

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 3 OF 104

Trust Under Test

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Genesis 17-24
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 3
Gospels	Matthew 4:1-5:12
General New Testament	Acts 3:1-4:22

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to move your class from admiring trust to practicing it. Everyone in the room will say they trust God. The readings ask a harder question: trust Him with what, and on what evidence, and what happens when the answer is delayed? Abraham is the case study, Proverbs 3 is the instruction, the wilderness is the pattern, and the Sanhedrin is the pressure test.

Doctrinally, three things want guarding. First, Genesis 22 and Galatians 3 together keep the promise to Abraham where it belongs, fulfilled in Christ and enjoyed by all who are baptized into Him, rather than parked in a future political Israel. Second, Acts 3:19 beside Acts 2:38 keeps repentance and obedience joined together rather than reduced to belief alone. Third, Acts 4:12 says out loud what a polite culture will not: salvation is in one name. Say it plainly, and say it without contempt.

Formationally, the thread is obedience that runs ahead of explanation. Abraham split the wood before he understood. Jesus refused three shortcuts on the strength of three sentences from Deuteronomy. Peter and John kept preaching after being told to stop. Ask your class this, and give them a minute of silence before anyone answers: what is the thing you would do this month if you were certain God would take care of the outcome, and what exactly is stopping you?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Genesis 17-24, and give the bulk of the hour to Genesis 22. It is the most formative passage in the week and the one that will stay with people. Read the chapter aloud in class rather than summarizing it; the text does its own work if you let it.

Second session: Take up Acts 3:1-4:22. It carries the doctrinal weight of the week, especially Acts 3:19 and Acts 4:12, and it gives your class a picture of ordinary Christians under pressure. Save ten minutes at the end for the question about where each of them is silent.

The other two readings: Proverbs 3 and Matthew 4:1-5:12 both reward private reading. Ask the class to read Proverbs 3:5-6 in its full paragraph rather than alone, and to read the Beatitudes twice, once through and once slowly, asking which one is least true of them.

Laughter, Fire, and a Mountain

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These eight chapters are the heart of Abraham's life, and they alternate between staggering faith and embarrassing failure. Chapter 17 seals the covenant with a sign in the flesh and gives both Abram and Sarai new names, because God intends to make them into something they are not yet. Chapter 18 gives us one of the most astonishing scenes in the Old Testament: a man standing in a road, negotiating with the Judge of all the earth, and being heard. Then chapter 19 burns, and chapter 20 shows Abraham telling the same half-truth about his wife that he told in Egypt years before.

Chapter 21 finally brings Isaac. The name means laughter, and Sarah says that God has made her laugh in a way she never expected. It also brings the painful sending away of Hagar and Ishmael, which the New Testament later uses as an illustration (Galatians 4:21–31) but which the narrative itself simply reports as a household grief that God attended to with kindness toward the outcasts.

Then chapter 22. Take your time here. God does not ask for a possession, He asks for the promise itself. If Isaac dies, every word God has spoken since Genesis 12 dies with him. Abraham rises early, splits the wood, walks three days, and tells his servants, "we will come back to you." Hebrews 11:19 tells us what he was thinking. The chapter closes with a name for the place: the Lord will provide. Then Sarah dies, Abraham buys a cave, and a servant goes looking for a wife for Isaac in a chapter that is nothing but the quiet, ordinary providence of God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Circumcision (17:9–14) is the sign of the covenant with Abraham and his descendants. It is not binding on Christians, and Paul says so with some force (Galatians 5:2–6; Colossians 2:11–12).
- The three visitors of chapter 18 include "the Lord" speaking directly with Abraham, and two angels who go on to Sodom. Do not overbuild on this; the text tells us only what it tells us.
- Sodom and Gomorrah sat in the plain near the Dead Sea. Their destruction becomes a standing biblical image of judgment (Isaiah 1:9; Luke 17:28–32; 2 Peter 2:6).
- Mount Moriah (22:2) is identified in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the site where Solomon later built the temple, the place where sacrifice would be offered for a thousand years.
- Isaac is roughly thirty-seven when Sarah dies, and the servant's errand in chapter 24 takes place in a world where marriages were arranged by families. The chapter is about guidance and faithfulness, not about a courtship method to copy.
- All of this is centuries before Sinai. There is no Law, no tabernacle, no priesthood. Read it for what it reveals about God and faith.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Genesis 18:22–33 shows Abraham standing in the road bargaining with God over Sodom. Walk through the exchange. What is Abraham appealing to, and what does his boldness tell us about how God receives the prayers of a friend?*

Abraham is not trying to manipulate God, and God is not reluctant. Look at what Abraham appeals to in 18:25: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" He appeals to God's own character. He never asks God to spare the wicked; he asks whether the righteous will be swept away with them, and the answer each time is no. Notice also that God initiates the whole conversation by deciding not to hide what He is about to do (18:17). The bargaining scene happens because God invited it.

