the New Testament to have faith in any, any, any thing or one other than God Himself.

So, when we look at this, you're like, "Well, how do we know how to arrange this in English then?"

Well, there's actually a chiastic structure here.

You remember chiasms? That the first line and the last line go together and the two center lines go together?

You work your way in and you work your way out.

When you arrange the Greek in a chiastic structure, you see the love marries up with the saints and the faith marries up with the Lord Jesus.

And does anybody remember where you put the most important thing?

In the middle. That's right.

So Paul, in the structure of the language itself, is pointing to Jesus is where you start and there's an impact from there.

Come on, y'all. That's just pretty, isn't it?

And all of this kind of just gets... we just kind of smooth it over.

And I would say, the Christian standard is fine.

It marries the things up that should be married up, but the legacy standard actually keeps the word order of the Greek and forces you to kind of do the work and to see the relationships.

Are there good and bad things about both those approaches? Yes, there really are.

You just want to be aware of the approach that your translation uses.

The Christian standard takes a ton of flexibility with the word order and the phrase order of different verses in the New Testament.

Some other translations don't, but that's just... we've got to know what we're working with.

So, that's the chiastic structure here.

So, "I hear of your love." This comes first in the Christian standard.

And this is a theme in Philemon. We see love in verse 5 and verse 7 and verse 9.

"For all the saints..." Don't flip the page yet. So, a couple of things is that Christians talk about Christians loving Christians.

So, there was somebody who whispered in Paul's ear that told him about what Philemon was doing.

Christians listened for good news about other Christians.

So, Paul heard those good words and was proactively interested in engaging with them.

And then Christians share good news about other Christians. Paul takes it and sends it back to Philemon and says,

"Hey, look what I heard about you. This is good."

And it takes all three of those. It takes somebody telling Paul.

It takes Paul listening and it takes Paul sending it back for Philemon to get the message and to be encouraged.

And all of those are really important. So, talk about it, listen for it, and share it.

This is really, really good. And I went down this deep, deep, deep rabbit hole of this this week.

And then I read Ms. Saunders' quote from Payson Aiken.

"We should work hard at giving authentic praise to our brothers and sisters for the good things we see God doing in their lives.

It will bless and encourage them, something we all need, and also inspire and motivate them to keep on going."

Yay! Do you feel encouraged when someone encourages you?

Hopefully so. Right? Otherwise, that was a lousy Barnabas that did whatever.

Now, is it possible to screw up encouragement? Yes. Yes, it certainly is. A thousand percent.

But let's practice this. Let's do this. Let's encourage each other.

Yes? Thank you. I'm dying.

You made the point that often it's uncomfortable for us to encourage other people.

And God just keeps impressing on my heart that instead of living in that awkwardness, we need to embrace that awkwardness and realize it's God's general reminder.

This is not your home. It will be uncomfortable for you to encourage others because that's not what they do here.

But that's what we do here. And the more comfortable we get with trusting God in that, the less awkward it becomes in us.

Amen. Amen. And this is all the stuff that is just one level deep under the surface.

Paul didn't focus in on this. We're just looking at what he's doing and drawing conclusions and direction from it,

which I think is amazing that you can go examine somebody's actions that closely.

When you get to the root of it, it is still significant and good and worth following.

So your love for all the saints. So what do we find out about Philemon later on in Philemon?

I'm sorry. What do we find out about Onesimus later on in Philemon?

He's there with them. He's there in what we think is likely Colossae.

Tell me about Onesimus' spiritual background.

So the first time he was with Philemon, believer or no? No.

He somehow meets up with Paul, which is super weird, y'all. I mean that's just incredibly unlikely.

But Paul's telling everybody about Jesus, so I don't know. This is the way this works.

When Paul talks about he's a father to Onesimus, so there's some way that Paul has shared the gospel

and Onesimus has become converted and he's sending him back to Philemon now.

And when Paul says, "Your love for all the saints," who does that now include?

It now includes Onesimus.

See, I hear and I hear and I hear and I hear and I hear how you've been loving on the saints.

How you've been loving on the saints. How you've been loving on the saints.

Here's one more.

Boy, the gospel gets real in a hurry, doesn't it?

He does have a little experience with conversion, doesn't he?

That's exactly right. Who did vouch for him? Does anybody remember who put their arm around him

and said, "This guy, I'm vouching for him"?

Barnabas the encourager.

And a reputation for encouragement. People like encouragers.

You want to win a straw poll in any group. Just be an encourager. You will get votes.

Barnabas would very likely have been a very valued, treasured member of that community

because he was an encourager and when he speaks up for somebody, that carries outsized weight on this.

It's almost like Paul's going, "Here's an opportunity to practice."

Like, "Are we talking about practice?" Yes, we are.

"When I mention you in my prayers because I hear of your love for all the saints and..."

Because there's a second half to this, right?

Aw, thanks, Mom.

She commented, "I thank God for you, Jim."

Aw, shucks.

Well, now I'm going to get tore up. Dadgummit.

"Thank God for..." Well, I've got to read the whole thing again now. Yep, here we go.

