

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 18 OF 104

Costly Surrender

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Numbers 5-9
Wisdom Literature	Proverbs 21
Gospels	Matthew 18:21-19:30
General New Testament	Acts 19:11-20:16

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to put a price tag on discipleship without ever suggesting that salvation can be purchased. Every reading involves someone handing over something valuable: restitution with a fifth added, twelve wagonloads of silver and gold, a debt cancelled and then demanded back, a young man's portfolio, and a bonfire in a city square. By the end your class should be able to say what following Christ has actually cost them, in specifics, and what it has not cost them yet.

Doctrinally, two passages will carry the week. Matthew 19:3-9 requires you to teach what Jesus said about marriage and divorce, grounding it in creation, stating the one exception plainly, and handling it with pastoral care rather than with a courtroom manner. Acts 20:7, with 1 Corinthians 11 and 16, gives you the apostolic pattern for the first day of the week and the Lord's Supper. Along the way you will want to affirm that children are safe (Matthew 18:3; 19:14; Ezekiel 18:20), that forgiveness received is conditioned on forgiveness extended, and that the confirming miracles of the apostles served the word and have ceased.

Formationally, the thread is what a person will not let go of. The unforgiving servant would not let go of a small debt. The Pharisees would not let go of a convenient reading of Moses. The young man would not let go of his property. Demetrius would not let go of his income. But the Ephesians burned their books, and Israel moved when the cloud moved. Ask your class this directly: name the one thing you are holding that you already know God has asked you to hand over, and say what day this week you will do it.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Matthew 18:21-19:30. Open with the two debts in the parable and do the arithmetic out loud. Then give at least twenty minutes to Matthew 19:3-9, teaching it from Genesis as Jesus did. Close with the rich young man, and let the class sit with the fact that Jesus let him walk away.

Second session: Take up Acts 19:11-20:16. The bonfire and the riot will hold any class, and Acts 20:7 gives you the chance to teach why the church meets on the first day of the week and what it meets to do. Save ten minutes at the end for the scene at Troas, lamps and all.

The other two readings: Numbers 5-9 and Proverbs 21 are for home study. Point the class to Numbers 6:24-26, which many of them have heard pronounced over them, and to Numbers 9:15-23, which is the best picture in the Old Testament of what it means to move at God's word rather than our own. Proverbs 21:3 makes a fine memory verse for the week.

Vows, Blessing, and the Cloud

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These chapters have the feel of final preparations. The camp is purified, wrongs are made right, a procedure is given for the corrosive suspicion that can destroy a marriage, and a way is opened for any Israelite, man or woman, to consecrate himself to the Lord for a season by the Nazirite vow. Then, almost without warning, comes the most familiar passage in the book: the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you. God tells Aaron to put His name on the people, and He promises to bless them.

Chapter 7 is the longest chapter in Numbers and one of the most skipped. Twelve leaders bring gifts at the dedication of the altar, one leader per day, and every gift is the same: one silver platter, one silver bowl, one gold pan, and the same animals. Moses writes each one out in full, with the man's name attached. Nobody got a footnote. Whatever else God is teaching, He is refusing to summarize the generosity of His people.

Chapter 9 closes the reading with the Passover kept in the wilderness and then with the cloud. Israel did not have a map, a schedule, or a vote. When the cloud lifted, they packed; when it settled, they stayed, even if that meant a night or a year. Read verses 22 and 23 slowly in class. Almost nobody in the room lives like that, and almost everybody in the room says they want to.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Israel is still at Sinai; the departure comes in Numbers 10:11, and chapter 9 tells us the Passover was kept in the first month of the second year.
- Chapter 7 is chronologically earlier than chapter 1, going back to the day the tabernacle was set up and anointed (7:1; Exodus 40:17).
- The Nazirite vow involved abstaining from grapes and wine, leaving the hair uncut, and avoiding contact with the dead, for a set period. Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist have lifelong associations with it.
- The ordeal of chapter 5 belongs to the civil and ceremonial law of Israel and has no parallel in the New Testament. It placed a husband's suspicion under God's judgment rather than under mob action or private vengeance.
- Numbers 6:24–26 is the priestly blessing. Christians may well use its language, but the New Testament benediction rests on the completed work of Christ (2 Corinthians 13:14; Hebrews 13:20–21).
- The cloud and fire are described in Exodus 13:21–22 and 40:34–38. Paul treats the wilderness experience as written for our instruction (1 Corinthians 10:1–11).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Numbers 9:15–23 says Israel moved when the cloud moved and stayed while it stayed, whether that meant two days or a year. What would living that way actually cost you, and where are you currently refusing either to wait or to move?*

Make the cost concrete before you make it spiritual. A family with tents, animals, children, and a garden plot has every reason to want a settled schedule. The cloud gave none. It could lift at dawn after a single night, or it could sit for months while people wanted to move. Obedience meant surrendering the calendar entirely, and there was no explanation offered in advance for either the waiting or the marching.