The pastoral point is that God welcomes honest, persistent, even audacious prayer from people who are in covenant with Him. Compare Luke 18:1–8 and Hebrews 4:16. Ask your class whether their prayers sound like a man standing in the road with the Judge of all the earth, or like a form letter. Most of us pray too politely and too generally to be arguing for anybody.

Question 2. *Sodom is one of the passages people find hardest to defend. Read Genesis 18:20–21 and 19:1–13, then read 2 Peter 2:6–9 and Jude 7. How does Scripture itself explain what happened there, and how would you talk about it with a friend who thinks it makes God cruel?*

Let Scripture give the answer rather than supplying your own. Genesis 18:20 speaks of an outcry against Sodom, language elsewhere used of the cry of the oppressed. Genesis 19 shows a city in which a mob of men, “both old and young, all the people from every quarter,” demanded to rape two visitors, and then attacked Lot for refusing. Ezekiel 16:49–50 names pride, excess food, careless ease, refusal to help the poor and needy, and abomination. Jude 7 names sexual immorality and going after strange flesh. Second Peter 2:6–9 says God knows how to deliver the godly and reserve the unjust for judgment, and holds the city up as an example.

Teach it truthfully and without cruelty. God’s judgment fell on an entire culture that had made violence and immorality ordinary, and the very chapter that records the judgment records God going to extraordinary lengths to get one compromised family out alive. If a class member has a son or a friend who identifies as homosexual, the way you say this will be remembered longer than what you say. Hold the standard without contempt, remembering 1 Corinthians 6:9–11, which names such sins and then says, “and such were some of you,” and then says they were washed.

Question 3. *God waited twenty-five years to give Abraham a son and then asked for him back. What was actually being tested on Mount Moriah, and what has God placed in your hands that you are holding with a closed fist?*

What is tested is whether Abraham loves the Giver more than the gift. God calls Isaac “your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love,” piling up the words so that nobody misses the cost. And notice that God already knew the answer; the test was for Abraham, and for us. Hebrews 11:17–19 says Abraham concluded that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, which is why he could tell the servants in 22:5 that both of them would return. This is not blind obedience. It is obedience that has done the math on God’s faithfulness.

Now press the second half of the question, gently and specifically. Nearly everyone in the room has something they have quietly decided God may not have: a child’s future, a marriage, a retirement account, a reputation, a plan for their own body when the diagnosis comes. Ask what it would mean to carry that thing up the hill with open hands. Then read 22:14 aloud. The name Abraham gave the place was not “the Lord tested me.” It was “the Lord will provide.”

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the promise to Abraham through 17:1–8, 18:17–19, and 22:15–18. What is added or sharpened at each stage, and who besides Abraham is included by the end?*

In 17:1–8 God promises to multiply him exceedingly, make him a father of many nations, change his name, establish an everlasting covenant with his descendants, and give the land of Canaan. In 18:17–19 God adds that Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation and that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him, and He ties it to Abraham commanding his household after him. In 22:15–18 God swears by Himself, promises descendants as the stars and the sand, victory over enemies, and again that in his Seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, this time grounded in “because you have obeyed My voice.” By the end, all the nations are included, and Galatians 3:16 identifies the Seed as Christ.

2. *Read Genesis 22:1–14 beside Hebrews 11:17–19. What had Abraham concluded God was able to do, and what does verse 5 of Genesis 22 suggest he expected to happen on the way back down?*

Hebrews 11:19 says he reasoned that God was able to raise Isaac even from the dead. That conclusion was not a hunch; it followed from the promise in Genesis 21:12 that in Isaac his seed would be called. If God had sworn the line would run through Isaac and now required Isaac’s life, then God must intend to give him back. Genesis 22:5 fits exactly: “we will come back to you.”

