

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 31 OF 104

Sons and Heirs

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Judges 8–15
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 9–10
Gospels	Mark 1:1–34
General New Testament	Romans 8:12–39

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is identity. Judges is full of powerful men who never settled whose they were, and it shows in every decision they make. Romans 8 is written to ordinary Christians under pressure in Rome, and it tells them they are sons, heirs, and inseparably loved. The gap between those two pictures is the lesson. By the end of the week your class should be able to say who they belong to and what difference it made on Wednesday.

Doctrinally, the weight is in Romans 8:29–39, and it must be carried carefully. Teach that God predestined those in Christ to be conformed to the image of His Son, which is covenant purpose rather than unconditional individual election. Teach that nothing outside a Christian can separate him from God's love, while being equally plain that Scripture warns Christians not to depart. Alongside that, Mark 1 gives you another chance to distinguish John's baptism from the baptism Christ commanded, and to say again that the kingdom came at Pentecost.

Formationally, watch what each reading says about approval. Samson had the Spirit's power and never grew up. Psalm 10 describes people God sees when no one else does. The Father calls Jesus beloved before a single miracle. And Paul says we have received the Spirit of adoption, not a spirit of fear. Ask your class this: are you serving God to be accepted, or from acceptance, and what would the coming week look like if that changed?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Romans 8:12–39 first and give it the whole hour. Begin with adoption in verses 14 through 17, handle 8:28–30 carefully in the middle, and finish by reading 8:31–39 aloud without stopping. Tell the class before you start that you will answer the predestination question directly, so nobody spends the hour waiting for it.

Second session: Take up Mark 1:1–34 and use the first five minutes to introduce Mark, since the class has just finished Matthew. Read the passage at speed, have them count the word “immediately,” and land the lesson on 1:35, the solitary place before daylight, which is where the busiest people in your class need to end up.

The other two readings: Judges 8–15 and Psalms 9 and 10 fit the extended questions. Warn the class that these chapters of Judges are ugly and are meant to be, and that Hebrews 11:32 names some of these men anyway. Suggest they read Psalms 9 and 10 in one sitting as the single poem they originally were.

Deliverers Who Needed Delivering

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These chapters are where the book of Judges turns dark. The cycle is still running, but the deliverers themselves are deteriorating. Gideon ends well in public and badly in private: he refuses kingship because the Lord shall rule over Israel, then asks for gold, makes an ephod, and Israel plays the harlot with it. He also takes many wives, and one son by a concubine in Shechem becomes the next chapter's disaster. Judges is showing us that the problem is not only the Canaanites outside but the corruption inside.

Abimelech is the low point, a man who hires worthless men with money from a pagan temple and murders his seventy brothers on one stone. Jotham, the youngest, escapes and shouts a parable from Mount Gerizim: the olive, the fig, and the vine all refuse to leave their useful work to reign over trees, so the bramble accepts, and the bramble has nothing to offer but fire. Three years later the parable comes true, and Abimelech dies with his skull broken by a millstone dropped by a woman on a tower.

Then Jephthah and Samson, both men with real faith and ruinous judgment. Jephthah, the rejected son of a harlot, is called back when the people need a fighter, argues his case with the Ammonites out of Israel's own history, and then makes a rash vow that darkens the rest of his life. Samson is set apart from the womb, and Scripture repeatedly says the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him, yet nearly every decision he makes is driven by appetite. God still used them, which is a mercy worth naming out loud, and Hebrews 11:32 lists them both.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Judges is arranged to show decline. Compare the faith of Othniel early in the book with the chaos of the closing chapters, and the direction is unmistakable.
- Shechem, where Abimelech is made king, is the same place where Joshua had gathered Israel to renew the covenant in Joshua 24, which sharpens the irony.
- A Nazirite vow (Numbers 6) involved abstaining from grape products, avoiding contact with the dead, and leaving the hair uncut. It was normally temporary and voluntary; Samson's was lifelong and given before birth.
- "The Spirit of the Lord came upon him" describes God empowering a man for a task in that era. It is neither approval of his character nor the same as the Spirit's indwelling of Christians (Romans 8:9).
- Hebrews 11:32 names Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah among the faithful, which shows God's grace toward flawed men without endorsing their failures.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Gideon refuses the crown with one of the best sentences in the book and then makes an ephod that becomes a snare to him and his whole house (8:22–27). How does a man do the right thing and the ruinous thing in the same chapter?*

