

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 29 OF 104

A Place of Refuge

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Joshua 16-24
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 4-6
Gospels	Matthew 27:15-56
General New Testament	Romans 5-6

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from admiring safety to running for it. The cities of refuge only helped the man who actually ran to one and stayed. Psalm 4 only helps the man who lies down trusting the God he has just prayed to. The cross only saves the person who is joined to the death that happened there. Plan to end the week with the plainest possible statement of how a person gets into Christ, and with a real opportunity to do it.

Doctrinally, this is one of the heaviest weeks of the year, and three things must be said carefully. Romans 5:12 teaches personal accountability for personal sin, not inherited guilt. Romans 6:3-4 teaches that baptism is a burial into the death of Christ, where His blood was shed, and that it is how a believing penitent gets into Him. And Romans 6 as a whole assumes a Christian must continue presenting himself to God, which quietly closes the door on once saved, always saved. Say all three plainly and kindly.

Formationally, notice how much of this week happens in the dark. David prays at night and sleeps. The land goes black for three hours. A man runs a road toward a city gate with a relative behind him. Paul describes a burial. Christianity is not a religion that avoids the dark; it is the announcement that God met us there and brought us out. Ask your class this: what is the one part of your life you have never taken to God in plain words, and what would it cost you to say it out loud this week?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Romans 5-6 first and do not rush it. Spend the first half on what a justified person already has, and the second half on Romans 6:1-14. Read 6:3-4 aloud twice, explain baptism from the text itself, and make it easy for anyone who has never obeyed the gospel to say so.

Second session: Take up Matthew 27:15-56. Read Psalm 22 first, then the passage, and let the class find the overlaps themselves. Handle the cry of dereliction carefully and end at the torn veil and the centurion rather than at the burial, which belongs to next week.

The other two readings: Joshua 16-24 and Psalms 4 through 6 fit the extended questions well. Point the class especially to the cities of refuge and to Joshua 21:45, and suggest they read Psalm 4 at bedtime and Psalm 5 at breakfast for one week and report back on what changed.

Not One Word Failed

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The land is being handed out, and the details matter more than they look. Seven tribes have to be prodded in 18:3 with a question that stings: “How long will you neglect to go and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers has given you?” The gift was already theirs. The failure was not in God’s giving but in their taking. Then Joshua, who apportioned everyone else’s inheritance, receives his own city last (19:49–50), which tells you something about the man.

Chapters 20 and 21 give us two of God’s most tender provisions. Six cities of refuge, spread evenly on both sides of the Jordan so that no one was more than a hard day’s run away, protected a man who had killed accidentally from a grieving relative with a sword and a head start. He was safe there, but not free; he stayed until the death of the high priest. Then forty eight towns scattered the Levites through every tribe, so that no Israelite lived far from someone whose life was the law of God.

The book ends with two assemblies. In chapter 22 a misunderstanding about an altar nearly destroys the nation, and is resolved by men who went and asked rather than men who went and fought. In chapters 23 and 24 Joshua, old and knowing it, reviews everything God has done, warns them about the gods across the river and the gods in the land, and forces a decision. “Choose this day.” The people answer well, and Joshua, who knows them, tells them frankly that they do not know what they are promising.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Shiloh becomes the home of the tabernacle (18:1) and remains the central place of worship until the days of Samuel.
- The avenger of blood was a near relative charged with pursuing a killer; the cities of refuge placed the case before the congregation for a hearing rather than leaving it to family vengeance (Numbers 35:9–34).
- Joshua 21:43–45 declares the land promise of Genesis fulfilled. Say this plainly; it removes the foundation from any claim that the promise awaits a future political settlement.
- The covenant ceremony at Shechem (chapter 24) takes place where Abraham first built an altar in the land (Genesis 12:6–7), a deliberate return to the beginning of the promise.
- Joshua 24:2 and 24:14 both mention the gods Israel’s fathers served beyond the Euphrates and in Egypt, which means idolatry was not a foreign import; it was already in the luggage.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Joshua 20 sets apart six cities of refuge with roads kept open to them. Walk through how the system actually worked, and discuss what it shows about a God who holds justice and mercy together without letting go of either.*

The system is careful and humane. A man who killed without hatred or premeditation ran to the nearest city, stated his case at the gate, and was taken in. He then stood trial before the congregation. If cleared, he lived inside the city, safe from the avenger, until the death of the high priest, after which he could go home free. Justice was not waived: a murderer got no protection, and the manslayer lost his liberty and his land for years. Mercy was not waived either: no one was executed for an accident.