3. List every detail of Genesis 22 that later finds an echo at Calvary: an only son, the wood carried uphill, the place God chose, the third day, the ram caught in a thicket. Then name the point where the parallel stops, and say why that difference is the whole gospel.

The father offers his only beloved son; the son carries the wood up the hill on his own back; the son goes willingly, since Isaac was easily strong enough to resist an old man; the place is the one God appointed, later the temple mount; the son is as good as dead from the moment God speaks and is received back on the third day; a substitute is caught in a thicket and dies in the son's place. The parallel stops at the substitute. On Moriah a ram died instead of the son. At Calvary the Son was the substitute, and no voice from heaven stopped it (Romans 8:32; John 1:29).

4. Abraham's servant prays a specific prayer in 24:12–14. Read the chapter and mark every place where God's providence and the servant's own diligence are operating in the same moment.

He prays for success and a specific sign, and then he stands at the well at evening when the women come out, which is the sensible time and place to be. Rebekah arrives before he has finished speaking. He watches in silence to see whether the Lord has prospered his way. He asks her family, tells the whole story plainly, and refuses to eat until he has stated his errand. He prayed like everything depended on God and worked like a man with a job to finish, and the chapter never suggests those are in tension.

5. Sarah laughed, and so did Abraham (17:17; 18:12). Name the promise of God you have quietly stopped expecting Him to keep, and take one concrete step this week that would only make sense if He keeps it.

Answers will vary. Listen for the quiet cynicism that hides in long-time church members: the prodigal they have stopped praying for by name, the marriage they have decided will never be warm again, the sin they have decided they will always lose to. A concrete step might be a letter, a counselor's appointment, a renewed daily prayer with a name attached.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The command to offer Isaac: God never intended the death of the boy, and He explicitly condemns child sacrifice elsewhere (Leviticus 18:21; Jeremiah 19:5). The test was real; the outcome was never in doubt with God. He alone has the right to give and require life.
- Sodom: speak the truth about sexual sin and about the pride, ease, and neglect of the poor that Ezekiel 16:49–50 also names. Speak it with the tone of 1 Corinthians 6:11, which ends in washing rather than in contempt.
- Abraham deceives Abimelech in chapter 20, repeating the failure of chapter 12. Do not defend it. Scripture records the sins of its heroes without approving them.
- Lot's daughters (19:30–38) and the origins of Moab and Ammon are frank material. In a mixed class it is enough to note what happened, say plainly that Scripture reports it without commending it, and move on.
- Circumcision is not binding on Christians. If someone raises it, Galatians 5:2–6 and Colossians 2:11–12 settle it: the Old Law was fulfilled and taken out of the way in Christ.

Trust With All Your Heart

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 3 moves from the pursuit of wisdom to the practice of it. The first twelve verses are a series of commands with promises attached, and they cover the whole of a life: mercy and truth, trust, the fear of the Lord, money, and suffering. The second half, verses 13 through 35, celebrates what wisdom is worth and then gets very concrete about how a wise man treats the person who lives next door.

Verses 5 and 6 are the hinge, and they are worth slowing down over because everyone in your class already knows them. The instruction is not to stop thinking. Solomon spends the whole book demanding hard thinking. The instruction is to stop leaning, to stop putting the final weight of a decision on your own analysis when God has spoken. The promise is not that God will explain the route, but that He will make it straight.

Verses 11 and 12 will matter more to some people in the room than anything else in the chapter. The idea that hardship can be fatherly discipline rather than divine indifference is either a comfort or an offense, depending on where a person is sitting. Hebrews 12 picks these verses up and builds on them, and it is worth reading the two passages together in class.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Proverbs 3 belongs to the long parental instruction of chapters 1 through 9, spoken by a father to a son on the edge of adult life.
- “Firstfruits” language (3:9) draws on Israel’s agricultural offerings. The principle of giving God the first and best carries over; the Old Covenant tithe itself does not bind Christians (2 Corinthians 9:6–7).
- Verses 11 and 12 are quoted in Hebrews 12:5–6, where the writer treats them as God speaking to Christians as sons.
- “Tree of life” in 3:18 is a deliberate echo of Eden. Wisdom restores something of what was lost there.
- Hebrew poetry uses parallelism: the second line of a verse usually restates, sharpens, or contrasts the first. Reading both lines together is how a proverb is meant to be heard.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 3:5–6 is one of the best known passages in the Bible and one of the most misused. Read it slowly. What is promised, what is not promised, and what is the phrase “lean not on your own understanding” asking of a competent adult who is good at his job?*