Gideon's refusal is theologically perfect: "I will not rule over you, nor shall my son rule over you; the Lord shall rule over you." And in the very next breath he asks each man for an earring from the plunder, gathers seventeen hundred shekels of gold, and makes an ephod that all Israel goes after. He probably meant it as a memorial of the victory, or as a way to inquire of God. It became a snare to him and his house. The man who tore down one idol built another with better intentions.

Draw out the pattern, because it is everywhere. What ruins us is usually not the thing we were warned about but the good thing we added on our own authority. A ministry becomes a monument, a tradition becomes a test of fellowship, a success becomes an identity. Ask the class where their congregation or their family has begun treasuring something that started as a way to honor God and has quietly become the point.

Question 2. *Jotham's parable of the trees is the first parable in Scripture (9:7-20). Work out what each tree represents and discuss what it says about who ends up in charge when useful people will not take responsibility.*

The olive, the fig, and the vine each decline because they will not leave their fruitfulness to "sway over trees." The bramble, which produces nothing, is delighted to accept, and its offer is menacing: come take shelter in my shade, or let fire come out of me and devour the cedars. Brambles have no shade. What they do have is thorns and a tendency to catch fire. The parable is a warning against putting power in the hands of men who want it most and have the least to lose.

The application to congregational life is direct and should be made kindly. When qualified, fruitful men will not serve as elders or teachers because they are busy with good things, leadership falls to whoever will take it. Ask the class what it costs a congregation when capable people keep declining, and ask the capable people present, without naming them, to reconsider. Note also that the New Testament requires men who do not grasp for it (1 Timothy 3:1-7; 1 Peter 5:2-3).

Question 3. *Samson's strength was entirely from God and his weakness was entirely his own. Trace both through chapters 13 through 15, and discuss what this warns us about gifted people, in the pulpit and in the pew, whose character never grew up.*

The pattern is stark. Every recorded exertion of Samson's strength is credited to the Spirit of the Lord. Every recorded decision of his life is credited to his own eyes: he saw a woman in Timnah and said, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well." He scoops honey out of a lion's carcass, which a Nazirite should never have touched. He settles scores with foxes and firebrands and a donkey's jawbone. He is a one man wrecking crew who never once leads a nation.

This is the place to talk about gift and character, because your class has watched the collapse of gifted people and probably has some gifted people in it. A gift is given; character is grown. A man can preach well, sing well, organize well, and make money well while his interior life goes untended, and the collapse always looks sudden from outside and never is. Ask what practices actually build character, and be concrete: confession to somebody, accountability that can say no to you, and obedience in the small unwatched places.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Judges 8:22-27 and list exactly what went wrong with Gideon's ephod. Compare Exodus 20:4-5 and Deuteronomy 12:8, and notice how quickly a memorial becomes an idol.*

Gideon asked for the gold, made the ephod, and set it up in his own city, and all Israel played the harlot with it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and his house. The problem was worship that God had not authorized, in a place God had not designated, by a man who was not a priest. Exodus 20:4-5 forbids the image; Deuteronomy 12:8 forbids everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. Good motives do not sanctify unauthorized worship.

2. *Write out Jephthah's vow (11:30-31) and what followed (11:34-40). Read Leviticus 27:1-8 and Deuteronomy 12:31, then state carefully what the text says and what it does not say.*

He vowed that whatever came out of the doors of his house to meet him on his return would be the Lord's, and he would offer it as a burnt offering; his only child, a daughter, came out with timbrels and dancing. The text says he did with her according to his vow, and she had known no man, and Israel's daughters lamented four days a year. Faithful students have taken this two ways, that she was offered as a sacrifice or that she was devoted to perpetual virginity. What Scripture states plainly elsewhere is that human sacrifice is an abomination God never commanded (Deuteronomy 12:31; Jeremiah 7:31), that vows could be redeemed with money (Leviticus 27), and that rash vows are condemned (Ecclesiastes 5:4-6). The text reports Jephthah's act; it never approves it.

