

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 33 OF 104

You Are My Lord

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Samuel 1-8
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 16-17
Gospels	Mark 3
General New Testament	Romans 11-12

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to make the class face the question of lordship in a form they cannot dodge. Israel's elders asked for a king they could see, and God said that request was a rejection of Him. Mark 3 puts the same choice in front of scribes who watched the power of God and named it Satan. Romans 12 tells a Christian what the answer looks like when it is real: a body on an altar, a mind being renewed, a love with no acting in it.

Doctrinally, this week carries three loads. Romans 11:22 is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that a Christian can be cut off, and it deserves careful, gentle, unhurried treatment. The olive tree must be taught as one tree, which quietly closes the door on a separate future program for national Israel. And Psalm 16 gives you the chance to show the class exactly how the apostles preached the Old Testament, because Peter stakes the resurrection on a psalm and then calls for repentance and baptism.

Formationally, watch the direction people face. Israel faced outward, toward the nations, and asked to look like them. David faced God and said, You are my Lord. The scribes faced Jesus and looked for a charge. Paul faces the church and asks for a body. Put this question to the class before they leave: name the one area of your life where you are still the king, and tell us the first thing that will change this week if you hand it over.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 1 Samuel 1-8. It is the longest reading, it moves fast, and 1 Samuel 8:7 gives you the sentence the whole week turns on. Spend the first half on Hannah and Eli's house, and give the second half to the demand for a king and the six uses of the word take.

Second session: Take up Romans 11-12. Give unhurried time to the olive tree and to the warning of 11:22, then finish in chapter 12 so the class leaves with the altar rather than the argument. If the hour gets away from you, protect Romans 12:1-2.

The other two readings: Psalm 16-17 and Mark 3 reward private reading. Point the class to Psalm 16:8-11 with Acts 2:25-32 open beside it, and warn them in advance that Mark 3:28-30 frightens sincere people. Offer to talk with anyone about it after class rather than leaving it unaddressed.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT 1 Samuel 1-8

Give Us a King

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

First Samuel opens on a small domestic scene and ends up rearranging a nation. Hannah is childless, mocked by a rival wife, and so shaken in her praying that Eli assumes she is drunk. She asks for a son and promises to give him away, and she keeps the promise. Her song in chapter 2 is one of the great theological statements of the Old Testament: God brings low and lifts up, He raises the poor from the dust, and the last line reaches for a king and an anointed one before Israel has either.

Against Hannah stands the house of Eli. His sons treat the offerings of the Lord as their personal supply and treat the women at the door of the tabernacle as their own, and their father, who knows, restrains them with nothing but words. God tells the boy Samuel He will judge that house forever for the iniquity Eli knew about and did not restrain. Chapters 4 through 6 then show Israel doing at a national level what Eli did at a family level: keeping the forms of religion while emptying them of reverence. They carry the ark into battle as a good luck charm, and thirty thousand men die.

The turn comes at Mizpah. Israel puts away foreign gods, Samuel prays, God thunders, and the Philistines are routed. Samuel sets up a stone and names it Ebenezer, “thus far the Lord has helped us.” And then, one chapter later, with Samuel old and his own sons corrupt, the elders ask for a king like all the nations. God tells Samuel to give them what they want and to warn them what it will cost. The tragedy of chapter 8 is not that Israel wanted a king; Deuteronomy 17 had already anticipated one. The tragedy is why they wanted him.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- First and Second Samuel are one book in the Hebrew Bible. The author is not named; 1 Chronicles 29:29 mentions records kept by Samuel, Nathan, and Gad.
- The period runs roughly from 1100 to 1010 B.C., bridging the era of the judges and the beginning of the monarchy. Samuel is the last judge and the first of the great prophets.
- Shiloh was where the tabernacle stood (1:3). Its destruction not long after these events is remembered later in Jeremiah 7:12–14 as a warning.
- Samuel was a Levite by descent (1 Chronicles 6:33–38), which is why his lifelong service at the sanctuary is not an irregularity. Hannah’s vow placed him under something very like the Nazirite restrictions (1:11; compare Numbers 6).
- A king was permitted and regulated in advance (Deuteronomy 17:14–20), including the warning that he must not multiply horses, wives, or silver. Israel’s sin in 1 Samuel 8 is in the motive: they want to be like the nations and to have someone visible go out before them.
- The ark was the throne of God among His people, not a talisman. Numbers 4 gives the rules for moving it; 1 Samuel 4 shows what happens when reverence is replaced by superstition.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Hannah asks God for a son and then hands him over at about the age of three (1:24–28). What made that possible, and where does her song in 2:1–10 say her confidence actually rested?*

What made it possible is in the song. Hannah’s confidence rests on the character of God, not on her circumstances: there is none holy like the Lord, He kills and makes alive, He brings low and lifts up, He guards the feet of His saints. A woman who believes that can open her hands. She is not giving Samuel to Eli or to a building; she is giving him back to the God who gave him, and 1 Samuel 2:21 quietly notes that God gave her five more children.