Then turn it. Most Christians find one of the two harder than the other. Some cannot wait: they force decisions, change jobs, move churches, jump into relationships rather than sit still. Others cannot move: they know what God has said about a conversation, a sin, a service, a move, and they have been camped there for years. Ask each person which one describes him, and what the next step would be if the cloud lifted tomorrow. Note that we are

not looking for a cloud; God has spoken in His Son and in the completed word (Hebrews 1:1–2; 2 Timothy 3:16–17).

Question 2. *Chapter 7 records twelve offerings that are identical in every particular, and God has Moses write out all twelve in full rather than saying the others brought the same. Why would He spend a chapter that way?*

The obvious answer is that God does not treat His people as a group average. Nahshon's offering is recorded, and then Nethanel's, and then Eliab's, each with the same list, each with his own name at the top. It would have been efficient to compress it. God is not being efficient; He is being personal. Hebrews 6:10 says God is not unjust to forget your work and the love you have shown toward His name.

There is a second lesson worth drawing out. Nobody tried to outdo anyone. The gifts were equal, and no leader distinguished himself by giving more. In a congregation where giving and serving can quietly become competitive, this is a quiet rebuke and a comfort. Ask the class how it changes the way they think about the unnoticed work they did last year, and about the work someone else did that nobody thanked them for.

Question 3. *The Nazirite vow was entirely voluntary, and once taken it had to be kept precisely (Numbers 6:1–21). What place do voluntary commitments have in a Christian's life, and what is the danger in making one?*

Voluntary commitments have an honorable place. The Nazirite chose a season of visible devotion nobody required of him. Paul had his hair cut for a vow at Cenchrea. Christians make voluntary commitments all the time: a fast, a period of concentrated prayer, a pledge to a building fund, an agreement to teach for a year, a personal rule about what one will not watch or drink or spend.

The danger is in Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 and Matthew 5:33–37. It is better not to vow than to vow and not pay, and Jesus warns against the habit of swearing to things at all, telling us to let our yes be yes. A vow made in emotion and broken quietly does real damage to a person's conscience. Ask the class what they have promised God in the last five years, whether they kept it, and what a wiser, smaller, actually keepable commitment might look like this month.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Numbers 5:5–8 requires confession, full restitution, and an added fifth. Set it beside Zacchaeus in Luke 19:8, and write down what genuine repentance includes beyond feeling sorry.*

The law requires confessing the sin, repaying the principal in full, and adding twenty percent to the injured party. Zacchaeus goes further, offering half his goods to the poor and fourfold restoration to anyone he had defrauded, and Jesus says salvation has come to his house that day. Genuine repentance includes admitting it specifically, naming the person wronged, and making it right at real expense. Sorrow that costs nothing and changes no accounts is not yet repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10).

2. *Copy out the blessing of Numbers 6:24–26, and take each of the three lines in turn, saying exactly what it asks God to do for His people.*

The first line asks God to bless and to keep, that is, to do good and to guard. The second asks that His face shine on us and that He be gracious, the language of a welcoming rather than an averted face. The third asks that He lift up His countenance upon us and give peace, the settled well-being of a people at rest with God. Verse 27 adds the purpose: they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.

3. *Trace the movement of the cloud in Numbers 9:15–23, and count how many times that passage says “at the command of the Lord.”*

The cloud covered the tabernacle by day and looked like fire by night. Whenever it was taken up, Israel moved on; where it settled, they camped. Sometimes it stayed a few days, sometimes a month, sometimes a year, sometimes only from evening to morning. The refrain “at the command of the Lord” appears repeatedly in verses 18 through 23, seven times in most translations, which is clearly the point Moses wants hammered home.