"I always thank my God when I mention you in my prayers because I hear of your love for all the saints and the faith..."

And the faith, this only shows up a couple of times in Philemon, but the concept is there, especially in verse 10

where we talk about Onesimus being converted.

"And the faith that you have..." It's a present active, so you have it right now.

"...in the Lord Jesus." And I want to lean into that "in" for just a second.

So flip over in your blue books over to page 11, because this is hard to see on the screen from where you are.

Don't advance yet, Dave. There's one more to go.

The word "in," if you had to guess which Greek preposition is being used here,

you would guess "in," because it means "in."

So let me orient you to the preposition circle.

So the preposition circle, like the circle is the object of the thing that we are talking about.

Prepositions generally show movement or location, so you would think it would be "in."

It is not the Greek word for "in." It is the Greek word for "toward."

Let me try it again. One more time. There we go.

Sometimes you have to whack the screen for it to work really well.

So it is the Greek word for "toward." It is you are moving toward this object.

And the faith that you have toward the Lord Jesus.

You might go, "Well, that sounds weird. That's why they translated it "in."

It is a very close concept, but it is not the exact same concept.

This implies there is still growth going on as Philemon pursues Christ in his faith journey.

Now, it doesn't mean he is not a believer. We definitely think he is a believer.

But the preposition has to have an object.

The cool thing about Greek is that every Greek noun tells us by the way that it is spelled

what part of speech it functions in in the sentence.

So flip back over to page 10 in your blue books.

And this is our cheat sheet for Greek nouns.

And I will tell you the reason I made this page is because I got tired of looking it up.

The reason I made page 9 is because I got tired of looking it up.

The reason I made page 11 is because it was too complicated in discrete pieces

and I needed to draw a picture.

And then I found that somebody had already drawn a picture and I just used theirs.

So this is the great thing about studying the original languages of the Bible.

Somebody has already done the work.

You just probably need to go figure out where it is and then make it not sound like it was written in the 1700s.

So that is what I have done here.

So the cheat sheet for Greek nouns.

The case, look at that third bold part there, is the function the noun performs in the sentence.

Now, for this sentence and the faith that you have in the Lord Jesus,

what part of speech would you expect Lord Jesus to be?

Put your English grammar hats on for just a second.

Say it again?

The direct object. That is exactly right.

So we would be looking for the accusative case.

And what case are Lord and Jesus in?

Back on page 30.

The accusative case.

Boom!

So when you hear our pastor say,

"Faith has to have an object that is theologically and grammatically correct."

And the object is our Lord Jesus Christ.

The object is never anything else in the New Testament.

It is always the Lord Jesus.

And that is good news.

Because think about how challenging Christianity would be if,

"Well, it is Sunday. What is the object today?"

We have got to figure it out.

Well, it is Monday. Check your sheet.

What is your cheat sheet for Christianity objects?

What is the object today?

It is Tuesday afternoon.

Well, has the object changed?

No. The object has not changed.

The object remains unchanged.

The object will always remain unchanged.

The Lord Jesus Christ is only and always the object of a Christian's faith.

Yes!

That is good news.

And I think that might be a handy place to stop.

And I will just summarize this whole text here.

That Christian faith works.

Christian faith works.

It is not a, "Well, I believe and now there is no activity in my life."

No, no, no. Christian faith works.

There is some action that is a result of my belief in what is going on.

Because the gospel changes people, y'all.

It is really, really important.

Payson Aiken say this.

They say, "God-given faith is active and dynamic. It does things."

Now, do not get the order wrong here.

We do not work to have faith.

That is a different building in this town.

We have faith that works.

Hugely important, the order here.

Hugely important, the order here.

I had plans a very long time ago to do this on a regular basis.

I do not think I have ever actually done it.

So I am just going to show you guys real quick.

This is the list of all the members of our Sunday school.

And what I would love for you to do, since not everybody knows everybody,

is I would love for you to pick a couple of names on this list

and pray for them.

And then, tell them you prayed for them.

And tell them you thank God for them.

So we can practice.

So, practice.

Does this sound good?

Every bit of this is...

Wow, that just waved, didn't it? That was crazy.

It made me dizzy.

I looked at it through the wrong part of my glasses.

I am telling you. I am telling you now. It is something.

So, yeah.

There we go.

All of the contact information is where?

It is in Realm.

It is that computer app that our staff tells us about every 30 minutes

and that we never download.

And we have forgotten our password.

And the church office will help you with all of that.

Okay? And we are just going to leave it on this slide for the rest of the day.

Does that work? Cool.

That is our lesson for today.

So, what I want you to do is you should have your weekly update on your table.

So, grab your weekly update.

We have prayer requests written down on this already.

Thank you, Miss Linda.

I am so faithful at this. I so appreciate it.

If you have got a new prayer request, either for this week or for ongoing,

please jot those down there and we will just keep praying for people.

Because that is what we do.

That is what we do.

Alright. Thanks for coming today, guys.

Thanks for engaging.

And don't forget to subscribe to our podcast, YouTube channel, and weekly email.

You can subscribe to all three of those at OurSundaySchool.com.

Grace and peace to you.