Do not turn this into a formula. Hannah is not rewarded for making a deal with God; she is a woman who wanted one thing more than anything and wanted God more. Ask the class what they are currently holding closed-fisted, and what it would mean to hold it the way Hannah held her son. Note also that she visited him every year with a little coat she had made. Surrender is not the same as indifference.

Question 2. *In 1 Samuel 8:7 God tells Samuel that the people have not rejected Samuel but have rejected God from reigning over them. Talk about how a request can be a rejection, and where we do the same thing while still saying our prayers.*

Their words were reasonable. Samuel is old, his sons take bribes and pervert justice, and the nation is under military pressure. Nobody in the meeting said, "Let us reject God." They said, "Give us a king to judge us like all the nations." God's verdict in verse 7 is the uncomfortable part: they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. A request can be a rejection when it is a request for something God has already said He would be for you.

Bring it close. We can pray earnestly for a solution while refusing the one God has given. A man prays about his marriage and will not open the passage that tells him what to do. A congregation prays for growth and will not do personal work. Ask the class where they are asking God for a visible king, something they can see and manage, instead of trusting the God who thundered at Mizpah.

Question 3. *Eli knew exactly what his sons were doing and never did more than talk about it (2:22–25; 3:13). Describe what that same failure looks like in a home or a congregation today, and name what it would have taken for Eli to act.*

Eli's failure is specific and it is named twice. He heard about it (2:22), he reasoned with them mildly (2:23–25), and he honored his sons above God (2:29). God tells Samuel the house will be judged because Eli knew and did not restrain them. This is not a man who was unaware. It is a man who could not bring himself to do anything that would cost him his sons' affection or his own comfort.

Ask what restraint would have required. It would have meant removing them from service at the tabernacle, whatever the family cost. Push the parallel gently but honestly: parents who see a pattern in a child and answer it with a sigh, elders who know about a problem and keep hoping it will settle itself, friends who let a brother drift because the conversation would be awkward. Ask the class to name the conversation they have been avoiding, and why.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1–10 and list the reversals she names. Then set it beside Mary's song in Luke 1:46–55 and note every place the two overlap.*

Hannah names the bows of the mighty broken and the stumbling girded with strength, the full hiring themselves out for bread and the hungry ceasing to hunger, the barren bearing seven and the mother of many growing feeble, the Lord killing and making alive, bringing down to the grave and raising up, making poor and making rich, bringing low and lifting up, raising the poor from the dust and setting him among princes. Mary's song in Luke 1 follows the same pattern almost point for point: He has scattered the proud, put down the mighty, exalted the lowly, filled the hungry, and sent the rich away empty. Two women, a thousand years apart, sing the same God.

2. *Trace what happens in 1 Samuel 3:1–18 from the first call to the morning report. How many times does Samuel go to Eli, and what finally changes for the boy?*

Samuel goes to Eli three times before Eli understands what is happening, and a fourth call comes after Eli tells him how to answer. What changes is that Samuel stops running to the man and starts answering the Lord: "Speak, for Your servant hears." Note also verse 7, that Samuel did not yet know the Lord and the word had not yet been revealed to him. His first message is a hard one about the man who raised him, and he tells Eli everything and hides nothing.

3. *1 Samuel 4 through 6 tells the story of the ark. Make two lists, one of everything that goes wrong for Israel and one of everything that goes wrong for the Philistines. What is the account teaching about treating holy things as tools?*

Israel loses four thousand men, then sends for the ark, then loses thirty thousand more along with the ark itself; Hophni and Phinehas die, Eli falls and breaks his neck, and a baby is named Ichabod because the glory has departed. The Philistines fare no better: Dagon falls before the ark twice and ends up broken on his threshold, the people of Ashdod and Gath and Ekron are struck with tumors, and after seven months they send the ark home with a guilt

offering. The lesson is that God will not be used. Israel treated the ark as leverage, and the Philistines treated it as plunder, and God refused both.

