

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 4 OF 104

Guard Your Heart

Week 4 of 104 • 4% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Genesis 25–30
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 4
Gospels	Matthew 5:13–5:48
General New Testament	Acts 4:23–5:16

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

This week the readings go under the surface. Genesis gives you a family where everyone is managing everyone, a boy who trades his future for a bowl of stew and a brother who wins a blessing wearing goat skins on his arms. Solomon tells his son that the one thing worth guarding above every other is the heart, because everything else in a life flows out of it. Then Jesus climbs a hillside and moves murder back to anger and adultery back to a look, and the crowd realizes the standard is higher than they thought and closer to home. And in Jerusalem a husband and wife decide that the appearance of generosity will do.

How to use this guide: Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the “Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study” questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT Genesis 25–30

Grasping for the Blessing

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Abraham dies, and the promise passes to a family full of schemers. Rebekah carries twins who wrestle before they are born. Esau comes in hungry and sells his birthright for a bowl of red stew. Isaac repeats his father's old lie about his wife. Then Jacob, coached by his mother, dresses in his brother's clothes and steals the blessing from a blind old man, runs for his life, meets God on a stone pillow at Bethel, and spends twenty years in Haran being out-manuevered by his uncle.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Esau traded his birthright for a bowl of stew (25:29–34), and Hebrews 12:16–17 calls him a profane man for it. Talk through what he actually gave up. Why does an appetite of the moment feel more real to us than an inheritance we cannot see?
2. Rebekah and Jacob lie to a blind old man to obtain what God had already promised in 25:23. God kept His word, and the family paid for that morning's deceit for twenty years. How do we hold together God's settled purpose and God's refusal to excuse the sin used to get there?

3. Alone and on the run, Jacob wakes at Bethel and says, “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it” (28:16). Where have you been so consumed with managing your own escape that you missed God standing there, and what would it take to notice Him this week?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every deception in these six chapters and who carried it out. In each case, who ends up paying, and how long does the bill take to arrive?
2. Read Genesis 25:23 beside Romans 9:10–13. Is God choosing Esau’s eternal destiny, or choosing which brother carries the promise? Give your reasons from both passages.
3. Trace the promise God makes to Jacob at Bethel in 28:13–15 and set it beside the promise to Abraham in 12:1–3. What is repeated word for word, and what is added for a man sleeping outdoors with nothing?
4. Genesis 29:31–30:24 records the births of eleven sons, and every name carries a story. Write out the names and their meanings, and note what those names reveal about life inside that household.
5. Jacob spent his youth engineering what God had already promised to give him. Name the outcome you are currently maneuvering for, then go a full week praying about it and doing no maneuvering at all, and write down what happens in you.

WISDOM LITERATURE Proverbs 4

Keep Your Heart With Diligence

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Solomon does something unusual in this chapter: he tells his sons what his own father told him, so three generations are in the room at once. Get wisdom, he says, and get it at any price, because it is the principal thing. Then the chapter opens into two roads, one that grows brighter until full day and one so dark that a man cannot see what he trips over. It ends with the most quoted line in the chapter, a command to guard the heart, followed by a careful inventory of mouth, eyes, and feet.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. In Proverbs 4:3–4 Solomon quotes what his own father David taught him when he was a boy. Three generations stand in that paragraph. What obligation does that put on the adults in this room, and who is actually listening to you right now?
2. Verse 23 says to keep your heart with all diligence, because out of it flow the springs of life. Make that practical: what is involved in guarding a heart, and what specifically are you guarding yours from this week?
3. Verses 18 and 19 set two roads side by side, one growing brighter toward noon and one so dark that the traveler does not even know what he stumbled over. Which is more dangerous in a person's life, the sin he knows about or the darkness that keeps him from seeing it, and why?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List every part of the body named in 4:20–27 and write down what is commanded of each one. Why would Solomon organize his closing appeal that way?
2. Compare Proverbs 4:23 with Matthew 15:18–19 and Luke 6:45. Where do Jesus and Solomon agree about the source of a person's behavior?
3. Verse 7 calls wisdom the principal thing and says to get it with all your getting. Trace through the chapter what wisdom is said to cost a man and what it is said to pay him.
4. Verses 14 and 15 stack five commands about the path of the wicked: do not enter, do not walk, avoid it, do not travel on it, turn away. Why so many verbs for what sounds like one instruction?
5. Guarding a heart is a concrete act, not a mood. Name the single input in your life, an app, a program, a friendship, a habit of thought, that is doing your heart the most damage, and remove it or fence it this week.