Let the class feel both halves. A God who only had mercy would be indifferent to the dead man; a God who only had justice would have nothing to offer the frightened man on the road. Hebrews 6:18 speaks of those who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us, and the imagery is exactly this. Ask what it means that the refuge required running, arriving, and staying, and where the class is tempted to admire the city from a distance rather than live in it.

Question 2. *Joshua 21:45 says not one word of the Lord's good promises failed, and yet chapters 16 through 19 admit plainly that Canaanites remained in the land. How do you hold those two statements together without softening either one?*

Both are true, and the seam between them is important. God gave the land completely, broke organized resistance, and made good on every promise; what remained was for Israel to occupy, tribe by tribe, exactly as 13:1 and 18:3 say. The failure recorded later in Judges is not God withholding but Israel settling. God's faithfulness does not become our excuse for passivity, and our passivity does not make God unfaithful.

Apply that where it lives. God has given the Christian everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3), and yet whole territories of most of our lives remain unclaimed: a temper never brought under, a habit never surrendered, a relationship never repaired. Ask the class to name a piece of ground God has clearly given them that they have simply never gone up and taken. Then ask what the first step would be this week.

Question 3. *The altar by the Jordan almost caused a war between brothers (22:10–34). What did the western tribes do right in the way they confronted their kinsmen, and what would that same approach look like in a congregational disagreement this year?*

They did three things well. They cared enough to be alarmed, because they took unauthorized worship seriously. They sent Phinehas and ten leaders to ask before they mustered an army, which is the whole hinge of the story. And when they received the answer, they believed their brothers and went home glad, without needing to extract a punishment. Notice too that the eastern tribes did not take offense at being questioned; they explained themselves fully and gladly.

In a congregational dispute this is the difference between a crisis and a conversation. Most church trouble is not caused by the original action; it is caused by the conclusions people reach about the action before anyone asks. Ask the class how a rumor usually travels in a congregation, and what it would take to make "go and ask him" the normal first move (Matthew 18:15). Note that both sides here were willing to be corrected, which is the part nobody volunteers for.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Name the six cities of refuge listed in Joshua 20:7–8 and locate them on a map. What do you notice about how they are spaced across the country and on both sides of the Jordan?*

Kedesh in Galilee, Shechem in the mountains of Ephraim, and Kirjath Arba, which is Hebron, in Judah, on the west; and Bezer, Ramoth in Gilead, and Golan in Bashan on the east. Three on each side of the Jordan, spaced north, center, and south, so that no one in Israel was ever far from safety. Jewish tradition says the roads were kept clear and marked. Access mattered as much as the provision.

2. *Read Joshua 22:21–29 and write out the eastern tribes' explanation of their altar. What were they afraid of, and does the rest of Israel's history suggest they were right to fear it?*

They feared that in years to come the western tribes would tell their children, "You have no part in the Lord," because the Jordan lay between them and the tabernacle. The altar was built as a witness, a copy, not for sacrifice. Their fear was entirely reasonable, and the later history of the divided kingdom shows how quickly geography turns into separation and separation into strange worship.

3. *In Joshua 23:6–13 Joshua warns against mixing with the remaining nations. List the specific things he tells Israel not to do, and note the reason he attaches to each one.*

Do not turn from the book of the law to the right or the left; do not mix with these nations; do not mention or swear by the name of their gods; do not serve or bow down to them; do not intermarry with them. The reasons given are that the Lord has driven out great nations for them, that He fights for them, and that intermarriage will become a snare, a trap, a scourge in their sides, and thorns in their eyes until they perish from the land.