4. *Read 1 Samuel 8:11–18, where Samuel spells out what a king will do. Count how many times the word take appears, then compare it with what God had freely given at Mizpah in 1 Samuel 7:10–13.*

The word take appears six times in that short speech: he will take your sons, take your daughters, take your fields and vineyards and olive groves, take a tenth of your grain, take your servants and your best young men and donkeys, and take a tenth of your sheep. Set that against 1 Samuel 7, where God gave them victory for nothing but repentance and a prayer, and thundered against the Philistines Himself. They traded a God who gives for a king who takes, and verse 18 says they will cry out because of the king they chose.

5. *Israel wanted to look like the nations around them. Name the specific place where you most want your life to look like everyone else's, and decide one thing you will do this week that will make it look like God's instead.*

Answers will vary. Listen for honesty about the pull of ordinary conformity: the house, the schedule, the way we spend a weekend, the way we talk about money, what we let our children absorb. The step should be specific and visible to someone else, since Israel's sin was the desire to look like everyone else, and the remedy is a life that visibly does not.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Hannah's vow belongs to her time and her covenant. Do not turn it into a pattern of bargaining with God, and do not bind vows on Christians. Ecclesiastes 5:4–5 and Matthew 5:33–37 are the sober words to have ready if the subject comes up.
- The sins of Eli's sons include sexual sin at the door of the tabernacle (2:22). State it plainly and briefly and move on, especially in a class with young people.
- The ark passages invite superstition in reverse: people will ask about relics, holy objects, and church buildings. The lesson is reverence for God Himself, not for objects. God struck men who treated the ark casually and also humbled a nation that treated it as a charm.
- Israel's request for a king was sinful in motive, yet God used the monarchy to bring David and, through David, the Christ. Teach both. God's purposes are not defeated by human sin, and that is not the same as saying human sin does not matter.

My Portion and My Cup

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 16 is a settled psalm. There is trouble in the background, since David asks God to preserve him, but the body of the psalm is a man taking inventory of what he has in God. He has chosen his company (the saints, the excellent ones), refused his alternatives (those who hasten after another god), and named his inheritance. The language of portion and cup and lot comes from the division of Canaan, where every tribe received land except Levi, whose portion was the Lord Himself (Numbers 18:20). David is saying he would rather have what the priests got.

Then verses 8 through 11 lift off the page. David says his flesh will rest in hope, that God will not leave his soul in Sheol or allow His Holy One to see corruption, and that in God's presence is fullness of joy. Peter reads that at Pentecost and makes the obvious point: David died, was buried, and his tomb is down the street. So he spoke as a prophet, of the resurrection of the Christ. Teach your class that Old Testament writers sometimes said more than they understood (1 Peter 1:10–12), and that the Spirit was aiming at Jesus the whole time.

Psalm 17 belongs to the same world but a harder night. David asks for a hearing, insists his cause is just, and describes enemies who have closed up their hearts and speak proudly, lions crouching to tear. His images for protection are intimate: keep me as the apple of Your eye, hide me under the shadow of Your wings. And the last verse quietly refuses the arithmetic of verse 14, where men have their portion in this life. David wants a different portion and expects to receive it on the far side of waking.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 16 carries the heading “A Michtam of David,” a term whose meaning is uncertain, possibly an inscription or engraving. Psalm 17 is headed simply “A Prayer of David.”
- Psalm 16 is directly messianic: quoted by Peter in Acts 2:25–31 and by Paul in Acts 13:35–37, both times as proof of the bodily resurrection of Jesus.
- Sheol in the Old Testament is the realm of the dead, the grave, not a synonym for the place of final punishment. Psalm 16:10 says God would not abandon the Messiah there or let His body decay.
- “The apple of Your eye” (17:8) is literally the little man of the eye, the pupil, the most instinctively protected part of the body. The same image appears in Deuteronomy 32:10 and Zechariah 2:8.
- The portion and inheritance language of 16:5–6 draws on the allotment of the land under Joshua and on the Levites' unique arrangement (Numbers 18:20; Joshua 13:33).
- Psalm 17 is a lament with a plea for vindication, one of the most common categories in the Psalter.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Psalm 16:2 says to the Lord, “You are my Lord; my goodness is nothing apart from You.” Talk about the distance between believing that and saying it, and about what a calendar and a bank statement reveal concerning which one is actually true.

The sentence in verse 2 is short and total. Everything David has that is good, he has from God, and he says so before he asks for anything. That is worth sitting with, because most of us would say we believe it and would be embarrassed to have our week audited against it. Verse 4 shows the practical shape: he will not pour out the drink offerings of other gods or take their names on his lips. Saying “You are my Lord” means closing certain doors.