4. *Numbers 9:6–14 makes provision for men who were ceremonially unclean or away on a trip when Passover came. Read it with Hebrews 4:15–16 and say what God’s willingness to make that provision reveals about Him.*

God made a way for men who wanted to keep the feast but could not, without lowering the standard for everyone else: keep it one month later, on the fourteenth of the second month. He is not looking for reasons to shut people out. Hebrews 4:15–16 says our High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses and invites us to come boldly to the throne of grace. Note also verse 13, which shows the provision is for those genuinely hindered, not for the careless.

5. *Restitution costs money and pride at the same time. Name something you owe, whether in dollars or in an apology, and pay it this week with the extra fifth added.*

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between a general resolution and a specific payment. The added fifth is the part that stings and the part that proves the repentance is real. If somebody names a debt too large to settle in a week, encourage a first payment and a written plan rather than a vague intention.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The ordeal of Numbers 5:11–31 troubles modern readers. Explain that it took a suspicious husband’s accusation out of his own hands and placed it before God, protected an innocent wife from private vengeance, and belonged to the civil law of Israel. It is not a pattern for anything today, and it should not become an occasion for jokes.
- The Nazirite vow is not binding and is not a model for Christian rules about hair, wine, or diet. Draw the principle of voluntary consecration, and do not bind what God has not bound (Colossians 2:20–23).
- The cloud is not a promise of special personal guidance today. God guides His people now through His completed word (2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:3). Teach the principle of submission to God’s timing without encouraging anyone to look for signs.
- Chapter 7 tempts a teacher to skip it entirely. Read at least one leader’s offering aloud and make the point about God recording every name. That two minutes is worth more than a summary.

Better Than Sacrifice

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Proverbs 21 is a chapter about what God actually values, and it keeps returning to the same contrast: what looks impressive to people and what weighs heavy with God. A king's decisions look sovereign, and God turns them like water in a ditch. A man's way looks right to him, and God weighs his heart. Religious observance looks devout, and God says doing justice pleases Him more.

The second thread is the mouth and the temper inside a household. Twice Solomon says it is better to live on the roof, or out in the desert, than in a comfortable house with constant strife. Preach this carefully, because both verses mention a wife, and both principles apply to whoever is doing the quarreling. Verse 23 puts it generally: whoever guards his mouth and tongue keeps his soul from troubles.

Then there is money, which occupies a surprising amount of the chapter. Treasures gotten by a lying tongue, the wicked man's craving, the sluggard whose desire kills him, the man who loves pleasure and will not be rich, the gift given in secret that quiets anger, the righteous man who gives and does not spare. Solomon is not against prosperity; he is relentlessly interested in how it was obtained and what it does to a person afterward.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This continues the collection of Solomon's individual sayings (10:1 to 22:16).
- Verse 1 uses the image of irrigation: a farmer opens a channel and the water goes where he directs it. The picture is of God's providential rule over rulers, not of God compelling individual choices.
- The preference for justice over sacrifice is a recurring prophetic theme (1 Samuel 15:22; Isaiah 1:11-17; Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24), and Jesus quotes Hosea twice (Matthew 9:13; 12:7).
- Verses 9 and 19 are near duplicates, a common feature of the collection, repeating a saying for emphasis.
- As always, these are general principles reliable over the long run, not guarantees in every individual case.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Proverbs 21:3 says doing righteousness and justice is more acceptable to the Lord than sacrifice, though God Himself commanded the sacrifices. Read 1 Samuel 15:22, Micah 6:6-8, and Matthew 23:23, and talk about what that verse is actually getting at.*

The verse is not setting worship against ethics; God commanded both. It is exposing the ancient and permanent temptation to use worship as a substitute for obedience, to pay God in ceremony what we refuse to pay Him in conduct. Saul kept the best sheep for a sacrifice and lost a kingdom. Micah asks whether thousands of rams will do and answers with justice, mercy, and humility. Jesus tells men who tithed their garden herbs that they had left undone judgment, mercy, and faith, and then adds, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone."

Bring it home to a congregation that values attendance and correct worship, as it should. Ask what it means that a man can be present three times a week, sing well, partake weekly, and cheat an employee, ignore a widow, or run his household with cruelty. Worship offered by such a man is not neutral; the prophets call it an offense. The point is not to devalue worship but to refuse the trade.