4. *Joshua 24:2–13 retells the nation’s history in God’s own voice. Count how many times God says “I,” and then describe what all that repetition does to the appeal in verse 14.*

God says “I” more than twenty times in twelve verses: I took your father, I led him, I gave him Isaac, I sent Moses, I brought you out, I delivered you, I destroyed them, I gave you a land for which you did not labor, cities you did not build, vineyards you did not plant. By the time verse 14 says “Now therefore, fear the Lord and serve Him,” the appeal rests entirely on what God has already done. Gratitude is the ground of obedience.

5. *Joshua says, “Choose this day whom you will serve,” and then declares for his own household (24:15). Say out loud who and what your household actually serves, and name one thing in your home that needs to be gone by the end of the month.*

Answers will vary, and the assignment is deliberately concrete because the choice in Joshua 24 is concrete. Listen for something that can actually be removed: a subscription, a bottle, a schedule, a relationship, a device in a bedroom. Note also Joshua’s warning in 24:19–22; easy promises made in a crowd are worth less than one thing thrown out on Monday.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The cities of refuge illustrate God’s character beautifully and may be used to point toward the refuge we have in Christ (Hebrews 6:18). Do not press every detail into an allegory; the New Testament itself does not.
- Joshua 21:43–45 is your clearest statement that the land promise was fulfilled. Use it whenever the question of a future earthly kingdom arises, alongside Acts 2 and Colossians 1:13.
- Chapter 22 raises the question of worship without authority. The concern of the tribes was right in principle, and it is worth saying so, while noting that they asked before they judged.
- Joshua 24:15 is one of Scripture’s plainest statements that people genuinely choose. Use it to teach responsible choice without turning the lesson into an attack on anyone’s religious background.

Evening, Morning, and Tears

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These three psalms belong to ordinary life, which is why they wear so well. Psalm 4 is an evening prayer written while people were smearing his reputation and asking, in effect, how long this man is going to keep trusting God when nothing is working. David answers them, then talks to God, then to himself, and finally goes to sleep. Verse 8 is the summary of the whole psalm: “I will both lie down in peace, and sleep; for You alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.”

Psalm 5 is the morning counterpart. The word rendered “direct” in verse 3 is used of arranging wood on an altar or laying out the sacrifice in order, which means David is describing prayer as something prepared rather than something muttered while looking for the car keys. Between verses 4 and 6 he says hard things about God’s hatred of evil, and in verses 11 and 12 he ends where the psalm has been heading all along, with everyone who trusts God rejoicing under His shield.

Psalm 6 is where your class will find itself in a bad season. David is worn out, his bones are troubled, his soul is greatly troubled, he floods his bed with tears at night, his eye is wasted with grief. He asks God how long. And then, without any change in his situation, the psalm turns: “The Lord has heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord has heard my supplication.” The turn is not manufactured. It is what happens when a man says the whole truth to God and then remembers who he has been saying it to.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- All three carry headings assigning them to David and are marked for the chief musician, which means they were written for public worship, not only private devotion.
- Psalm 6 is the first of the seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), traditionally grouped for use in confession.
- Lament is the most common genre in the Psalter. Its usual shape is complaint, petition, and then a turn toward confidence, and all three of these psalms show some form of it.
- The instruments named in the headings (stringed instruments, flutes) belonged to Old Covenant temple worship, which is fulfilled and taken away in Christ. New Testament worship in song is the singing of the congregation (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- Hebrew poetry frequently speaks of bones, soul, and eye to describe the whole person under strain. It is vivid description, not medical report.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 4 ends with sleep and Psalm 5 begins with morning. Talk about what the pairing says about a day of faith, from the last thought at night to the first one at dawn.*

The two psalms frame a day. The last thing in David’s mind at night is that God alone makes him dwell in safety; the first thing in the morning is a prayer arranged deliberately and then a look upward while he waits. Most of us have those two moments occupied by a screen, and the effect on our interior life is enormous. Whatever fills the first and last ten minutes of a day tends to set the emotional temperature of everything in between.

Make the application specific and small enough to actually happen. Ask the class what currently occupies the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning, and propose a single change for one week. Then note what is not in these psalms: David does not sleep because the trouble ended. The trouble is still there in the morning, and it is still there in Psalm 5. Peace is not the absence of enemies; it is the presence of a God who does not sleep.