Take the discussion to evidence rather than sentiment. Where the money goes and where the hours go will tell you who the lord is. Ask what a stranger would conclude about each person's lord from a month of their calendar.

Then ask for one adjustment. The psalm is not asking for more feeling; it is asking for a settled allegiance that shows.

Question 2. *Peter quotes Psalm 16:8–11 at Pentecost and says David was speaking of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:25–32). Read both passages side by side and discuss how a man can say more than he knows.*

Lay Acts 2:25–32 beside the psalm and let Peter do the work. Peter grants that David wrote it, then observes that David is dead and buried and that his tomb is with them to that day. So the words cannot have found their fulfillment in David. Being a prophet, and knowing God had sworn to set one of his descendants on his throne, he spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, whose soul was not left in Hades and whose flesh did not see corruption.

Two things to draw out. First, 1 Peter 1:10–12 says the prophets searched their own writings to learn what the Spirit was indicating, which means inspiration is not dictation to a man who understands everything he writes. Second, note what Peter does with the psalm in Acts 2: he preaches it, and the sermon ends with “repent, and let every one of you be baptized.” The resurrection is not a fact to admire. It is a fact that requires an answer.

Question 3. *Psalm 17:15 ends, “I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.” Where are you presently trying to get satisfied instead, and what would actually change if you believed verse 15 on a Tuesday afternoon?*

Start with the honest inventory. Most of us are running a low-grade satisfaction project: the next purchase, the next promotion, the next weekend, the next thing that will finally settle us. Verse 14 names the alternative exactly, men of the world whose portion is in this life, whose bellies God fills, who leave their substance to their babies. David does not say they are miserable. He says their portion is in this life, and that is all.

Then press verse 15 into ordinary hours. If satisfaction is coming, and coming from seeing God’s face and being made like Him, then a disappointing Tuesday is not a verdict on your life. It also means the things we reach for cannot deliver what we are asking of them, which is why they keep failing us. Ask what one habit would change this week if that were settled.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Psalm 16 says the Lord is to David: his refuge, his portion, his cup, his counselor, and more. Which of those images meets you where you are right now?*

David calls the Lord his refuge (16:1), his Lord (16:2), the portion of his inheritance and his cup (16:5), the One who maintains his lot (16:5), his counselor (16:7), the One at his right hand (16:8), and the One in whose presence is fullness of joy (16:11). Answers on which image helps most will vary; listen for people naming the one that corresponds to what they are short of, which is usually a good sign they are reading honestly.

2. *Compare Psalm 16:10 with Acts 2:25–32 and Acts 13:35–37. How do Peter and Paul each use the verse, and what argument do both of them make from David’s tomb?*

Peter argues in Acts 2 that David spoke as a prophet, because David died, was buried, and his tomb was still in Jerusalem, so his flesh did see corruption; therefore the psalm speaks of Christ, whom God raised up. Paul makes the identical argument in Acts 13:35–37: David, after he had served his own generation, fell asleep and saw corruption, but the One God raised up saw none. Both apostles stake the resurrection on the plain fact that the psalm did not come true in the man who wrote it.

3. *Psalm 17:1–5 sounds like a man claiming to be sinless. Read it slowly beside Psalm 51:1–4, written by the same man. Is David claiming perfection, or claiming something narrower?*

He is claiming innocence with respect to the particular accusations of his enemies, not sinless perfection. Psalm 17:3–5 speaks of his mouth not transgressing and his steps holding to God’s paths in this matter; Psalm 51 shows the same man pleading for mercy over a specific and terrible sin. Scripture allows a believer to say honestly, “I did not do what they say I did,” without claiming he has never sinned (1 John 1:8–10).

4. Trace the requests David makes in Psalm 17:6–9. What images does he use for God's protection, and what does each one suggest about how close he expects God to be?

He asks God to incline His ear and hear his speech, to show His marvelous lovingkindness, to save by His right hand those who trust in Him, to keep him as the apple of His eye, and to hide him under the shadow of His wings from the wicked who oppress him. The images are of a parent covering a child and a bird covering its young, protection that is close, instinctive, and personal rather than distant.

5. Psalm 16:7 says the Lord instructs David's heart in the night seasons. Take ten silent minutes this week with no screen in the room, and write down what God's word has been saying that you have been too busy to hear.