Question 2. *Verse 2 says every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the hearts. If your own eyes are unreliable witnesses, how do you find out what is really in your heart?*

Start by admitting that self-examination has a built-in problem: the instrument is the thing being measured. Jeremiah 17:9 says the heart is deceitful above all things, and verse 10 immediately adds that the Lord searches it. So the answer is that we learn what is in us from sources outside us. The word, which discerns thoughts and

intentions (Hebrews 4:12). Other people, who are permitted to tell us the truth (Proverbs 27:6). And our own conduct under pressure, which reveals what our explanations conceal.

Give the class a practical method. Read a passage and ask what it says about you, not about others. Ask a spouse or close friend the dangerous question and do not argue with the answer. Watch what you do with money, with time you did not plan for, and with people who can do nothing for you. Psalm 139:23–24 is the prayer to end on: search me, O God, and know my heart.

Question 3. *Twice this chapter prefers a corner of the roof or the wilderness to a house full of contention (21:9, 19). Instead of deciding who in a home is at fault, talk about what it takes to stop being the contentious one.*

Handle this with care and aim it at the room rather than at absent spouses. The most useful move is to ask what contention actually looks like day to day: the need for the last word, the reopening of a settled argument, the running commentary of criticism, the sighing, the silence that is louder than shouting. Most contentious people do not think of themselves that way; they think of themselves as right.

What it takes to stop is mostly unilateral. James 1:19 on being slow to speak and slow to wrath. Proverbs 15:1 on the soft answer. Ephesians 4:31–32 on putting away bitterness and clamor. And the willingness to lose an argument on purpose, which is the hardest of all. Ask each person to identify one recurring quarrel in their home that they have the power to end by themselves, and to end it this week without announcing that they are doing so.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Collect the verses in this chapter that concern the poor, including 21:13 and 21:26. Write down what the chapter says will happen to the man who will not listen to the cry of the needy.*

Verse 13 says whoever shuts his ears to the cry of the poor will also cry himself and not be heard. Verse 26 contrasts the man who covets greedily all day with the righteous who gives and does not spare. Related verses include 21:6 on treasure gained by lying and 21:17 on the man who loves pleasure. The warning of verse 13 is sobering and consistent with James 2:13, that judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy.

2. *Proverbs 21:5 sets the plans of the diligent against the haste of the grasping. Compare Luke 14:28–30 and explain how the two passages are making the same point.*

Proverbs 21:5 says the plans of the diligent lead surely to plenty, but those of everyone who is hasty surely to poverty. Jesus asks which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost. Both commend deliberate, unhurried planning and both warn against the impulse that starts without finishing. Scripture never treats careful planning as a failure of faith.

3. *Verse 31 says the horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the Lord. Read Psalm 20:7 and 1 Samuel 17:45–47, and describe what preparation and trust look like when they are working together.*

Psalm 20:7 says some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. David told Goliath that the Lord does not save with sword and spear, and then he ran toward him with a sling he had clearly practiced with. Preparation and trust are not rivals. You saddle the horse, sharpen the tools, do the study, make the budget, and then you rest the outcome in God rather than in the preparation.

4. *Verses 13 and 21 both attach consequences to conduct. Explain how a Christian holds such sayings as general principles rather than as a formula for getting what he wants out of God.*

These sayings describe how life generally runs under God's moral order. Mercy tends to be met with mercy, and righteousness tends to find life and honor. Read as guarantees they would mean that every generous person prospers and every sufferer failed somewhere, which is exactly the error of Job's friends. Hold them as reliable patterns, obey them because they reflect God's character, and leave the outcomes with God.

5. Verse 26 says the righteous gives and does not spare. Give something away this week that you would honestly rather keep, and tell no one that you did it (Matthew 6:3–4).

Answers will vary. The secrecy is the test. Matthew 6:3–4 says do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, and that the Father who sees in secret will reward you. Listen for whether anyone gives something genuinely inconvenient rather than surplus. Do not ask for reports the following week; that would defeat the exercise.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verses 9 and 19 about a contentious wife can be used cruelly. Note that the principle applies to contentious husbands identically, that Scripture elsewhere addresses harsh husbands directly (Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7), and aim the lesson at each person's own conduct.
- Verse 1, the king's heart in the hand of the Lord, teaches God's providential rule over history and rulers. It does not teach that God overrides human choice or predetermines who will be saved (Joshua 24:15; Acts 17:30; 2 Peter 3:9).
- Verse 18, that the wicked becomes a ransom for the righteous, is an observation about how justice tends to work out in this life. Do not build atonement doctrine from it.
- Keep saying it: proverbs are principles. A class that hears verse 13 as a guarantee will start reading their own hardships as evidence of secret sin.