3. *List everything the angel tells Manoah's wife about her son in 13:3-5, and set it beside the Nazirite requirements of Numbers 6:1-8. Which parts of that vow did Samson actually keep?*

The child would be a Nazirite to God from the womb, no razor was to come on his head, and his mother was to drink no wine or similar drink and eat nothing unclean. Numbers 6 adds abstaining from grapes and avoiding contact with any dead body. Samson touched the carcass of a lion and ate honey from it, held a feast which normally involved

drinking, handled the corpses of thirty Philistines, and finally gave up the hair. He kept the outward sign the longest and the heart of the vow the least.

4. *Trace how often Samson's decisions begin with something he saw or wanted (14:1-3; 15:1-3; 16:1). What does that reveal about the engine driving his life, and where do you recognize the same engine?*

In 14:1 he saw a woman in Timnah and demanded her because she pleased him; in 14:3 he says, "Get her for me, for she pleases me well"; in 15:1 he goes to her expecting his rights; in 16:1 he sees a harlot in Gaza and goes in to her. The engine is appetite, and it never reverses. Answers about personal application will vary; listen for honesty about the eyes, since that is where the text locates the ignition.

5. *Judges 13:5 says Samson would only "begin to deliver Israel." Name one assignment from God you have settled for merely beginning, and take the next step on it this week.*

Answers will vary. The phrase "begin to deliver" is one of the saddest in the chapter, because Samson had everything needed to finish and spent it on grudges. Listen for something specific with a next step attached: a study started and dropped, a relationship half repaired, a promise half kept, a habit half broken.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jephthah's vow: present the interpretive options honestly and briefly, and do not let the hour be spent there. Keep the point where the text keeps it, on the folly of rash vows and the seriousness of speaking to God.
- Samson's marriage to a Philistine, his visit to a harlot, and Gideon's many wives are reported, not approved. Say so plainly. God's design is one man and one woman for life (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:4-6).
- Do not use "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him" to justify anything Samson did, and do not read the Christian's relationship to the Spirit back into these accounts.
- Hebrews 11:32 will come up. Use it to show God's grace toward imperfect people who trusted Him, not as a blanket approval of their conduct. Both truths keep a class honest about its own heroes.

The Helper of the Fatherless

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

In the Hebrew text these two psalms share a single running acrostic, and many older translations join them. They should be taught together, because separated they each become a half truth. Psalm 9 alone can sound like a man who has never watched injustice go unpunished. Psalm 10 alone can sound like a man who has given up on God. Together they are what faith actually looks like over a long life: settled conviction about God's justice, and unflinching honesty about how slow it can look.

Psalm 9 is thanksgiving for judgment already seen. God has rebuked the nations, blotted out the wicked, and sits enthroned forever. The line to underline is verse 10: those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You have not forsaken those who seek You. And verse 18: the needy shall not always be forgotten, and the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever. That word “always” is a concession. It admits that right now, they are being forgotten by everyone else.

Psalm 10 is the complaint, and it is remarkably modern. The wicked man boasts of his heart's desire, blesses the greedy, and says in his heart that God has forgotten and will never see. His ways are always prospering. He lies in wait like a lion for the poor. And then the turn in verse 14: “But You have seen, for You observe trouble and grief, to repay it by Your hand. The helpless commits himself to You; You are the helper of the fatherless.” The psalm does not end by explaining God's delay. It ends by insisting on God's sight.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 9 and 10 form one acrostic in Hebrew, which is why Psalm 10 has no heading of its own; the Greek and Latin traditions count them as a single psalm.
- Psalm 9 is a psalm of thanksgiving mixed with lament; Psalm 10 is a community lament focused on the oppression of the poor.
- “Sheol” in 9:17 is the realm of the dead. Hebrew poetry uses it broadly; the full New Testament teaching on final judgment comes later in revelation (Luke 16:19–31; Revelation 20:11–15).
- Care for the fatherless, the widow, and the stranger is one of the most repeated obligations in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 10:18; 24:17–22), and it carries over into the New (James 1:27).
- “Higgaion” and “Selah” in 9:16 are musical or liturgical markings, most likely indicating a pause or an instrumental interlude.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 9 celebrates a God who judges, and Psalm 10 opens by asking why that God is standing far off. Discuss how the two belong together, and what it means that God put both of them in the songbook of His people.*

They belong together because both are true at once. God does judge, and God's judging is often invisible on the timeline we are living on. If your class only ever sings Psalm 9, the first genuinely unjust thing that happens to them will feel like evidence that the faith was false. If they only ever pray Psalm 10, they will drift into cynicism. Held together, the two psalms teach a believer how to wait without lying about what he sees.