Answers will vary, and that is fine, but the assignment is the point. Look for people who actually did it. Most of us have removed from our lives every gap in which God might instruct the heart. Ten minutes of quiet with an open Bible is not mysticism; it is simply giving the word room to be heard.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Sheol and Hades in Psalm 16:10 refer to the realm of the dead, not to hell as final punishment. Do not build a detailed map of the intermediate state; Scripture gives us Luke 16:19–31 and little more, and speculation past that does not edify.
- Psalm 17:13–14 has a hard edge, asking God to cast down the wicked. Handle it as an appeal to God's justice rather than a model for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19; Matthew 5:44).
- Psalm 16:6 about pleasant boundary lines is sometimes preached as a promise of comfortable circumstances. David wrote it while asking God to preserve his life. The contentment is in the portion, who is God Himself, not in the ease of the surroundings.
- When you show the class how Peter used Psalm 16, resist the urge to treat every Old Testament verse as secretly about Jesus. Let the New Testament writers show you which ones are, and teach those with confidence.

By Whose Power

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Mark 3 is the chapter where the lines harden. It opens with a trap. There is a man with a withered hand, it is the Sabbath, and Mark says plainly that they watched Him so they might accuse Him. Jesus makes the confrontation public, stands the man in the middle, and asks whether it is lawful on the Sabbath to do good or evil, to save life or to kill. Nobody answers. Then comes one of the most striking sentences in the gospel: He looked around at them with anger, grieved by the hardness of their hearts. Mark alone records the anger, and Mark alone tells you what it was mixed with.

The middle of the chapter shows Jesus organizing for the long work. He withdraws from the crowd, goes up a mountain, and appoints twelve, and Mark states the purpose in two parts: that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach. The order matters. Before they are sent anywhere they are simply with Him, and that is the training. Mark also names Judas Iscariot in the list and tells you at once who he would turn out to be.

The chapter closes with two verdicts about Jesus offered on the same day. His family says He is out of His mind. The scribes from Jerusalem say He has Beelzebub. Jesus answers the second charge with plain logic, a divided kingdom cannot stand, and then with the parable of the strong man, before issuing the most sobering warning in the gospel about the sin that has no forgiveness. And then, while His mother and brothers stand outside calling for Him, He looks at the people sitting around Him and says, here are My mother and My brothers. Whoever does the will of God is My brother and sister and mother.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Mark writes quickly and concretely and is the only gospel writer to record Jesus' emotions here. He is widely understood to have written with Peter's preaching behind him, for a Roman readership.
- Herodians were political supporters of the Herod family, natural enemies of the Pharisees on nearly every question. Their alliance against Jesus in 3:6 shows how threatening He was to both.
- The Sabbath dispute concerns Pharisaic tradition about what counted as work, not the written command itself. Under that covenant the Sabbath was still in force; it was fulfilled and removed at the cross (Colossians 2:14–17).
- Beelzebub, a name derived from a Philistine deity (2 Kings 1:2), was used in Jesus' day for the prince of demons. The scribes are not doubting that a miracle occurred; they are assigning it to the wrong source.
- The brothers named later in Mark 6:3 are James, Joses, Judas, and Simon, along with sisters. James later leads in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13; Galatians 1:19) and writes the letter that bears his name.
- The appointment of twelve deliberately echoes the twelve tribes. These men are eyewitnesses commissioned to preach, and their office is not one that continues (Acts 1:21–22).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Mark 3:5 says Jesus looked around at them with anger, grieved at the hardness of their hearts. What made Him angry, and what does it teach us that anger and grief arrived together in the same look?*

What angered Him was the use of a crippled man as bait. The Pharisees were not defending the Sabbath; they were hunting for a charge, and a human being with a useless hand was simply the instrument. Jesus frames the question morally, is it lawful to do good or to do evil, and their silence is the answer. Religion had become a system in which a man could stand in the house of God, watch suffering, and think only about winning an argument.

The pairing of anger and grief is the pastoral gold here. Anger without grief turns into contempt, which is what the Pharisees had. Grief without anger turns into resignation, which is what tired Christians have. Jesus was angry because He cared and grieved because they were ruining themselves. Ask the class how they feel about sin in other people, honestly, and which half of that sentence is usually missing.

Question 2. *Jesus warns of a sin that has no forgiveness (3:28–30). Read the warning with verse 30 in view, notice exactly what the scribes had said, and discuss why the person most afraid of having committed it is almost certainly the person who has not.*

Set the warning in its context. Verse 30 says He spoke it “because they said, He has an unclean spirit.” These men had watched God’s power poured out in front of them, had no honest doubt that it was real, and deliberately attributed it to Satan in order to keep their standing. That is not a slip of the tongue or a moment of doubt. It is a settled, knowing rejection of the only witness that could bring them to repentance.