What is promised is direction: “He shall direct your paths,” or make them straight. What is not promised is an explanation, a preview, or an easy road. Plenty of Christians have quoted this verse expecting God to show them which house to buy and then felt betrayed when He did not. Solomon is describing the settled posture of a life, not a decision-making technique. The heart is the whole inner person, and “with all your heart” rules out a divided arrangement where God gets the religious decisions and we keep the financial ones.

As for leaning, the picture is of putting your full weight on something. A man leans on a staff when the ground is uneven. Solomon is not asking an accountant to stop doing arithmetic; he is asking him not to make his own judgment the final authority when God’s word has already spoken. Ask the class to name a decision where they would be tempted to say, “I know what the Bible says, but in my situation.” That sentence is the whole verse in reverse.

Question 2. *Verses 9 and 10 tell you to honor the Lord with your firstfruits and promise full barns. Whole ministries have been built on those two verses. Since a proverb states a general principle and not a guarantee, what is genuinely being taught here, and what is not?*

What is taught is priority and trust: give God the first and the best, and do it as an act of honor. What is not taught is a transaction in which giving obligates God to enrich you. Proverbs describes how life generally goes in a world God governs: generous people tend to be cared for, and grasping people tend to end up small and alone. Read as a guarantee, verse 10 would make the widow of Mark 12:41–44 a failure, and she is the one Jesus commended.

Take a moment to say what the New Testament actually teaches about giving, because your class is swimming in bad teaching on this subject. Second Corinthians 9:6–7 says each one is to give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, because God loves a cheerful giver. First Corinthians 16:2 sets the first day of the week and giving as we have prospered. The Old Covenant tithe is not bound on Christians, and the New Testament standard is in some ways higher, not lower.

Question 3. *Proverbs 3:11–12 says the Lord corrects the son in whom He delights. Think back over a hard season of your own life. How would you tell the difference between God’s discipline and plain trouble, and what did you do with that season at the time?*

Begin by admitting the honest difficulty: Scripture does not give us a formula for reading our own suffering, and Job’s friends went badly wrong trying. What Proverbs 3:11–12 does say is that hardship in the life of a child of God is never outside His fatherly hand, and that the temptation is either to despise it, shrugging it off as meaningless, or to faint under it, concluding God has quit on us. Hebrews 12:11 adds the purpose: afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Let the second half of the question do the pastoral work. Ask for a real season, not a hypothetical. Many people will discover in the telling that they never actually asked God what He was after, they only asked Him to stop. The useful question is not “why did this happen” but “what is God forming in me, and am I cooperating.” Be ready for grief in the room, and do not rush it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the commands in 3:1–12 and write the promise attached to each one. How many of those promises concern material things, and how many concern something else?*

The commands include keeping the law and commands in the heart, binding mercy and truth on the neck, trusting the Lord fully, not leaning on your own understanding, acknowledging Him in all your ways, not being wise in your own eyes, fearing the Lord and departing from evil, honoring the Lord with your possessions and firstfruits, and not despising His chastening. The attached promises are length of days and peace, favor with God and man, straight paths, health to the body and strength to the bones, full barns, and the assurance of being loved as a son. Only one of those, the barns, concerns material abundance. The rest are about relationship, direction, and character.

2. *What does Hebrews 12:5–11 add to Proverbs 3:11–12 about the purpose of discipline and about what it produces in a person who submits to it?*

Hebrews 12 adds that the discipline proves sonship, that a child with no correction is illegitimate, that human fathers corrected us for a short time as seemed best to them while God does it for our profit that we may share His holiness, and that no discipline seems joyful at the time but afterward yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those trained by it. The Hebrews writer also treats Proverbs 3:11–12 as God’s direct address to Christians, calling it “the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons.”

3. *Verses 13 through 18 compare wisdom to silver, gold, and rubies, and then call her a tree of life. Trace the comparison, and look up Genesis 2:9, Genesis 3:22–24, and Revelation 22:2 to see where else that image appears.*

Wisdom is said to be better merchandise than silver, better gain than fine gold, more precious than rubies, with length of days in her right hand and riches and honor in her left, her ways pleasantness and all her paths peace. Then she is called a tree of life to those who take hold of her. The tree of life stood in Eden and was guarded after the fall,

and it appears again in the New Jerusalem in Revelation 22:2 with leaves for the healing of the nations. The image says that wisdom restores something humanity lost and will one day have back completely in Christ.