Debts, Vows, and Riches

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The parable of the unforgiving servant is one of the most severe stories Jesus ever told, and the severity is the point. A man owes ten thousand talents, a debt so large that it is deliberately absurd, the national revenue of a province. He is forgiven outright, walks out, finds a man who owes him about three months' wages, and takes him by the throat. The other servants are grieved, the master is furious, and the ending is not softened: so My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

Then Matthew moves to Judea and to the divorce question, which the Pharisees raise as a trap between rival rabbinic schools. Jesus refuses the framing entirely and goes back to the beginning: God made them male and female, a man leaves and is joined to his wife, and the two become one flesh. What God has joined together, let not man separate. Moses permitted the certificate of divorce because of hardness of heart, but from the beginning it was not so, and Jesus allows one exception, sexual immorality.

The chapter ends with two contrasting scenes. Children are brought to Jesus and the disciples rebuke those bringing them, and Jesus says let them come, for of such is the kingdom of heaven. Then a rich young man comes, sincere, moral, eager, and leaves sorrowful because he had great possessions. The children who had nothing to offer were welcomed; the man with everything could not let go. Peter's question about what the disciples will receive gives Jesus the opportunity to promise that nothing given up for His name goes unrewarded.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- A talent was an enormous sum, commonly reckoned at six thousand denarii, and a denarius was a day's wage for a laborer. Ten thousand talents is therefore on the order of sixty million days of labor.
- The rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai debated the grounds for divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1. The Pharisees' question, "for just any reason," is asking Jesus to take a side in that dispute.
- Jesus grounds marriage in creation rather than in Moses, which means His teaching is not Jewish civil law but God's design for all people from the beginning (Genesis 1:27; 2:24).
- The saying about eunuchs in 19:11–12 acknowledges that some will remain unmarried, whether by circumstance, by birth, or by choice for the kingdom's sake (compare 1 Corinthians 7:7–9, 32–35).
- The "regeneration" of 19:28 refers to the new order established under Christ, not to a future earthly political kingdom. The apostles judge through the word they preached (compare Acts 2; 1 Corinthians 6:2).
- Matthew 19:29 promises a hundredfold now and eternal life; Mark 10:30 adds the striking phrase "with persecutions."

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter offers seven times as a generous limit and Jesus answers seventy times seven. Compare the two debts in the parable (18:24, 28) and talk about why the servant's behavior is not merely ungrateful but absurd.*

Do the math out loud in class, because the numbers are the sermon. Ten thousand talents is a sum no servant could ever repay, and both he and the king know it. A hundred denarii is real money, about three months' wages, the kind of debt a neighbor might actually owe you. The ratio is roughly six hundred thousand to one. The servant's conduct is not merely ungracious; it is deranged, the behavior of a man who never grasped what had just happened to him.

That is precisely the application. A Christian who cannot forgive has not yet understood his own account. Colossians 3:13 says forgive as the Lord forgave you. The question is not whether the injury was real, because in

the parable the hundred denarii was genuinely owed. The question is what has already been cancelled in your favor. Ask the class to name, silently, the debt they are still collecting on, and then read verse 33 aloud.

Question 2. *In Matthew 19:3–9 Jesus answers a question about divorce by going all the way back to Genesis. Trace His argument step by step, and state plainly what God joined, what Moses permitted and why, and what one exception the Lord names.*

Walk the argument in order. First, He appeals to creation: He who made them at the beginning made them male and female. Second, He cites God's stated design: a man shall leave father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Third, He draws the conclusion: they are no longer two but one flesh, so what God has joined together, let not man separate. Only then does He address Moses, and He treats the certificate as a concession to hardness of heart, not as God's intent. Fourth, He states the standard: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.

Teach this plainly and pastorally in the same hour. Plainly, because Jesus gave one exception and not a list, and because a class deserves to hear what He actually said rather than what is comfortable. Pastorally, because divorce has touched most families in most congregations, and because the disciples' own reaction in verse 10 shows how hard the teaching is. Do not attempt to adjudicate individual situations in a class setting; invite those conversations privately with the elders. And put the emphasis where Jesus put it: on what God joined, and on marriages in the room that need tending now.