This is one of those texts where the pastoral work is as important as the exegesis. Some in the room have quietly feared for years that they committed this sin. Say clearly what the passage says and does not say: the sin in question is persistent, deliberate, informed rejection of the Spirit’s testimony to Christ. A person who is grieved, who wants forgiveness, who is asking the question, is by definition not hardened against the Spirit. The door is open as long as anyone wants through it (Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9).

Question 3. *In 3:31–35 Jesus draws a family line around whoever does the will of God. How does that land in a room where some people have believing families and some do not, and what does it obligate this congregation to do about it?*

Notice what Jesus does not say. He does not dismiss His mother, and He is not cold; on the cross He will see to her care (John 19:26–27). What He does is establish that the deepest family tie a person has is obedience to God, not blood. That is bracing for anyone who assumed his standing with God ran through his family, and it is enormously comforting for the believer who is the only Christian at his own table.

Then press the obligation. If the congregation is family, then the widow, the single mother, the college student far from home, and the teenager whose parents do not come are not guests. Ask who in this room has no Christian family at home, and ask what this class is going to do about that before the month is out. Make somebody name a Sunday dinner.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the twelve as Mark names them in 3:16–19. What sort of men are on the list, and what did Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector have in common besides Jesus?*

Mark names Simon whom He surnamed Peter, James and John the sons of Zebedee whom He called Sons of Thunder, Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite or Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. They are fishermen, a tax collector, a political radical, and men we know almost nothing about. Simon the Zealot belonged to the movement that hated Roman collaborators, and Matthew had made his living collecting Rome’s money. Apart from Jesus, one of them would have considered the other a traitor worth killing.

2. *Trace the conflicts from Mark 2:1 through 3:30. Who brings each charge, and how do the accusations escalate from grumbling to a plot?*

The charges run in order: He blasphemes by forgiving sins (2:7, scribes); He eats with tax collectors and sinners (2:16, scribes and Pharisees); His disciples do not fast (2:18, the question comes from John’s disciples and the Pharisees); His disciples break the Sabbath by plucking grain (2:24, Pharisees); He heals on the Sabbath (3:2, Pharisees watching); and finally He casts out demons by Beelzebub (3:22, scribes from Jerusalem). It moves from theological objection to public complaint to a plot to destroy Him (3:6) to an accusation of being demon-possessed.

3. Read Mark 3:22–27 and explain the parable of the strong man in your own words. Who is the strong man, who is the one who binds him, and what are the goods being carried off?

The strong man is Satan, whose house is the domain he holds and whose goods are the people he has bound. No one can plunder that house unless he first binds the strong man. Jesus is arguing that the exorcisms prove exactly the opposite of what the scribes claim: a house divided against itself cannot stand, so the fact that demons are being evicted means someone stronger has arrived and is tying Satan up. Compare 1 John 3:8 and Hebrews 2:14–15.

4. Compare Mark 3:6 with Mark 12:13. Why is it remarkable that Pharisees and Herodians would cooperate at all, and what does their alliance say about how threatening Jesus had become?

Pharisees were religious separatists who despised Rome and everything Herod represented; Herodians were political operatives whose position depended on the Herods and, behind them, Rome. They had almost nothing in common and would ordinarily have had nothing to do with one another. That they conspire together in Mark 3:6 and again in Mark 12:13 shows that Jesus threatened both the religious establishment and the political one, which is generally what happens when someone refuses to be useful to either.

5. Mark 3:21 says Jesus' own relatives went out to take custody of Him because they thought He was beside Himself. Name the cost of following Him that you are currently unwilling to pay, and take one step toward paying it this week.

Answers will vary. Listen for the honest ones: a reputation at work, a relationship with a relative who will think you have gone strange, money, a Saturday, a habit. Mark 3:21 is there partly to tell us that being misunderstood by people who love you is not proof you are wrong. Ask for a step small enough to be taken and public enough to be noticed.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The blasphemy against the Holy Spirit will produce fear in someone in the room. Teach it exactly as the text frames it, a settled and knowing attribution of the Spirit's work to Satan, and say plainly that the anxious inquirer is not the hardened blasphemer. Be available after class.
- Jesus' brothers in Mark 3:31 and 6:3 are the natural sons of Joseph and Mary. Say it kindly but clearly, and do not leave room for the idea that Mary is to be venerated or prayed to. She is honored in Scripture as a faithful servant of God and nothing more.
- The Sabbath controversies are not about Sunday. Do not let the class construct a Christian Sabbath. Christians gather on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2) under a new covenant, not a modified old one.
- The casting out of demons belongs to the ministry of Christ and the apostolic age. Do not encourage speculation about demon possession today or treat the passage as a manual. The point Jesus makes is about His own authority.