4. *Proverbs 3:27–30 lists four things not to do to a neighbor. Write them in plain modern terms, then name one situation in the last month where one of them described you.*

Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in your power to act; do not tell a neighbor to come back tomorrow when you have it with you today; do not devise evil against a neighbor who lives trustingly beside you; do not quarrel with a man without cause. In modern terms: pay what you owe when you owe it, do not make people chase you, do not scheme against people who trust you, and do not pick fights. Answers on the last part will vary, and the most common honest answer is the second one, delay.

5. *Honoring the Lord with the firstfruits means God gets the first portion, not what is left over. Look at your actual giving and your actual weekly calendar, and change one of them this week so that God comes first in fact and not merely in sentiment.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the word “first.” Many people give what remains and pray with what energy is left at the end of the day. A concrete change might be moving the contribution to the front of the month or moving Bible reading to before the phone rather than after it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Proverbs 3:9–10 is a favorite of prosperity teaching. Settle it early in the session: general principle, not guarantee, and the New Testament pattern of giving is purposed, cheerful, and proportional, not a tithe bound by law.
- Proverbs 3:5–6 is often used to discourage careful thought or planning. Guard against that; the whole book commands hard thinking.
- Verses 11 and 12 can be misapplied to tell a suffering person that God is punishing them for a particular sin. Hebrews 12 speaks of training, not of retribution. Be careful with anyone in the room who is currently in the fire.

The Wilderness and the Mountain

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Matthew moves straight from the Father's voice at the Jordan to the devil's voice in the wilderness, and the devil's first two words are "if You are the Son of God." That is not an accident of arrangement. The temptation is aimed precisely at what heaven has just declared. Jesus is offered a shortcut to bread, a shortcut to fame, and a shortcut to the kingdoms He came to claim, and every one of them would have let Him skip the cross.

He answers every offer the same way, with Scripture, and specifically with Deuteronomy, the book of a people who were tested in a wilderness for forty years and failed. Israel grumbled for bread; Jesus refuses to make it. Israel tested God at Massah; Jesus refuses to test Him. Israel bowed to other gods; Jesus refuses the whole world on those terms. Where the nation collapsed, the Son stands.

Then the ministry begins, and Matthew summarizes it in a sentence: preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every kind of sickness. Crowds follow from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan. And with that crowd assembled, Jesus sits down and begins the greatest sermon ever preached by describing the citizens of His kingdom. Poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungry for righteousness, merciful, pure, peacemaking, persecuted. Every one of those is the opposite of what a crowd expecting a military Messiah came to hear.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The wilderness of Judea is genuinely desolate country, rocky and dry, west of the Dead Sea. Forty days recalls Moses on the mountain and Israel's forty years.
- Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13, all from passages about Israel's testing in the wilderness. He fights with the Scriptures an ordinary Jewish boy would have memorized.
- "The gospel of the kingdom" (4:23) is the announcement that the reign of God promised in Daniel 2:44 was about to be established. It came at Pentecost.
- The Beatitudes open the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5 through 7, delivered to disciples with crowds listening in (5:1–2; 7:28).
- Capernaum, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, becomes Jesus' base of operations. Matthew reads the move as fulfilling Isaiah 9:1–2, light dawning on Galilee of the Gentiles.
- The miracles are not random kindness only; they confirm the messenger and the message (John 5:36; Acts 2:22).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus answers each of the three temptations with a verse from Deuteronomy. Take them one at a time. What is being offered in each case, and what truth does He use to refuse it?*

The first offer is bread, and the point is not that eating is wrong; He will feed five thousand later. The point is using divine power to serve Himself and to step outside the Father's timing. He answers from Deuteronomy 8:3, that man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. The second is a leap from the temple pinnacle, a spectacular sign that would have produced a crowd without a cross. He answers from Deuteronomy 6:16, you shall not tempt the Lord your God. The third is the whole world for one act of worship, and He answers from Deuteronomy 6:13, you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only shall you serve.