That God preserved Psalm 10 in the inspired songbook is itself a pastoral gift. He is not offended by the question. He is not fragile. Habakkuk asked it, Job asked it, Jeremiah asked it, and the martyrs under the altar ask it in Revelation 6:10. Ask the class what they have been carrying that they have never said to God in plain words because they thought it was disrespectful. Then read 10:1 out loud again and tell them it is in the Bible.

Question 2. *Psalm 10:4–11 lets us hear what the wicked man says in his heart. List those sentences, and talk honestly about which of them we half believe on our worst days.*

The wicked man says: God will not require an account; there is no God; I shall not be moved, I shall never be in adversity; God has forgotten, He hides His face, He will never see it. Notice that the sentences are not philosophical arguments. They are assumptions he lives by, and most of them are about God not paying attention.

The uncomfortable application is that we say these same sentences quietly. We believe God has forgotten when a prayer goes years unanswered. We believe we shall not be moved when our finances and health are good. We behave as if no account will be required in the moments when nobody is watching. Practical atheism is not a creed; it is a set of habits. Ask the class where their behavior last week assumed God was not in the room.

Question 3. *Both psalms keep returning to the poor, the oppressed, and the fatherless. What does that repetition tell you about what God notices, and who is currently invisible in our own congregation?*

It tells us that God pays attention to exactly the people society stops seeing. The psalms return to them because God returns to them. Deuteronomy 10:18 says He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow and loves the stranger; James 1:27 defines pure religion as visiting orphans and widows in their trouble and keeping oneself unspotted. This is not a social program bolted onto the gospel; it is the character of God showing up in His people.

Then get uncomfortably local. Ask the class to name, without notes, the widows in the congregation, the members who live alone, the children whose fathers are absent, the family in financial trouble. Whoever cannot be named is invisible, and invisible is exactly the condition Psalm 10 is complaining about. Assign names to people, not projects to committees.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read the two psalms straight through as one poem and list the words, images, and requests that appear in both. What does putting them together do to each one?*

Both psalms use the language of the oppressed, the needy, the humble, and the times of trouble; both speak of God as a refuge and a judge; both ask God to arise; both insist that the wicked will be caught in what they devised; and both end with confidence in judgment. Read together, the confidence of Psalm 9 gives the complaint of Psalm 10 somewhere to stand, and the complaint keeps the confidence honest.

2. *Make a list of everything Psalm 9 says God does for the oppressed, then add what Psalm 10:14 and 10:17–18 say. Which promise do you most need to believe this month?*

Psalm 9 says God maintains the cause of the oppressed, is a refuge in times of trouble, does not forsake those who seek Him, does not forget the cry of the humble, and will not forget the needy forever. Psalm 10 adds that He observes trouble and grief to repay it by His hand, that He is the helper of the fatherless, that He hears the desire of the humble, prepares their heart, and inclines His ear to do justice. Answers about personal need will vary.

3. *Psalm 10:4 says that in his pride the wicked will not seek God and that God is in none of his thoughts. Compare Psalm 14:1 and Romans 1:28, then describe in your own words what practical atheism looks like in a person who would never deny God out loud.*

Practical atheism is living as though God is not watching while believing in principle that He is. Psalm 14:1 says the fool says in his heart there is no God, and the context is behavior rather than philosophy. Romans 1:28 says they did not like to retain God in their knowledge. It shows up as prayerlessness, as ethics that shift when nobody will find out, and as decisions made with no thought of what God has said.