Question 3. *The rich young man goes away sorrowful, and Jesus lets him go without renegotiating. What was he unwilling to surrender, and what is the thing in your life that occupies the same place?*

He would not surrender his possessions, but notice what that stood for. Jesus tells him to sell, give to the poor, and come follow Me. The command exposed where the young man's security actually rested. He kept the commandments about his neighbor, and when obedience finally reached his portfolio, he discovered the limit of his willingness. Matthew notes that he went away sorrowful, which means he knew what he was doing.

The equivalent thing is different for each person, which is why the question must be asked individually. For some it is money. For others it is a career, a relationship God has fenced off, a grudge held for thirty years, a reputation, a hobby that has quietly taken every Sunday, or a child's ambitions being pursued at the expense of the family's faith. Jesus did not lower the price to keep him, and He will not lower it for us. Ask the class to name theirs specifically, and remind them of verse 26: with God all things are possible.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Work out roughly what ten thousand talents and a hundred denarii were worth in wages (18:24, 28). Write the two figures side by side, then read 18:32–35 again with those numbers in front of you.*

A denarius was a day's wage, so a hundred denarii is roughly three or four months of work. A talent was about six thousand denarii, so ten thousand talents is on the order of sixty million days of labor, a debt beyond any possibility of repayment. Set beside it, the servant's refusal is grotesque. Jesus then applies it: so My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.

2. *Read Matthew 6:14–15 and Ephesians 4:32 with the final verse of the parable. State clearly what Jesus says happens to a Christian who will not forgive his brother.*

Matthew 6:14–15 says if you forgive men their trespasses your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Ephesians 4:32 says be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. The parable ends the same way. The forgiveness a Christian has received can be forfeited by refusing to extend it. This is not earning forgiveness; it is the plain condition Christ attached to it.

3. *Jesus quotes Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 in Matthew 19:4–6. Copy both verses out, and list every element of God's design for marriage that He draws from them.*

God made them male and female. A man leaves father and mother. He is joined to his wife. The two become one flesh. They are no longer two. God is the one who joins them. And no man is to separate what He joined. The design

is therefore one man and one woman, in a public leaving and cleaving, forming a permanent one-flesh union that God Himself establishes. Every element of that sentence is under pressure in our culture, which is why Jesus went back to Genesis rather than to current opinion.

4. *Matthew 19:13–15 has Jesus receiving children and saying the kingdom belongs to such as these. Read it with Matthew 18:3 and Ezekiel 18:20, and say what these passages together settle about children and guilt.*

Jesus says the kingdom belongs to such as these and that we must be converted and become as little children to enter. That would be meaningless if children were born guilty. Ezekiel 18:20 says the soul who sins shall die, that the son shall not bear the guilt of the father. Together they teach that children are safe, that guilt is personal and comes when a person sins himself, and that there is no inherited guilt requiring infant baptism. Say this gently; a grieving parent may be listening.

5. *Jesus told the young man to go, sell, give, and come. Name the possession, plan, or ambition that would be hardest for you to hand over, and take one concrete step this week toward loosening your grip on it.*

Answers will vary. The step matters more than the naming. Examples: setting an actual giving figure and starting this month, selling something, telling a spouse about a boundary, declining an opportunity that would cost the family's spiritual life, or beginning a hard conversation. If nobody in the class can name anything that would be difficult to surrender, gently suggest that the young man thought the same thing until Jesus named it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Divorce and remarriage: teach what Jesus said, including the single exception, without hedging and without harshness. Do not try to resolve individual cases in class, and make clear that the elders and the preacher are available privately. Remember that grace and forgiveness are as real here as anywhere (1 Corinthians 6:9–11).
- Do not soften the last verse of the parable. Forgiveness received is conditioned on forgiveness extended (Matthew 6:14–15). At the same time, distinguish forgiving from pretending: forgiveness does not require restoring trust, dropping legal consequences, or returning to danger.
- The rich young ruler does not teach that wealth is sin or that every Christian must sell everything. It teaches that whatever competes with Christ must go (1 Timothy 6:17–19). Avoid letting comfortable people conclude too quickly that the story is not about them.
- Matthew 19:28 and the “regeneration” will be read by some as premillennial. Keep it tied to the reign Christ began at His ascension and to the apostles’ authoritative role in the church (Acts 2:33–36; Ephesians 2:20; Colossians 1:13).
- Matthew 19:11–12 on eunuchs should be handled simply: some do not marry, and Scripture honors the unmarried life lived for the Lord (1 Corinthians 7:32–35). Do not speculate beyond the text.