Draw out the common thread: every offer is a way to have the end without the road, the crown without the cross. That is still the shape of most temptation, which is why it rarely feels wicked at the moment. Ask the class where they are being offered a shortcut this month, at work, in a relationship, in how they handle money or truth.

Question 2. *Satan quotes Scripture in 4:6. Compare his quotation with Psalm 91:11–12 and notice what he left out. How do we protect ourselves from people who use real Bible verses to talk us into something God never said?*

Satan quotes Psalm 91:11–12 but omits the phrase “in all your ways,” which in the psalm means in the ways God has appointed. He turns a promise of protection for the obedient into a dare. That is how Scripture is usually misused: not by inventing verses but by cutting them loose from their setting and their conditions.

The protection is not suspicion of everyone who quotes the Bible; it is knowing the Bible well enough to hear what is missing. Notice that Jesus does not answer with a better feeling or a private conviction. He answers with another passage that settles the matter. Second Timothy 2:15 and Acts 17:11 give the pattern: handle the word accurately, and search the Scriptures to see whether these things are so. Ask the class how they would actually check a claim they heard on a podcast this week.

Question 3. *Read the Beatitudes slowly, all of them. Which one is least true of you at this point in your life, and what would have to change about an ordinary Tuesday for it to start becoming true?*

Do not let the class answer this one in general terms, and do not let them answer for their spouse. The Beatitudes are uncomfortable in a specific way: they describe an interior life. Poor in spirit means the settled awareness that you bring nothing to God but need. Mourning includes grief over your own sin. Meekness is strength that has been handed over to God’s control. Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is wanting to be right with God more than you want to be comfortable.

Expect the honest answers to cluster around meekness and mercy, because those two cost something in front of other people. Whatever a person names, press for a Tuesday. What does poverty of spirit look like at 7:15 on a Tuesday morning with a full inbox? Usually it looks like prayer before problem-solving, and like being interruptible. Formation happens in ordinary hours or it does not happen.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the three temptations with the three answers, and find each of Jesus’ quotations in Deuteronomy 6 and 8. What were the Israelites doing when those words were first spoken to them?*

Stones into bread, answered from Deuteronomy 8:3; the pinnacle of the temple, answered from Deuteronomy 6:16; the kingdoms of the world, answered from Deuteronomy 6:13. All three come from Moses’ words to Israel about their forty years in the wilderness, where God humbled them, let them hunger, fed them with manna, and tested them to know what was in their hearts. Israel failed those tests at Massah and at Sinai with the golden calf. Jesus, in a wilderness of His own, passes every one.

2. *Read 1 John 2:15–17 beside Matthew 4:1–11 and Genesis 3:6. Write down the pattern that shows up in all three passages, and where you have seen it in your own week.*

First John 2:16 names the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. Genesis 3:6 says the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. Matthew 4 offers bread, a display of glory, and the kingdoms of the world. The same three doors, in the same order, from the garden to the wilderness to your own week. Eve took; Jesus refused.

3. *Matthew 4:18–22 records four men walking away from a family business. Note exactly what each one left behind, and how much time the text says they took to decide.*

Peter and Andrew left their net; James and John left the boat and their father Zebedee. The text says “immediately” of both pairs. Luke 5:1–11 fills in that they had already met Jesus and seen His power, so this is not an impulsive decision by strangers, but it is still a decision that cost them a trade, an income, and in the case of James and John, a family enterprise.

4. *The Beatitudes describe the character of kingdom people rather than listing entrance requirements. Trace the promise attached to each one, and mark which promises are stated in the present tense and which in the future.*

Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (present); they shall be comforted (future); they shall inherit the earth; they shall be filled; they shall obtain mercy; they shall see God; they shall be called sons of God; theirs is the kingdom of heaven

(present again). The list opens and closes in the present tense, which frames everything between. The kingdom is not a distant hope for these people; it is a present possession, and the rest follows from it.