4. *Trace the verbs addressed to God in Psalm 10:12–18: arise, lift up Your hand, do not forget, see, hear, prepare, strengthen, judge. Which of them is the prayer of your own heart right now?*

The verbs are a whole theology of appeal: arise, lift up Your hand, do not forget the humble, see, hear, prepare their heart, incline Your ear, do justice, break the arm of the wicked. Answers will vary. Note that the psalmist asks God to act rather than asking permission to act himself, which is where Romans 12:19 will land the Christian.

5. *Psalm 10:17–18 says God hears the desire of the humble and does justice to the fatherless and the oppressed. Learn the name of one person near you who is fatherless, widowed, or alone, and do one specific thing for that person before Sunday.*

Answers will vary, and the assignment is a name and a specific act. The psalm's complaint is that the helpless are unseen; the remedy in the congregation begins with somebody learning a name. Follow up the next week and ask who did it, and what they found when they got there.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 10:1 is a genuine complaint, not a denial of faith. Do not let the class treat honest lament as weakness; it is the language God preserved for His people.
- Requests for God to break the arm of the wicked are appeals for divine justice, not models for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19). Note that the psalmist asks God to act, not for a free hand himself.
- God's delay is not indifference. Pair these psalms with 2 Peter 3:9, which says the delay is mercy aimed at repentance, and with Ecclesiastes 8:11, which explains why delay emboldens the wicked.

The Beginning of the Gospel

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Your class has just finished Matthew, and the change of pace will be obvious from the first sentence. Mark writes like a man with news that cannot wait. No genealogy, no birth account, no long sermons in these opening chapters. He tells you in verse 1 exactly what he is doing: “The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” Then he moves, and the word “immediately” becomes the drumbeat of the whole book.

The opening section establishes who Jesus is by stacking witnesses. The prophets announce Him. John the Baptist, the most compelling religious figure in the country, says he is not worthy to stoop down and untie His sandals. The Father speaks from a torn heaven. The Spirit descends. Satan tests Him. Even the demons know exactly who He is and say so out loud, which is a detail Mark uses repeatedly. By verse 34 the reader has heard the verdict from heaven, from hell, and from the crowds.

And then watch the shape of the first day of public ministry in Capernaum, from verse 21 to verse 35. He teaches with authority, not like the scribes. He casts out an unclean spirit with a word. He heals Simon’s mother in law, and she gets up and serves. At sunset, when the Sabbath ends, the whole city gathers at the door and He heals many. And in the morning, a great while before day, He gets up and goes out to a solitary place to pray. That last verse is the one to leave with the class.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Mark is the shortest Gospel, written most likely from Rome to a largely Gentile audience, which is why he explains Jewish customs and translates Aramaic words.
- Early tradition connects Mark closely with Peter, and much of the book reads like an eyewitness account told by a man who was there.
- John the Baptist fulfills Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1, the messenger preparing the way. His baptism was a baptism of repentance in anticipation of the One coming, and it was superseded by the baptism Christ commanded (Acts 19:1–5).
- Jesus’ own baptism was not for the remission of sins, since He had none. Matthew 3:15 explains it as fulfilling all righteousness; it publicly identifies Him and inaugurates His ministry.
- The demons’ recognition of Jesus and His refusal to let them speak is a recurring feature of Mark. Their testimony was true but unwelcome; He would be revealed on His own terms.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Mark skips the birth entirely and opens with a man shouting in a wilderness. What does that beginning tell you about the kind of Gospel Mark is writing and the kind of readers he had in mind?*

Mark writes for people who need the point fast. He assumes his readers know less about Judaism, so he explains customs, and he assumes they have less patience for genealogies, so he skips one. His Gospel is action: what Jesus did, one scene after another, with the cross looming from early on. For a Roman audience under pressure, and for the busy adults in your class, this is the Gospel that proves Jesus is the Son of God by showing Him at work.

Use this to reset how the class reads. Suggest they read Mark in one or two sittings rather than in fragments, and watch for the word “immediately.” Ask what difference it makes that the earliest preaching about Jesus was not an argument but a report of what He did. Christianity stands on events, in public, with witnesses (Acts 26:26).