GOSPELS Matthew 5:13–5:48

Righteousness From the Inside

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus calls His disciples salt and light and a city that cannot be hidden, then makes a claim about Himself and the Law that the whole sermon depends on. Six times He says, “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you,” and each time He drives the command back past the action into the heart: murder back to anger, adultery back

to the look, divorce back to God's design, oaths back to plain honesty, revenge back to mercy, and love back past your neighbor all the way to your enemy.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. In 5:17–18 Jesus says He did not come to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. Read that alongside Colossians 2:14–17 and Hebrews 8:13. What does “fulfill” mean here, and is a Christian today under the Law of Moses?
2. Six times Jesus says, “You have heard that it was said, but I say to you.” Look closely at whom He is correcting and what He is doing to the standard. Is He raising the bar, or uncovering what the bar always was?
3. Jesus traces murder back to anger and adultery back to a look (5:21–30). If He judged you by what happens inside you rather than by what anyone else can see, what would be exposed, and what would change about ten o'clock at night this week?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the six “you have heard that it was said” statements, and beside each one write what was said and what Jesus said in reply.
2. Read Matthew 5:31–32 with Matthew 19:3–9 and Romans 7:2–3. What cause does Jesus name, and what does He say about the one who marries the person put away?
3. Salt without savor and a lamp under a basket are useless in the same way. Trace what Jesus says each one is for, and note carefully who receives the glory in 5:16.
4. Verses 43 through 47 command love of enemies and prayer for persecutors. List every reason Jesus gives for it, and note what He says about a person who loves only those who love him back.
5. Write down the name of the person you least want to pray for. Pray for that person by name every day this week, asking God for their genuine good rather than for their correction, and note what it does to you.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Released from custody, Peter and John go straight back to their own people, and the church prays. Notice what they ask for. The place is shaken, and they go out speaking with boldness. The believers share so freely that no one among them lacks anything, and a Levite named Joseph sells a field and is nicknamed Barnabas. Then a husband and wife sell a possession, keep back part of the price, and present the rest as though it were all of it, and the church learns something about the God it is dealing with.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Read the church's prayer in 4:24–30 aloud and pay attention to what they ask for and what they never mention. If our congregation came under the same pressure, what would our prayer list actually sound like?
2. Ananias and Sapphira fall dead over a lie about money, while plenty of other sins in the New Testament receive patience and correction. Peter says in 5:3–4 that the land was theirs and the money was theirs. So what exactly was their sin, and why did God deal with it that way at that moment in the church's life?
3. Acts 5:11 says great fear came upon all the church. That is not language we use much anymore. How is fearing God different from being afraid of Him, and what would a recovery of that fear change about the way you come to the Lord's table this Sunday?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. The church prays Psalm 2 back to God in 4:25–26. Read Psalm 2 in full and write down what these Christians heard in it about Herod, Pilate, and Jesus.
 2. Trace what the believers did with their property in 4:32–37, then read 5:4 slowly. Was the sharing commanded or voluntary, and what in the text settles it?
 3. Barnabas is introduced with a nickname in 4:36–37. Follow him through Acts 9:26–27, 11:22–26, and 15:36–39, and write down what kind of man the apostles saw in him.
 4. Set the request of 4:29 beside the results in 4:31 and 4:33. What did God give them, and just as importantly, what did He not give them?
 5. Ananias wanted a reputation for total devotion at a discount. Name one place where you have been accepting credit for a godliness you have not actually paid for, and tell the truth about it to one person this week.
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NEXT WEEK'S READING: Genesis 31-36 · Proverbs 5-6:19 · Matthew 6 · Acts 5:17-6:15

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