Bonfires, Riots, and Midnight

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ephesus was a center of magic. The city held the temple of Artemis, one of the wonders of the ancient world, and a thriving trade in charms, formulas, and spells so well known that written incantations were called Ephesian letters. Into that Luke drops two stories that belong together. God works extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul, and then seven men who treat the name of Jesus as a more powerful formula are beaten out of a house naked and wounded by the man they came to help.

The result is the best kind of church growth. Fear fell on Jews and Greeks alike, the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, and believers came confessing and telling their deeds. Then those who had practiced magic brought their books and burned them in front of everyone. Luke, who counted such things, records the value: fifty thousand pieces of silver, plausibly fifty thousand days of a laborer's wages. Then he adds the summary: so the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed.

The riot follows naturally, because the gospel had begun to cost people money. Demetrius makes a business argument to the guild and a religious argument to the city, and for two hours a confused crowd chants the name of their goddess. The town clerk, a Roman official with a career at stake, restores order. Then Paul moves on, and Luke gives us the quiet scene at Troas: an upper room, many lamps, the first day of the week, the breaking of bread, a long sermon, a boy in a window, and a miracle at midnight.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul spent about three years in Ephesus (20:31), the longest recorded stay of his ministry, and the province of Asia was evangelized from there (19:10).
- Artemis, called Diana in Latin, was worshiped at Ephesus in a temple that drew pilgrims and the trade that came with them. Demetrius made silver shrines for that market.
- The theater at Ephesus has been excavated and seated something on the order of twenty-four thousand people.
- The town clerk was the chief local magistrate answerable to Rome; his fear of being charged with rioting (19:40) reflects real Roman policy toward unruly cities.
- Acts 20:7 is the only passage that names the day on which the church assembled to break bread, and it does so incidentally, as an established practice. With 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and 16:2 it gives the apostolic pattern.
- The miracles in this section, including the raising of Eutychus, are apostolic signs confirming the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 2 Corinthians 12:12).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The seven sons of Sceva tried to use the name of Jesus the way a man uses a tool (19:13–16). What went wrong for them, and where do people still treat the name of Christ as a technique rather than as a Lord?*

Their mistake is in the words Luke records: “We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches.” Whom Paul preaches, not whom we serve. They had no relationship to Christ and no commission from Him; they had a formula they had watched work for somebody else. The evil spirit's answer is one of the most chilling lines in Acts: Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you? Then the man leapt on them and they ran out of the house naked.

The modern versions are everywhere and mostly respectable. Praying in Jesus' name as a closing formula rather than as submission to His authority. Quoting Scripture to win an argument we have no intention of obeying. Claiming the promises while ignoring the conditions. Wearing the name Christian without the life. Matthew 7:21–

23 is the sober parallel: many will say Lord, Lord, and hear I never knew you. Ask the class where they have used the name of Jesus as leverage rather than as a Lord's name.

Question 2. *The Ephesian believers burned books worth fifty thousand pieces of silver, publicly, and nobody sold them first (19:18–20). Why was that necessary rather than wasteful, and what would the equivalent bonfire cost you?*

It was necessary because these were not neutral possessions. They were the tools of the life these people had just repented of, and the New Testament consistently calls for a clean break rather than a managed retreat (Romans 13:14; Ephesians 4:22–24). Selling the books would have funded the church and spread the poison; Luke notes the value precisely so we understand that the cost was real and was paid on purpose. Repentance that keeps the equipment is not yet repentance.

Press the second half hard, because this is where the class lives. What would you have to destroy rather than sell? A stored bottle, a saved contact, a hidden account, a file, a subscription, a relationship, a set of documents? People keep the means of return because part of them intends to return. Ask for one thing, this week, and note that the Ephesians did it publicly, which is often the only way it stays done.

Question 3. *Acts 20:7 says the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. Notice what that verse assumes rather than argues, and discuss what it establishes about the practice of the New Testament church.*

Notice how much Luke assumes. He does not argue that they should meet on the first day; he mentions in passing that they did, as the reason Paul waited seven days at Troas. He does not explain why they broke bread; he treats it as the purpose of the gathering. The verb tenses and the setting present this as an ordinary, expected assembly on an ordinary Sunday in a congregation Paul did not plant.