5. *Blessed are the peacemakers. Name the one relationship in which you are at peace only because you are avoiding somebody, and make the call, the visit, or the apology this week.*

Answers will vary. Listen for avoidance dressed up as peace. A great many Christians have confused keeping the quiet with making peace, and Matthew 5:9 does not bless the quiet keeper. Ask for a date, and ask them to come back next week and say whether they did it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jesus was genuinely tempted and never sinned (Hebrews 4:15). James 1:13 says God cannot be tempted with evil, and the two are not in conflict: the assault came from outside and found nothing inside to answer it.
- Do not turn the forty-day fast into a binding practice. Fasting appears in Scripture, but it is nowhere commanded of Christians as a rite, and this passage is about the Son's testing, not a spiritual discipline program.
- The Beatitudes are not a new law by which a person earns salvation, nor are they eight separate kinds of Christians. They are one portrait of one kind of person.
- "Theirs is the kingdom of heaven" is present tense. Keep the class out of the assumption that the kingdom is a future earthly reign; it was established on Pentecost and Christ reigns now (Colossians 1:13; Acts 2:33–36).

No Other Name

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke has shown us three thousand converted by a sermon. Now he shows us the church running into the world, and the world pushing back. The healing at the Beautiful Gate is public, undeniable, and inconvenient: the man is over forty years old (4:22), known by sight to everyone who entered the temple, and now standing in the middle of them. Peter's line, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you," has been quoted for two thousand years, and it is worth noting that the apostles were poor and unbothered by it.

The second sermon differs from the first in tone. Peter calls them brethren, allows that they acted in ignorance, and presses the Old Testament hard: the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified His Servant Jesus; Moses spoke of a Prophet to come; all the prophets from Samuel onward foretold these days; the covenant with Abraham has arrived in this Jesus. Then comes the command in 3:19, repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.

Chapter 4 brings the first official opposition. The Sadducees are the ones most disturbed, because they denied the resurrection and the apostles were preaching it out of a walking man. The council can produce no argument, only a prohibition. Peter's answer in 4:19–20 sets the pattern for Christians under pressure ever since: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The ninth hour, about three in the afternoon, was the hour of the evening sacrifice and prayer, so the temple courts were crowded.
- Solomon's Porch was a covered colonnade on the east side of the temple complex, a natural place for teaching.
- The Sadducees controlled the temple and the priesthood and denied the resurrection (Acts 23:8), which is exactly why the preaching of a risen Jesus alarmed them.
- The council before which Peter and John stood is the Sanhedrin, the same body that had condemned Jesus a few months earlier. Annas and Caiaphas are named.
- The miracles of Acts confirm the word the apostles preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). They are credentials, not a promise of health to every believer.
- Acts 4:4 counts about five thousand men who believed. The church in Jerusalem was growing fast and publicly, under the noses of the men who had crucified the Lord.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter tells this crowd in 3:19 to repent and be converted so their sins may be blotted out. Set that beside Acts 2:38. Where do the two accounts agree, and how does each one fill out the other?*

Both sermons call for repentance, and both connect forgiveness with an act of obedience rather than with belief alone. Acts 2:38 says repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins. Acts 3:19 says repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out. The word translated "be converted" means to turn; it describes the turning that repentance produces. Luke is not giving a different plan, he is giving the same gospel from another angle, and Acts 22:16 will later put the two together in one sentence when Ananias tells Saul to arise and be baptized and wash away his sins.

The useful point for a class is that no single passage in Acts lists everything. Acts 2 names repentance and baptism, Acts 3 names repentance and turning, Acts 8 shows a man confessing and going down into the water, Acts 16 shows a jailer believing and being baptized the same hour of the night. Put them together and you have a

consistent picture: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized into Christ. Beware of building a doctrine on any one verse in isolation, including the ones we like best.

Question 2. *In Acts 4:12 Peter says there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. What exactly is he claiming, and how would you say that kindly but plainly to a neighbor who believes every sincere path leads to God?*

Peter claims exclusivity, and he claims it in front of the ruling council of his own nation while under arrest. The claim is not that Christians are better people or that other religions contain nothing true. It is that salvation, rescue from sin and its penalty, is found in one Person, because only one Person died for sin and rose. Notice the word “must” in 4:12; there is no alternate route not because God is stingy but because there is no second Savior. John 14:6 and 1 Timothy 2:5 say the same.

As for how to say it, tone matters enormously. A neighbor who believes all sincere paths lead to God is usually being generous, not hostile, and meeting that generosity with a sneer ends the conversation. Try agreeing with what is true in it: God does love everyone, and sincerity is not nothing. Then ask the question that moves it forward, something like, if God has actually spoken and actually come, wouldn't it be strange to treat that as one option among many? Let the class practice saying it out loud. Most Christians are silent not because they lack conviction but because they have never rehearsed the sentence.