Question 2. *Psalm 4:4 says, “Be angry, and do not sin. Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still.” Paul quotes it in Ephesians 4:26. Discuss what a Christian is supposed to do with anger at eleven o’clock at night.*

Notice that the verse does not forbid anger. It assumes it, and then puts a fence around it: do not sin, think it over on your bed, and be still. The Hebrew word behind “be angry” carries the sense of trembling agitation. David is talking about the churning you take to bed with you. His counsel is to let the churning be searched in God’s presence rather than rehearsed against your enemy.

Paul adds the clock in Ephesians 4:26, saying do not let the sun go down on your wrath, and then says do not give place to the devil. Together the two passages give a workable discipline: name it honestly to God, refuse to act on it tonight, and do not let it become a permanent lodger. Ask the class what they actually do at eleven at night with anger, and be ready for honest answers about drafting messages they should not send.

Question 3. *Psalm 6 spends nine verses in tears and then turns hard in the last two. Nothing in the circumstances has changed. What has changed, and how do we pray our way there honestly rather than by pretending?*

What has changed is not the situation but David’s grip on it. He has told God the entire truth, including the accusation buried in “How long?” and he has asked for mercy rather than for vindication. Somewhere in that honesty he remembers that he is heard. Verses 8 and 9 do not say the enemies are gone; they say the Lord has heard, and on that basis David can speak to his enemies at all.

The pastoral point is that lament is faith, not the failure of faith. A third of the Psalms complain, and God preserved them in the book His people sing from. Tell your class that they are permitted to say the hard thing to God, out loud, in specific words, and that the way through usually runs through and not around. Then ask what they habitually refuse to say to God, and why they think He has not already heard it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Go through Psalm 5 and make two lists: every request David makes, and every description he gives of God. Which list is longer, and why does that order matter?*

Requests: give ear, consider my meditation, hear my voice, lead me in righteousness, make Your way straight, pronounce them guilty, cast them out, defend those who trust You. Descriptions of God: my King and my God, one who does not take pleasure in wickedness, with whom evil cannot dwell, who hates workers of iniquity, who destroys liars, who abhors the bloodthirsty, abundant in mercy, who blesses and surrounds the righteous. The descriptions are longer, and they come first. David establishes who he is talking to before he presses what he wants.

2. *Psalm 4:6–7 contrasts what most people are asking for with what David asks for. Write both down, then put your own name honestly beside one of them.*

Many are saying, “Who will show us any good?” David asks, “Lord, lift up the light of Your countenance upon us,” and then says God has put more gladness in his heart than they have in the season when their grain and wine increased. The contrast is between wanting circumstances to improve and wanting God’s face. Most of us will honestly have to write our name beside the first line, and the admission is the beginning of the cure.

3. *Psalm 5:11–12 piles up three pictures of protection: refuge, defense, and a shield of favor surrounding the righteous. Examine each, then compare Psalm 91:1–4 and Ephesians 6:16.*

Refuge is a place you run into; defense pictures God covering over those who trust Him; the shield of verse 12 is the large body shield that surrounds rather than a small buckler. Psalm 91 adds wings and feathers, the picture of a bird covering its young, and Ephesians 6:16 makes faith itself the shield that quenches the fiery darts. The common idea in all of them is that safety is a person, not a circumstance.

4. *Trace what Psalm 6 says about David’s bones, his soul, his bed, his eyes, and his enemies. Notice that he describes terrible suffering without once accusing God of wrongdoing.*

His bones are troubled, his soul greatly troubled, his bed is soaked with tears every night, his eye wastes away with grief and grows old because of his enemies. He asks how long, asks God to return and deliver, and appeals to God’s mercy and to the fact that the dead do not praise Him. He never says God is unjust. He presses God hard while holding on to Him, which is what biblical lament looks like.

5. David says, “My voice You shall hear in the morning; in the morning I will direct it to You, and I will look up” (5:3). Set your alarm five minutes earlier every day this week and do exactly that, and write down what you notice by Friday.