Question 2. *At the baptism the Father says, “You are My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (1:11), before Jesus has preached a sermon, healed anyone, or gone to a cross. Discuss why that order matters for people who are exhausted from trying to earn approval.*

The Father’s declaration comes at the beginning, not at the end. Before the miracles, before the crowds, before Gethsemane, the Son hears that He is loved and that the Father is pleased with Him. Whatever we say about the unique relationship of the Father and the Son, the pattern is instructive. Approval is not the wage paid at the end of a life of performance; in the gospel it is the ground a person stands on while he works.

Bring this to the people in the room who are tired. Many faithful members are running on a quiet engine of trying to be enough, for God, for parents long dead, for a congregation. Romans 8:15–16, which the class reads this same week, says we received the Spirit of adoption and cry Abba, Father. Ask what would change about their service if they were serving from acceptance rather than for it. Then guard the other side: sonship in Christ is entered by the new birth and kept by walking with Him (Galatians 3:26–27; Romans 8:13–14).

Question 3. *Twice in this short reading people are astonished at His authority (1:22, 27). Where in your own life does the authority of Jesus actually get the final word, and where do you still quietly negotiate with Him?*

The scribes taught by citing other scribes. Jesus taught on His own authority, and then demonstrated it by commanding an unclean spirit that obeyed Him. The crowd’s reaction in verse 27 joins the two: “What new doctrine is this? For with authority He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.” The miracles were never entertainment; they confirmed the word He preached (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4).

Now make it personal, because authority is easy to affirm in the abstract. Ask where each person still negotiates: in how money is spent, in what is watched, in how a spouse is spoken to, in whether the assembly is a priority, in whether a grudge is finally released. Colossians 3:17 says do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. Have the class name one place this week where they will stop negotiating and simply do what He said.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Count how many times “immediately” or “straightway” appears in Mark 1:1–34. Describe the effect all that speed has on a reader, and what it suggests about Mark’s purpose.*

Depending on the translation, the word appears roughly eight to eleven times in these thirty four verses. The effect is breathless urgency: Mark is not composing a leisurely biography but delivering news. It also fits his portrait of Jesus as the Servant who works, which is why Mark gives us so much action and so little commentary.

2. *Write out what John preached according to 1:4–8, then read Acts 19:1–5. How was John’s baptism different from the baptism the risen Christ commanded?*

John preached a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, confessing sins, and announced One mightier coming who would baptize with the Holy Spirit. His baptism looked forward to a Christ who had not yet died and risen. In Acts 19 Paul finds men who had received John’s baptism, explains that John pointed to Jesus, and they are then baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. John’s baptism served its purpose and ended; the baptism now commanded is into Christ and His death (Matthew 28:19; Romans 6:3–4).

3. *Mark 1:15 summarizes Jesus’ first preaching in four short phrases. List them, then read Daniel 2:44, Mark 9:1, and Acts 2:1–4, 36–41, and state when the kingdom actually came.*

“The time is fulfilled,” “the kingdom of God is at hand,” “repent,” and “believe in the gospel.” Daniel 2:44 said God would set up a kingdom in the days of those kings; Mark 9:1 said some standing there would not taste death until they saw it come with power; Acts 2 records the power coming on Pentecost, three thousand baptized, and the church begun. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into it. The kingdom came; it is not still awaiting establishment.

4. *Trace what happens from sunset in 1:32 to early morning in 1:35. Given the day He had just had, what does Jesus do next, and what does that suggest about His own habits and priorities?*

After healing the whole town at the door, He rises a great while before day and goes out to a solitary place to pray, and when Simon finds Him He moves on to the next towns to preach. The busiest day in the passage is followed by

the earliest prayer in the passage. He also refuses to let a successful evening set His agenda. Both habits are worth naming for a class of tired people.

5. Simon, Andrew, James, and John left nets, a boat, hired servants, and a father. Name what you would have to leave in the boat to follow Jesus more closely, and take one real step toward leaving it this week.