The Olive Tree and the Altar

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 11 completes the argument Paul began in chapter 9. Has God cast away His people? Certainly not, and Paul offers himself as exhibit one: he is an Israelite, of the tribe of Benjamin, and he is in Christ. Then he reaches for Elijah, who was certain he was the only faithful man left and was off by seven thousand. In the same way, Paul says, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. God has not abandoned Israel; He has done what He always did, preserving those who believe.

The olive tree is the picture to teach carefully. There is one tree, not two, with one root. Some natural branches were broken off because of unbelief, and wild branches were grafted in by faith. Then comes the warning that ought to be underlined in every Bible in the room: do not be arrogant, but fear; for if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Consider the goodness and severity of God, goodness toward you if you continue in His goodness, otherwise you also will be cut off. Paul also says the broken branches can be grafted back in, if they do not continue in unbelief. Everything in the passage turns on continuing.

Then chapter 12 arrives, and the great theological argument lands on a body. Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. What follows is not abstract: think soberly about yourself, do the work you have been given in the body, love without pretending, cling to good, weep with people who are weeping, keep your hands off vengeance, and overcome evil with good. Romans 1 through 11 tells you what God did. Romans 12 tells you what Monday looks like.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Romans 9, 10, and 11 form one argument and must be taught together. Chapter 9 stresses God's freedom to choose the line of promise, chapter 10 stresses human responsibility to hear and obey, and chapter 11 holds both and adds the warning that grafted branches can be removed.
- The remnant idea runs throughout the prophets (1 Kings 19:18; Isaiah 1:9; 10:20–22). God has always preserved a faithful minority, and He has never needed a majority.
- Grafting a wild olive shoot into a cultivated tree is agriculturally backwards, and Paul says so in 11:24, calling it contrary to nature. He chose the image because the mercy is contrary to expectation.
- “And so all Israel will be saved” (11:26) means in this manner: through the gospel, as Jews believe and Gentiles are grafted in, God saves His true Israel. It is not a promise of a future national or political restoration of the Jewish state.
- Romans 12:1 uses sacrificial language deliberately. The old covenant brought dead animals to an altar; the new brings living people, and the whole of life becomes the offering (compare Hebrews 13:15–16; 1 Peter 2:5).
- The gifts listed in 12:6–8 include both miraculous and ordinary functions. The confirming miraculous gifts served to establish the word and ceased when revelation was complete (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Hebrews 2:3–4); ministering, teaching, giving, leading, and showing mercy continue.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Romans 11:22 tells the Gentile Christian to consider the goodness and the severity of God and warns that he too can be cut off. Read the olive tree passage as a whole and talk about what it means, practically, to “continue in His goodness.”*

Start by establishing that the warning is addressed to Christians. Paul is speaking to Gentile believers in Rome, people who are in the tree, and he tells them they stand by faith and can be cut off. That single verse dismantles

the idea that a saved person cannot be lost, and it does not stand alone (Galatians 5:4; Hebrews 3:12–14; 10:26–31; 2 Peter 2:20–22). Say it gently, without turning the hour into a debate, and let the text do the work.

Then answer the practical question: what does continuing in His goodness look like? It is not anxious perfectionism. It is continuing in the same posture that brought you in: faith that keeps obeying, repentance that keeps working, a life that stays attached to the root. Ask the class what a branch does. It does not produce sap; it stays connected. Then ask what is currently loosening anyone's grip, and what would tighten it this week.

Question 2. *Romans 12:1 asks for your body, not your opinions or your feelings. What would it look like this week to hand over your hands, your schedule, your mouth, and your appetite as a living sacrifice?*

Notice how physical this is. The Romans had watched animals carried to altars all their lives, and Paul says the new sacrifice gets up and walks around. Bodies are where obedience actually happens: what the eyes look at, what the hands sign, where the feet go on a Friday night, what the mouth says about a coworker, what the body does with food and with sleep and with another person's spouse. The word reasonable also carries the sense of rational or thoughtful; this is the only sensible response to eleven chapters of mercy.

Ask for particulars rather than resolutions. What time will the alarm go off? What will you not watch? Who will you call? Add verse 2: do not be conformed, be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Transformation runs from the inside out, and the mind is renewed by the word, which is why the reading plan sitting in their laps is not a hobby.