Answers will vary. Ask for the specific observation on Friday rather than a general report. The point of David’s verb is preparation: a prayer laid out in order like wood on an altar. Listen for the difference between a five minute habit and five minutes of arranging the day before God on purpose.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 6 may be read as if all suffering is divine punishment. David connects his affliction with God’s anger in his own case; John 9:1–3 and Job stand against turning that into a rule. Be careful with anyone in the class who is sick.
- Psalm 5:10 asks God to pronounce the wicked guilty and cast them out. That is an appeal to God’s justice, placed in God’s hands, not a license for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).
- Lament should be taught as permitted and even modeled speech. Classes often need explicit permission to bring anger, confusion, and grief to God in plain words.
- The instruments mentioned in the psalm headings belonged to the temple worship of the Old Covenant. Do not use them to authorize a practice the New Testament does not give us (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

The Place Called Golgotha

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Matthew narrates the crucifixion with almost no commentary. There is no description of the nails, no appeal for sympathy, no adjectives. He simply reports: “Then they crucified Him.” What he does give us in detail is the mockery, layer on layer, and the fulfilled Scripture underneath it. Soldiers gamble for clothing, and Psalm 22:18 is standing there. Onlookers wag their heads, and Psalm 22:7 is standing there. They offer sour wine, and Psalm 69:21 is standing there. The most unjust hours in human history were also the most precisely foretold.

At the center are the three hours of darkness and one sentence in Aramaic. “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.” It is the first line of Psalm 22, a psalm that begins in abandonment and ends with all the ends of the world remembering and turning to the Lord. Jesus is bearing our sin in His body (1 Peter 2:24), made sin for us who knew no sin (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the cry is real anguish, not theater. Handle it with reverence and with care, and refuse to speculate beyond the text.

Then everything breaks open at once. He cries with a loud voice and yields up His spirit, which is not the way crucified men die; they suffocate quietly. The veil of the temple tears from top to bottom, and the way into the holiest is open. The earth quakes, rocks split, tombs open. And a hardened Roman soldier, who has almost certainly done this many times, looks at the darkness, the earthquake, and the manner of that death, and says the sentence the whole gospel has been driving toward. The first man to confess Him after His death is a Gentile with a spear.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Crucifixion was a Roman execution reserved for slaves, rebels, and the worst criminals, designed to be public, prolonged, and humiliating.
- Golgotha, “Place of a Skull,” lay outside the city wall, which Hebrews 13:12 takes up: Jesus suffered outside the gate.
- The titulus over His head, “This is Jesus the King of the Jews,” stated the official charge, and John 19:20 says it was written in three languages.
- The temple veil separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place, entered by the high priest alone, once a year, with blood (Leviticus 16; Hebrews 9:7).
- Simon of Cyrene came from North Africa; Mark 15:21 names his sons Alexander and Rufus as if the readers knew them, which suggests the family later became known among Christians.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The chief priests taunt Him with the words, “He saved others; Himself He cannot save” (27:42). In what sense were they more right than they knew, and how does that change the way we hear the whole scene?*

They meant it as proof that He was a fraud: a man who cannot get himself down from a cross is no Messiah. And they were stating, without knowing it, the exact logic of our salvation. He could not save Himself and save us at the same time. Twelve legions of angels were one word away (26:53). The nails did not hold Him there; the will of the Father and the love of the Son did.

Press the class on the definition of power this scene forces on us. Everything our culture calls strength was on display in the people mocking, and everything it calls weakness was hanging on the middle cross, and the world has never recovered from what happened next. Ask where in their own lives they are refusing to save themselves for someone else’s sake, and where they are refusing to, and be quiet long enough for that to land.

Question 2. *From noon to three the land is dark, and Jesus cries out the opening line of Psalm 22. Read that psalm together, and discuss carefully what He was saying from the cross and what He was not saying.*

Say clearly what the cry is: the first line of Psalm 22, quoted by a dying Man who knew the whole psalm and knew His hearers would. It is genuine anguish. He is bearing sin, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 and Isaiah 53:6 say so in the plainest words Scripture has. Whatever else that hour held, the holy God's judgment on sin fell there, in His body, and He felt the horror of it.