Answers will vary. Press for specifics rather than symbols: a second job, a hobby that eats every weekend, a friendship that pulls the wrong direction, a level of income that requires more than it returns. Note that they left the boat but not their family or their trade forever; the point is not that everyone quits a job, but that nothing is allowed to outrank the call.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Distinguish John's baptism from the baptism the risen Christ commanded (Acts 19:1–5). The class will be confused if this is left vague, and the distinction protects the teaching of Acts 2:38.
- Jesus' baptism was not for the forgiveness of sins. Say so plainly (Matthew 3:15; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).
- "The kingdom of God is at hand" is a statement about its nearness then, not a prediction of a future earthly reign. Use Mark 9:1, Acts 2, and Colossians 1:13, and be plain that Christ reigns now.
- Demon possession appears frequently in Mark. Teach it as a real feature of that period, connected with the ministry of Christ and the confirmation of His authority, without encouraging modern speculation or exorcism practices.

Nothing Shall Separate Us

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The chapter turns on the word sons. Verse 14 says as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God, and verse 15 says the Spirit we received is not a spirit of bondage producing fear but a Spirit of adoption producing a cry: Abba, Father. Abba is the ordinary Aramaic word a child used at home. Paul then follows the logic to the end: if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified together. The privilege and the participation come as one package.

Verses 18 through 27 are the most realistic paragraph about Christian life in the New Testament. Creation groans and labors. We ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the redemption of our body. And the Spirit makes intercession with groanings that cannot be uttered when we do not know what to pray. Three groans, one hope. Paul is not describing a triumphant life free of pain; he is describing a family waiting for the rest of its inheritance while the world around it comes apart.

Then the crescendo. God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. The purpose is named in verse 29: to be conformed to the image of His Son. If God is for us, who can be against us? He did not spare His own Son, so how shall He not with Him freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge? Who shall separate us? And then the list: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, any other created thing. Nothing out there can do it. That is the point of the list, and it is worth saying out loud.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Romans 8 is the climax of Paul's argument that began at 3:21, describing the life of those who have been justified and are now in Christ.
- Adoption in the Roman world was a legal act by which a person was given full standing as a son and heir, often as an adult. The image would land hard on readers in Rome.
- "Foreknew" means God knew beforehand; "predestined" means He determined beforehand. The question in every case is what He determined beforehand, and 8:29 answers it: conformity to the image of His Son.
- Paul's letters consistently locate God's choosing "in Christ" (Ephesians 1:3–5), and a person enters Christ by faith, repentance, and baptism (Galatians 3:26–27; Romans 6:3–4).
- Romans 8:36 quotes Psalm 44:22, which is a psalm of complaint from a people suffering unjustly. Paul is not pretending the danger is imaginary.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul says we did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear but the Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, "Abba, Father" (8:15). How is the fear of a slave different from the confidence of a son, and which of the two do you actually pray with?*

The slave obeys because of what will happen if he does not; the son obeys because of who his father is. The slave never stops calculating whether he has done enough, because his standing depends on his last performance. The son knows he can come into the room. Paul says the Spirit we received produces the second, not the first, and that the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Ask the class, gently, which voice they actually pray with, because many lifelong members pray like employees. Then be careful not to overcorrect. Sonship is not presumption: verse 13 says if you live according to the flesh you will die, verse 14 says those who are led by the Spirit are sons, and verse 17 attaches a condition about suffering

with Him. The New Testament gives real assurance to those who are walking with God and real warning to those who are not, and a healthy class needs both in the same hour.

Question 2. *Romans 8:28 is quoted at more funerals than any other verse. Read it slowly with both of its qualifying clauses in place, and discuss what it genuinely promises and what it never said.*

Read the whole verse: all things work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. Two qualifiers, and then the purpose is defined in the next verse as conformity to the image of Christ. What it promises is that God is able to weave everything, including what is evil and what is senseless, into that end for people who are His. What it never said is that everything that happens is good, or that every loss will make sense in this life, or that God sent the tragedy.

This matters at a graveside. Do not let anyone quote this verse to a grieving person as though it minimizes the loss. Paul has just spent ten verses on groaning. The comfort is not that the thing was secretly good; it is that God is not finished and that nothing is wasted in His hands. Ask the class to name a time they saw God bring something good out of something they would never have chosen, and let the honest ones say that they are still waiting.