What it establishes, with 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and 16:1–2, is the pattern: the church assembled on the first day of every week, broke bread, and gave as they had prospered. That is why we do it weekly and why we do it then. Say clearly that this is not a Christian Sabbath; the Lord's Day is not the Sabbath transferred (Colossians 2:16–17). It is the day the Lord rose and the day His people met. Then ask the harder question: what is our own attendance and participation actually assuming about how important this is?

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the speech of Demetrius in 19:25–27 and note the order of his concerns. Identify the reason he gives his fellow tradesmen first and the reason he offers the crowd.*

To the craftsmen he says plainly that their prosperity comes from this trade, that Paul has persuaded many people that handmade gods are not gods at all, and that their trade is in danger of falling into disrepute. Then he adds the religious argument, that the temple of the great goddess Artemis may be despised and her magnificence destroyed. Money first, in private; religion second, in public. Luke lets the sequence speak for itself, and the crowd never learns the real reason it is shouting.

2. *The town clerk quiets a mob of thousands with three arguments (19:35–40). List them in order, and note what he says about using lawful channels.*

He says that everyone already knows Ephesus is the temple guardian of Artemis and of the image that fell from Zeus, so the facts are not in dispute and they should do nothing rashly. He says these men are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of their goddess, so no crime has been charged. And he says that if Demetrius has a case, the courts are open and there are proconsuls, and if they want anything else it must be settled in the lawful assembly. He warns that they are in danger of being charged with rioting. Lawful channels exist, and a mob is not one of them.

3. *Acts 19:11 calls these “unusual miracles.” Read 2 Corinthians 12:12 and Hebrews 2:3–4, and explain what purpose such signs were serving and for whom.*

2 Corinthians 12:12 calls signs, wonders, and mighty deeds the signs of an apostle. Hebrews 2:3–4 says the salvation first spoken by the Lord was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness with signs and wonders and various miracles. The purpose was to confirm the word while it was being delivered, in a city where

competing magical claims were everywhere. Once the revelation was complete, the confirming sign had done its work (1 Corinthians 13:8–10).

4. *Acts 20:7–12 is a window into a first-century assembly. List everything you can learn from it about when they met, why they met, how long they stayed, and what happened.*

They met on the first day of the week. They came together to break bread, which Luke states as the purpose. Paul preached, and since he was leaving the next day he continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room. A young man named Eutychus sank into sleep, fell from the third story, and was taken up dead. Paul went down, embraced him, and said his life was in him. Then they broke bread, ate, and talked until daybreak, and the boy was brought in alive, and they were greatly comforted. The assembly, the day, the purpose, and the preaching are all here.

5. *The Ephesians destroyed what they could easily have sold. Name one thing in your house, on your phone, or on your calendar that is holding you back spiritually, and get rid of it this week rather than storing it somewhere.*

Answers will vary. Look for a clean break rather than a management plan: deleting rather than hiding, throwing out rather than storing, cancelling rather than pausing. If someone names something they know they cannot destroy alone, that is a signal to follow up privately and to involve people who can help them stay free.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Acts 19:12 and the handkerchiefs and aprons are used to justify prayer cloths and healing ministries. Note that Luke calls these unusual even for that era, that they were done through an apostle, and that their purpose was to confirm the word (Hebrews 2:3–4). Teach the cessation of confirming gifts kindly and from the text (1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- The sons of Sceva are a warning against treating the name of Jesus as a formula. Do not let the story become entertainment; make the application to our own casual use of His name.
- Acts 20:7 is a key text on the day and purpose of the assembly. Teach it carefully and do not overreach: it establishes the first day of the week and the breaking of bread as the purpose of the gathering, supported by 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 and 16:2. Note also that the Lord's Day is not a Christian Sabbath.
- The raising of Eutychus is presented as a genuine miracle; Luke, a physician, says he was taken up dead. Do not explain it away, and do not use it to promise similar events today.
- The magic books may prompt questions about horoscopes, occult practices, and the like. Answer from Deuteronomy 18:10–12 and Galatians 5:19–21, and keep the emphasis on the Ephesians' decisive break.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Numbers 10–16 · Proverbs 22 · Matthew 20 · Acts 20:17–21:26

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