Now guard the other side just as firmly. Do not teach that the Father stopped loving the Son, that the Godhead was fractured, or that the Father was angry at Jesus personally. John 10:17 says the Father loves Him because He lays down His life, and 2 Corinthians 5:19 says God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The cross is not the Son rescuing us from the Father; it is God, at infinite cost to Himself, dealing with our sin. And note where Psalm 22 ends, with deliverance and worldwide worship, which is where Jesus was pointing all along.

Question 3. *The centurion who supervised the execution says, "Truly this was the Son of God" (27:54). What did that man see that changed him, and what would someone watching your ordinary week have to see to reach the same conclusion?*

Luke tells us he glorified God and said, "Certainly this was a righteous Man," and Matthew gives us the fuller confession. What he saw was three hours of darkness at midday, an earthquake, and above all the way this Man died: praying for His executioners, silent under abuse, and then crying out with a loud voice and deliberately yielding up His spirit. A centurion had seen hundreds of deaths. He had never seen one like this.

Turn the question toward the class carefully, because the honest answer is humbling. What people notice is not our arguments but how we behave when we are being treated unfairly, when we are in pain, and when nobody has to know. Ask each person to name the one situation in the coming week where someone will be watching how a Christian handles being wronged. That is the sermon most of your class will preach this month.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Psalm 22 straight through, then list every detail in it that shows up in Matthew 27. Remember that the psalm was written roughly a thousand years earlier.*

Psalm 22 names being despised and mocked, heads shaken, the taunt "He trusted in the Lord; let Him rescue Him," pierced hands and feet, bones out of joint, extreme thirst and a tongue clinging to the jaws, garments divided and lots cast for clothing, and enemies staring and gloating. It ends with deliverance, praise in the congregation, and all the families of the nations worshiping, which is why Jesus quoted its first line.

2. *Make a list of everyone who mocks Jesus in 27:27–44: soldiers, passersby, chief priests, scribes, elders, and even the robbers. Notice how many different kinds of people find common ground at the cross.*

Roman soldiers strip and mock and crown and spit and strike Him; passersby blaspheme and wag their heads; chief priests, scribes, and elders mock together; and the robbers crucified with Him revile Him as well. Religious leaders, occupying soldiers, ordinary citizens, and condemned criminals all agree about one thing that afternoon. Luke 23:39–43 records that one of the thieves later changed his mind.

3. *Matthew records four things that happened at the moment of Jesus' death (27:51–53). Write them down, then read Hebrews 10:19–22 on the first of them and say what the torn veil means for you personally.*

The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, the rocks split, and graves were opened with many bodies of the saints raised after His resurrection and appearing in Jerusalem. Hebrews 10:19–22 says we now have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, through the veil, that is, His flesh. The way to God is open, and it was opened from the top down, by God rather than by us.

4. *Barabbas walked free because Jesus was condemned in his place (27:15–26). Trace what that exchange pictures, and compare 2 Corinthians 5:21, Isaiah 53:5–6, and 1 Peter 3:18.*

A guilty man was released and the innocent One took his place and his cross. Barabbas is the only person who could say literally that Jesus died in his place, and he is the picture of everyone else. Isaiah 53:6 says the Lord laid on Him

the iniquity of us all; 2 Corinthians 5:21 says He was made sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him; 1 Peter 3:18 says the just for the unjust, to bring us to God.

5. *The women who had followed from Galilee stood watching from a distance, still there when everyone else had gone (27:55–56). Name one costly, quiet act of faithfulness you will do this week and tell nobody about it.*

Answers will vary and should stay private. What the teacher should listen for, or rather leave room for, is service that has no audience. These women financed and followed and stood watch when the apostles had scattered, and Matthew names them. Hidden faithfulness is the kind God tends to put in the record.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The cry of dereliction requires careful handling. Affirm that Jesus truly bore our sin and its judgment; deny any fracture in the Godhead or any suggestion that the Father ceased to love the Son. Anchor it in Psalm 22 as a whole.
- Matthew 27:25 has been misused for centuries to justify hatred of Jewish people. Say plainly that our sins put Him there (Isaiah 53:5–6; Acts 2:23), that the apostles and the first church were Jewish, and that the gospel was preached to the same crowd fifty days later and three thousand were baptized.
- The raised saints of 27:52–53 are reported without explanation. Report them the same way. Do not speculate about who they were or what happened afterward.
- Avoid dwelling on the physical gruesomeness of crucifixion for emotional effect. Matthew does not, and a class swept up in gore will miss what the darkness and the torn veil actually mean.