Question 3. *Romans 12:9 says let love be without hypocrisy. Where does love in a congregation most easily turn into a performance, and what would sincere love have done differently in this church in the last month?*

Hypocrisy in love usually is not lying; it is the gap between the greeting and the follow-through. Verse 9 literally says love without play-acting. Then Paul fills out what unfeigned love does: it is kindly affectionate, it prefers others in honor, it distributes to the needs of the saints, it is given to hospitality, it weeps with those who weep. Every one of those costs time and money, which is exactly how you tell the real thing from the performance.

Push for specifics from the last month rather than generalities about the future. Who moved and nobody helped? Who was in the hospital and got a card but no visit? Who has not been at services in six weeks and has not been asked why? Let the class feel the difference between an atmosphere of friendliness and the actual work of love. Then assign it: one name apiece, one act this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the olive tree illustration in Romans 11:16–24. Identify the root, the natural branches, and the wild branch, and state the one condition on which any branch remains.*

The root is the promise made to the patriarchs and carried forward in Christ, the covenant stock God planted. The natural branches are ethnic Israelites, and some of them were broken off, Paul says explicitly, because of unbelief (11:20). The wild branch is the believing Gentile, grafted in contrary to nature and standing by faith. The one condition is continuance: continue in His goodness, or you also will be cut off (11:22), and even the broken branches can be grafted back if they do not continue in unbelief (11:23).

2. *Romans 11:2–5 recalls Elijah under the broom tree. Read 1 Kings 19:9–18 and note how God corrects Elijah's arithmetic. Why is the idea of a remnant such a comfort to a discouraged Christian?*

Elijah told God that Israel had killed the prophets and torn down the altars and that he alone was left, and God answered that He had reserved seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal. Elijah was not lying; he was counting with the wrong instrument. The comfort is that faithfulness is never as rare as discouragement reports, that God keeps His own count, and that the health of God's cause has never depended on numbers. A Christian who feels like the last one standing in his workplace, family, or town is usually wrong about that, and is never alone in any case.

3. *List the marks of a transformed life in Romans 12:9–21. Choose the three you find hardest and write a sentence on why each one costs you.*

The list includes sincere love, hating evil and clinging to good, brotherly affection, preferring one another in honor, diligence, fervency in spirit, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, patience in trouble, steadfast prayer, giving to needy

saints, hospitality, blessing persecutors, rejoicing with the joyful and weeping with the weeping, living in harmony, refusing pride, associating with the humble, refusing to repay evil, living peaceably as far as it depends on you, leaving vengeance to God, feeding an enemy, and overcoming evil with good. Answers on the hardest three will vary; blessing persecutors and refusing vengeance are usually named.

4. *Romans 12:3–8 describes one body with many members. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 and Ephesians 4:11–16, then say what all three passages imply about a member who does nothing.*

All three passages say the body is one, that the members are many and different, and that each member exists for the others. First Corinthians 12 adds that the parts that seem weaker are necessary and that the members should have the same care for one another; Ephesians 4 adds that the body grows and builds itself up by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of every part. A member who does nothing is not a spectator; he is a missing part, and the body is measurably weaker for it.

5. *Romans 12:20–21 says to feed your enemy and give him a drink. Name the person you would least like to help, and do one concrete good thing for him before next Sunday.*

Answers will vary, and this one should cost something. The text is not asking for warm feelings toward an enemy; it is asking for bread and water, that is, for concrete good done to a specific person who has earned nothing. Listen for someone naming a real person rather than a category. Remind the class of 12:19: leaving room for God's wrath is what makes personal kindness possible.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Romans 11 is a favorite of premillennial teaching. Be plain: the olive tree is one tree, and the "all Israel" of 11:26 is saved in the manner Paul has just described, by faith in Christ through the gospel, not by a future earthly kingdom centered on national Israel. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).
- Romans 11:22 is decisive against the doctrine that a saved person cannot be lost. Teach it firmly and kindly, in company with Galatians 5:4 and Hebrews 10:26–31, and avoid scoring points against absent groups.
- Romans 12:6–8 will raise the question of spiritual gifts. Distinguish the miraculous confirming gifts, which had a purpose and an end (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Hebrews 2:3–4), from the ordinary abilities of teaching, giving, leading, and showing mercy, which the church still needs every week.
- Do not let "do not be conformed to this world" become a list of external cultural markers only. Paul aims at the mind and then at behavior. Nonconformity that never reaches the checkbook, the calendar, and the temper is just a costume.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Samuel 9–15 · Psalm 18 · Mark 4 · Romans 13–15:7

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