

Lesson Plan: The Two Cities—From Ancient Hippo to Halliwell Manor

Subject: Comparative Theology, Philosophy, and Media Studies

Student Level: Advanced High School / Early University (20-year-old homeschool student)

Time Allotment: 90 minutes

Materials Needed

- Digital or streaming access to **Charmed, Season 1, Episode 2: "I've Got You Under My Skin."** We will focus on the church scene (approximately 36:00–38:00).
- A printed or digital copy of selected excerpts from St. Augustine's **The City of God**. The following short passage is essential:
 - **Book 14, Chapter 28:** "Of the Nature of the Two Cities, the Earthly and the Heavenly." (A short, clear paragraph defining the two cities based on two different loves). It is highly recommended to use a modern translation like the one by Henry Bettenson (Penguin Classics).
- A notebook and pen, or a digital document for note-taking and completing the creative assignment.
- Optional: A whiteboard or large sheet of paper for creating a comparison chart.

I. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

1. **Articulate** the core concepts of Augustine's "City of God" and "City of Man," defining each by its foundational "love."
2. **Analyze** the character of Piper Halliwell and the church scene in *Charmed* using Augustine's philosophical framework as an interpretive lens.
3. **Synthesize** these ideas by creating a short, original piece (dialogue, report, or parable) that demonstrates a comparative understanding of both texts.
4. **Evaluate** how ancient theological concepts can provide fresh insight into modern pop culture narratives.

II. Lesson Activities & Procedure

Part 1: The Hook - The Problem at the Church Door (15 minutes)

The goal of this section is to ground the lesson in the student's primary interest and establish the central "problem" we will investigate.

1. **Watch the Scene:** Begin by watching the key scene from *Charmed* S1E2 where Piper tries to enter the church to retrieve the athame and is physically blocked by an invisible force.
2. **Initial Discussion:** Engage with a "Notice & Wonder" approach.
 - "What do you **notice** happening here, both physically and emotionally for Piper?"
 - "Why do you think she is blocked? The show implies it's because she's a witch. What does that suggest about the nature of 'good' and 'holy' in this universe?"
 - "What do you **wonder** about? Does it seem fair that a 'good witch' who fights demons is

barred from a holy place? What conflict does this create for her identity?"

Part 2: The Framework - Augustine's Two Cities (20 minutes)

Here, we introduce the philosophical tool we will use to analyze the scene more deeply. The focus is on understanding one core concept, not Augustine's entire theology.

1. **Introduce the Thinker:** Briefly explain who St. Augustine was: a Roman-African philosopher writing as the Roman Empire was collapsing. He wrote *The City of God* to explore history, humanity, and God's purpose.
2. **Read the Core Text:** Read the short excerpt from Book 14, Chapter 28 together. Pause after reading it to let it sink in.
3. **Build a Comparison Chart:** On a whiteboard or in a notebook, create a simple T-chart to define the two cities. The goal is clarity, not exhaustive detail.

The City of Man (Earthly City)	The City of God (Heavenly City)
Defined By: The love of self, to the point of contempt for God.	Defined By: The love of God, to the point of contempt for self.
Values: Earthly peace, power, glory, status, and pleasure.	Values: Eternal peace, faith, hope, and serving a higher purpose.
Its Citizens: Live for the moment and for worldly gain.	Its Citizens: Live on earth as "pilgrims" or "sojourners"—their true home is elsewhere.

4. **Key Insight Question:** "According to Augustine, belonging to a city isn't about where you live or what title you hold. It's about what you *love*. How does this simple idea make his concept both powerful and universal?"

Part 3: The Connection - Piper as a "Pilgrim" (30 minutes)

This is the heart of the lesson, where we apply the framework from Part 2 to the scene from Part 1. The goal is to move beyond a surface-level reading and generate new insights through Socratic questioning.

Central Question: "Let's revisit Piper at the church door, but now with Augustine's ideas in mind. How does the concept of the Two Cities help us understand her struggle in a new way?"

- "The church building physically represents the City of God. But Augustine says the **true** city is invisible and defined by love. Is it possible that Piper belongs to the City of God in spirit, even if the physical building rejects her?"
- "What is Piper's motivation? Is she trying to get the athame for selfish power (City of Man) or to protect an innocent (City of God)? How does her *intention* determine which city she's truly serving in that moment?"
- "Think about the demon, Javna. He preys on vanity and the desire for youth. Which city do his actions and his victims' desires clearly fall into?"
- "Augustine claimed the two cities were 'intermingled' on earth, impossible to separate until the end of time. How does the world of *Charmed*, where good and evil coexist in everyday San Francisco, perfectly illustrate this idea of two mixed cities?"
- "If the church isn't their sanctuary, could we argue that the Halliwell Manor—the place where they use their powers for good—functions as their outpost of the City of God? Why or why not?"

Part 4: Creative Synthesis - Make the Connection Real (25 minutes)

This section allows the student to demonstrate their understanding in a creative, application-focused way. The student should choose the option that is most interesting to them.

Instructions: "Now it's your turn to formalize this connection. Choose one of the following creative tasks to complete. The goal is to use Augustine's ideas to explain the *Charmed* universe."

- **Option A: The Dialogue.** Write a short, imaginative dialogue (1-2 pages) between St. Augustine and Piper Halliwell. They meet in a timeless space and discuss her experience at the church. What advice would he give her? How would she challenge his worldview?
- **Option B: The Analyst's Report.** You are a 'Watcher' or a member of a supernatural council. Write a formal report analyzing the "Piper-at-the-Church" incident. Use Augustine's terminology (City of God, City of Man, the two loves, pilgrims) to explain the magical and theological significance of what happened.
- **Option C: The Modern Parable.** Augustine loved teaching through stories. Rewrite the story of Piper at the church door as a short, modern parable that explains the difference between belonging to a physical institution and belonging to a spiritual city defined by love and purpose.

III. Assessment & Reflection

The success of the lesson will be measured through discussion and the creative output.

1. **Formative Assessment:** The quality of the student's answers and insights during the Part 3 discussion demonstrates their grasp of the core concepts.
2. **Summative Assessment:** The chosen creative piece from Part 4 will be evaluated based on a simple rubric:
 - **Clarity of Concept:** Does the piece accurately reflect an understanding of the Two Cities?
 - **Creative Application:** Does the piece successfully and creatively apply Augustine's ideas to the *Charmed* narrative?
 - **Insight:** Does the piece offer a unique perspective or a deeper understanding of either text?
3. **Concluding Reflection (Final 5 minutes):**
 - "What was the most surprising connection you found between these two very different worlds?"
 - "Does looking at *Charmed* through this ancient philosophical lens make it a 'deeper' show? Why or why not?"
 - "Where else in stories you love—books, movies, games—do you see this conflict between characters motivated by love of self versus characters motivated by love of a higher good?"