Buried With Him, Raised to Walk

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Romans 5 opens the treasure chest. Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Then the list: access into this grace in which we stand, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, glory even in tribulations, love poured out in our hearts, salvation from wrath, reconciliation. And in the middle, verses 6 through 10, Paul proves the love rather than merely asserting it. God demonstrated it while we were still weak, still ungodly, still sinners, still enemies. Not one of those four words describes a person who deserved anything.

The Adam and Christ comparison in 5:12–21 is Paul’s way of saying that what happened in Christ is bigger than what happened in Eden. Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and death spread to all men because all sinned. Note that last clause carefully; it is the reason the class must not be handed the doctrine of inherited guilt. Sin came into human experience through Adam, and every accountable person since has taken it up personally. But the “much more” of grace runs through the paragraph six times. The remedy is larger than the ruin.

Chapter 6 is where the objection arrives: shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Paul’s answer is not a rule but a fact. We died to sin, and here is when and how: as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death. Buried with Him through baptism into death, raised to walk in newness of life. A man does not crawl back into the grave he was just carried out of. The rest of the chapter works out the logic of two masters, two kinds of service, and two wages, and ends with the sentence every Christian should have memorized.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Romans 5:1 and 5:2 use the language of a royal audience: “access” is the word for being introduced into the presence of a king. The war is over and the door is open.
- The “much more” refrain of 5:9, 10, 15, 17, and 20 is the backbone of the chapter’s argument from the lesser to the greater.
- Baptism in the New Testament is immersion. The word means to dip or submerge, and Romans 6:4 and Colossians 2:12 describe it as a burial and a resurrection.
- Romans 6:17 says they obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to them; the form, or mold, matches the pattern of death, burial, and resurrection just described.
- The wages and gift contrast in 6:23 uses a soldier’s pay word for wages. Sin pays; God gives.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Romans 5:1–5 names what a justified person already has. List each item, and say honestly which of them is hardest for you to believe on an ordinary discouraging Tuesday.*

Work slowly through the list: peace with God, access into grace, a standing place, hope of glory, joy in tribulation, the love of God poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Then ask the honest question, because most Christians live below their own doctrine. On a discouraging Tuesday the hardest ones are usually peace, since we feel guilty, and love, since we feel unremarkable. Verse 8 is the answer to both: God proved His love at a time when we had nothing to commend us.

Note that Paul grounds assurance in what God did rather than in how we feel about it. Guard the class from two ditches at once. Do not let anyone conclude that assurance is impossible, because verse 1 says we have peace. And do not let anyone conclude that assurance is unconditional, because the same author warns in 11:20–22 to

continue in His goodness or be cut off, and Hebrews 3:12–14 says we are partakers if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

Question 2. *Paul says we glory in tribulations (5:3–5). How is that different from pretending trouble is not trouble, and where have you actually watched the chain of verses 3 and 4 work itself out in a real person?*

Paul is not recommending denial. The word for tribulation is pressure, and Paul is a man who had been beaten, stoned, and left for dead. He is saying that suffering, when it is brought into the hands of God, produces something: perseverance, then proven character, then hope that does not disappoint. The order matters, and no step can be skipped. Nobody develops proven character in a comfortable year.

Ask for a name. Almost everyone in the room has watched someone go through something terrible and come out with a settled, useful, unshakable faith, and watching it is more persuasive than any argument. Then ask the harder half: suffering does not automatically produce this. It can also produce bitterness. What made the difference in the person they just named? Usually the answer is that they kept praying, kept gathering with the saints, and kept serving while it hurt.

Question 3. *Romans 6:1–4 answers the charge that grace makes sin safe. Walk through what Paul says happened to us in baptism, and discuss why he regards that as a complete answer to the objection.*

This is the most important paragraph of the week, so slow down. Paul answers the antinomian objection by pointing to what happened at the beginning of the Christian life. We died to sin. How? Baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into His death, buried with Him through baptism into death, raised to walk in newness of life. The old man was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be done away. To continue in sin would be to deny the very thing that put us in Christ.