Question 3. *Romans 8:29–30 uses the words “foreknew” and “predestined.” Work carefully through what Paul says we were predestined to, and discuss what this passage settles and what it does not.*

Follow the sentence exactly. Whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. The object of the predestining is stated, and it is not which individuals will be saved apart from their response; it is what God determined beforehand would happen to those who are His, namely that they would be made like Christ and that He would be the firstborn among many brethren. Ephesians 1 says the same thing: He chose us in Him, and predestined us to adoption, so that being in Christ is the condition under which the blessing is received.

Say clearly what Scripture does not teach. It does not teach that God arbitrarily selected individuals for salvation or ruin before they existed, leaving the rest no genuine opportunity. God is not willing that any should perish (2 Peter 3:9), desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), calls people through the gospel (2 Thessalonians 2:14), and commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Whosoever will may come (Revelation 22:17). God determined the destiny of a people, and He determined how a person joins them: by being in Christ. Teach it plainly and without heat; many in your class have friends who have been taught otherwise and are frightened by it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Romans 8:12–17 says is true of a child of God, and mark carefully the condition Paul attaches at the end of verse 17.*

We are debtors but not to the flesh; if we put to death the deeds of the body we will live; those led by the Spirit of God are sons of God; we did not receive a spirit of bondage to fear; we received the Spirit of adoption and cry Abba, Father; the Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God; and if children, then heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The condition is at the end of verse 17: “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”

2. *Trace the three groanings in Romans 8:22–27. Who or what groans in each case, and what is each one waiting for?*

Creation groans and labors with birth pangs, waiting to be delivered from corruption. We ourselves groan within ourselves, having the firstfruits of the Spirit, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. And the Spirit makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered when we do not know what to pray as we ought. All three are waiting for the same day, and none of them is pretending the present is fine.

3. *Copy out Romans 8:29 and identify precisely what God predestined. Compare Ephesians 1:3–5 and 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14, noting how many times the words “in Him” or “in Christ” appear and how a person comes to be there.*

He predestined them “to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” Ephesians 1:3–5 says He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world and predestined us to adoption by Jesus Christ, with the phrase “in Him,” “in Christ,” or “in the Beloved” repeated throughout the paragraph. Second Thessalonians 2:13–14 says He chose us for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and

belief in the truth, and that He called us by the gospel. A person comes to be in Christ by hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Him (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27).

4. *Make a list of everything Romans 8:35–39 says cannot separate us from the love of God. Then notice whose name is absent from that list, and read Hebrews 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:4.*

Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, and any other created thing. The name that is absent is our own. Nothing outside can tear a Christian away from God's love, and Scripture is equally clear that a Christian can depart from the living God (Hebrews 3:12–14), be severed from Christ by turning to another system (Galatians 5:4), and be worse off at the end than the beginning (2 Peter 2:20–22). The love never fails; we can leave it.

5. *Romans 8:32 asks how God, having given His own Son, will not also freely give us all things with Him. Name one thing you have been afraid to ask God for, and ask Him plainly this week.*

Answers will vary. Verse 32 is an argument from the greater to the lesser: a God who gave His Son will not be stingy about anything else that serves His purpose. Listen for something real, a prodigal child, a healing, a job, courage to speak. Note that “all things” is governed by the purpose of verse 29, so this is not a promise to grant every request, which is why 8:26 says the Spirit helps us when we do not know what to pray.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Predestination: keep the class on the object of the verb. God predestined that those in Christ would be conformed to His Son. This is covenant purpose, not unconditional individual election. Answer Calvinism with Scripture, calmly, and without caricaturing anyone's family or background.
- Romans 8:38–39 is regularly used to teach once saved, always saved. Point out what the list contains, all created things outside us, and pair it with Hebrews 3:12–14, Galatians 5:4, and 2 Peter 2:20–22. God will never let go; we are warned not to.
- “Led by the Spirit” should be taught as the Spirit leading through the word He revealed (Ephesians 6:17; 2 Timothy 3:16–17), not as inner impressions or new revelation.
- Romans 8:28 must not be used to tell a suffering person that their tragedy was good or that God caused it. Teach it as God's ability to bring good out of everything for those who love Him, with the purpose defined by verse 29.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Judges 16–21; Ruth 1–4 • Psalm 11–15 • Mark 1:35–2:28 • Romans 9–10

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