Question 3. *The council could not deny the miracle, so they tried to silence the men, and the men said they could not stop speaking. Where are you quietly silent about Jesus during an ordinary week, and what would speaking there actually cost you?*

The council's problem is stated plainly in 4:14 and 4:16: the healed man was standing right there, and they could say nothing against it. So they moved from argument to intimidation. That is the ordinary progression when the evidence runs out. And the apostles' answer is not defiance for its own sake; it is a stated inability. They cannot stop speaking about what they have seen and heard, the way a witness cannot un-see.

Bring it home carefully, because silence in an ordinary week is rarely dramatic. It is the conversation at lunch that turns to faith and we let it pass. It is the coworker in a hard marriage we never invite to anything. It is the twenty-year friendship where the subject has simply never come up. Ask each person to name one setting and one name. The cost might be awkwardness, a reputation, a promotion, or just the risk of being the odd one. Name the cost honestly; it makes the decision real.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the lame man from 3:2 through 3:11 and then again in 4:14. List every verb the text uses of him, and notice where he is standing at the end.*

He was carried daily and laid at the gate; he asked alms; he gave heed, expecting to receive something; he was lifted up by the right hand; his feet and ankle bones received strength; he leaped up; he stood; he walked; he entered the temple, walking and leaping and praising God; he held to Peter and John. In 4:14 he is standing with them before the council, which is the whole point: the evidence walked into the courtroom on its own legs.

2. *Peter explains the source of the power twice, in 3:12–16 and again in 4:8–10. Write down every phrase he uses to push the credit away from himself and toward Jesus.*

In 3:12 he asks why they look at him and John as though by their own power or godliness they had made the man walk. He says God glorified His Servant Jesus, that the name of Jesus, through faith in His name, made this man strong, and that the faith which comes through Him gave this perfect soundness. In 4:10 he says it plainly again: by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. Peter takes none of it and spends all of it on Jesus.

3. *Acts 3:22–23 quotes Moses about a Prophet like himself. Read Deuteronomy 18:15–19 and note what the stated consequence is for the person who will not hear Him.*

Deuteronomy 18:15–19 promises a Prophet like Moses from among their brethren, into whose mouth God will put His words, and says that whoever will not hear that Prophet, God will require it of him. Acts 3:23 sharpens it: every

soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people. The authority of Christ is not optional information. To refuse the word of the Prophet is to be cut off.

4. *Acts 3:25–26 says the covenant with Abraham is being fulfilled in what these men have just seen. Read Galatians 3:8, 16, 29 and explain who receives the blessing promised to Abraham and how a person comes to receive it.*

Galatians 3:8 says the Scripture preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, that in him all nations would be blessed. Galatians 3:16 identifies the Seed as Christ, singular. Galatians 3:26–29 says that as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ, and that if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. The blessing promised to Abraham comes to all nations in Christ, and a person enters it by faith that obeys in baptism, not by physical descent and not through any future political arrangement in the Middle East.

5. *The council marveled and realized that Peter and John had been with Jesus (4:13). Consider what the people at your work would conclude about you from watching you under pressure, and change one specific thing this week so that their conclusion would be accurate.*

Answers will vary. The phrase to press is "had been with Jesus." The council did not conclude it from a doctrinal statement but from courage, composure, and plain speech under threat. Listen for changes involving temper, honesty in small things, how they speak about absent people, and whether anyone at work has ever heard them pray or mention the Lord's church.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The miracle: teach its purpose. Signs confirmed the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4) and ceased when revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8–10). Say so plainly and kindly, and do not let the hour become a debate about modern faith healers.
- Acts 3:19–21, "times of refreshing" and "times of restoration of all things," is sometimes pressed into service for a future earthly kingdom. The context is the present age of the gospel and the return of Christ, not a millennial reign. Keep it simple and stay in the text.
- Acts 3:25–26 must not be read as a promise still owed to national Israel. Galatians 3 settles who the seed is and who the heirs are.
- Acts 4:12 is exclusive, and it should be taught as exclusive. The danger is not softening the doctrine but hardening the tone. Teach it with the confidence of a witness and the manner of a neighbor.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Genesis 25–30 · Proverbs 4 · Matthew 5:13–5:48 · Acts 4:23–5:16

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