Say plainly and without apology what these verses teach, and teach it as good news rather than as a debating point. Baptism is a burial, which is why it is immersion. It is into Christ and into His death, which is where His blood was shed. Acts 2:38 says it is for the forgiveness of sins, Acts 22:16 says wash away your sins calling on His name, Galatians 3:27 says we put on Christ in it, and 1 Peter 3:21 says it saves us, not as a washing of dirt but as the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Then finish where Paul finishes, at the newness of walk, because the same passage that puts a person into Christ also demands that he live differently afterward.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Romans 5:1–11 says a justified person has, and mark which of those are present possessions rather than future hopes.*

Justification, peace with God, access into grace, a standing in grace, rejoicing in hope of the glory of God, glory in tribulations, the love of God poured out in our hearts, the Holy Spirit given, salvation from wrath through Him, reconciliation, and joy in God. Nearly every one of them is present tense. The only future item is glory itself, and even that is held now as hope.

2. *Romans 5:12 says death spread to all men because all sinned. Set that beside Ezekiel 18:20, Matthew 18:3, and Matthew 19:14, and write out what Scripture actually teaches about infants and guilt.*

Paul says death spread to all men “because all sinned,” which locates guilt in personal sin rather than in inherited guilt. Ezekiel 18:20 says the son shall not bear the guilt of the father. Jesus said we must become as little children to enter the kingdom and that of such is the kingdom of heaven, which would be impossible if children were born guilty. Adam brought sin and death into the world, and everyone who reaches accountability has followed him into it personally.

3. *Copy out Romans 6:3–4, then read Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:26–27, Colossians 2:12, and 1 Peter 3:21. Where do these passages agree about what baptism is and what it accomplishes?*

They agree that baptism is a burial and rising with Christ, that it is into Christ and into His death, that it is for the remission of sins, that it is where we put on Christ, and that it saves through the resurrection of Jesus. They also

agree on what it is not: it is not a mere outward washing, not a work by which we earn anything, and not a ceremony separated from faith and repentance. It is how a believing, repentant person gets into Christ.

4. *Count the times Paul uses the language of slaves and masters in Romans 6:15–23, then trace the two owners, the two kinds of service, and the two wages he sets against each other.*

The language appears roughly a dozen times. Two owners: sin, and God or righteousness. Two kinds of service: presenting your members as instruments of unrighteousness, or as instruments of righteousness for holiness. Two outcomes: the fruit of those things is shame and the end is death, or the fruit is holiness and the end is everlasting life. And the two payments in verse 23: wages earned, and a gift given. Nobody in the chapter is free of a master; the only question is which one.

5. *Romans 6:13 says to present your members to God as instruments of righteousness. Pick one part of your body, your eyes, your tongue, your hands, or your feet, and name exactly what presenting it to God would cost you this week.*

Answers will vary. The strength of the question is that it gets past general resolve and into a specific member of the body: an eye that has to stop looking, a tongue that has to stop repeating, feet that have to start going somewhere they have avoided. Listen for the cost. Paul says present, which is the language of laying an offering on an altar and leaving it there.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Romans 5:12 is the classic proof text for inherited guilt. Teach the clause “because all sinned” and be plain: children are not born guilty (Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 18:3; 19:14). Adam brought sin and death into the world; each person becomes guilty when he himself sins.
- Romans 5:18–19 speaks of “all men” and “many” on both sides. Do not let it be read as universal salvation; the same letter conditions salvation on believing and obeying, and 6:23 sets the two ends side by side.
- Romans 6:3–4 is the clearest statement in the New Testament of what baptism is and does. Teach it directly, joyfully, and without arguing with absent denominations. Let the text do the work, and give anyone present the opportunity to obey it.
- Romans 6 also refutes once saved, always saved. Paul’s whole argument assumes a Christian could continue in sin and must not, and 6:16 says we belong to whatever we present ourselves to. Pair it with Galatians 5:4 and Hebrews 10:26–31 if the question comes up.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Judges 1–7 · Psalm 7–8 · Matthew 27:57–28:20 · Romans 7:1–8:11

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