

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 37 OF 104

The House God Builds

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Samuel 1-10
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 22-23
Gospels	Mark 6:30-7:13
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 2-3

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from what we build for God to what God builds. David wanted to put up a temple and was told to sit down and listen to a promise instead. The Pharisees had built an elaborate structure of tradition that finally required them to break a commandment. Corinth was busy erecting parties around preachers. And God is quietly building a house that includes everybody in the room: God's field, God's building, God's temple, with a foundation nobody can lay twice.

Doctrinally, 2 Samuel 7 is the week's most important text. Teach it with Acts 2:29-36 open, and let the class see that the throne of David is occupied now by the risen Christ, which closes the door on any future earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Then use Psalm 22 to show how precisely God keeps His word, and 1 Corinthians 2:9-13 to show how that word reached us: revealed by the Spirit, spoken in words the Spirit taught, and written down where we can read it.

Formationally, the thread is who gets the credit. David is told he will not build the house. Paul says neither the planter nor the waterer is anything. Jesus gives the disciples bread they did not make and lets them hand it out. Put this question to the class before they leave: name one thing you have been building that has your name on it, and tell us what would have to change for it to be built on the foundation instead.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Samuel 1-10. Give the first part of the hour to David's conduct toward fallen enemies and to the ark, and reserve at least twenty minutes for 2 Samuel 7 with Acts 2:29-36 read aloud beside it. That pairing is the most valuable thing you will do this week.

Second session: Take up 1 Corinthians 2-3. Begin with why Paul refused to preach impressively, then move to the division of labor between planter, waterer, and God, and finish with the fire that tests the building. The chapter divides naturally into three movements and fills an hour without strain.

The other two readings: Ask the class to read Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 in one sitting, with a gospel account of the crucifixion open beside them. Mark 6:30-7:13 reads quickly; point them especially to 6:34 and to the Corban discussion, and mention that the feeding of the five thousand is the one miracle all four gospel writers record.

I Will Build You a House

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The opening chapters are about how a man behaves when his enemies fall. An Amalekite arrives with Saul's crown, expecting a reward, and is executed for claiming to have killed the Lord's anointed. David writes a lament and orders the men of Judah to learn it. When Abner is murdered by Joab, David walks behind the bier and fasts until sundown. When Ish-bosheth is assassinated in his bed by men who thought they were doing David a favor, David has them killed. Over and over he refuses to profit from a murder, and all Israel notices (3:36).

The middle of the reading is the consolidation: Hebron, then Jerusalem, then the ark. Chapter 6 is one of the hardest scenes in the Old Testament. The ark is being moved on a new cart, which is how the Philistines had moved it, not how God had said to move it. The oxen stumble, Uzzah reaches out, and he dies. David is angry, then afraid, and leaves the ark at the house of Obed-Edom for three months. When he comes back for it, 1 Chronicles 15 tells us he had done his homework: the Levites carry it on their shoulders with poles, because the Lord had broken out against them the first time, since they did not consult Him about the proper order.

Then chapter 7, which is the hinge of the Old Testament. David wants to build a temple. God says no, and then makes a promise that goes far past David: I will set up your seed after you, he shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. Solomon fulfills part of it. But no son of David sat on a throne in Jerusalem after the Babylonians came, and the New Testament tells you where the promise landed. Peter says at Pentecost that God had sworn to David that from the fruit of his body He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, and that this is what happened when Jesus was raised and exalted to the right hand of God. The chapter ends with David sitting before the Lord, asking who he is that God should bring him this far.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2 Samuel covers roughly 1010 to 970 B.C. David reigned seven and a half years at Hebron over Judah and thirty-three years at Jerusalem over all Israel (5:4–5).
- Jerusalem was a Jebusite stronghold that Israel had never taken. By capturing it David gained a capital belonging to no tribe, which helped unite a nation that had just fought a civil war.
- The ark was to be carried by Levites on poles resting on their shoulders (Numbers 4:15; 7:9). The new cart in 2 Samuel 6 copies Philistine practice from 1 Samuel 6, not God's instruction.
- 2 Samuel 7 is the Davidic covenant, the anchor of messianic hope throughout the prophets and the Psalms. The New Testament applies it directly to Jesus (Acts 2:29–36; Acts 13:22–23; Hebrews 1:5).
- Mephibosheth was Jonathan's son, lame in both feet since a nurse dropped him fleeing the news of Gilboa when he was five (4:4). As a surviving heir of Saul he had reason to expect execution, not a seat at the king's table.
- Joab is David's nephew and commander, brilliant, loyal, and ruthless. His murder of Abner is personal revenge for his brother Asahel, and David's inability to control him becomes a running problem in the book.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *David composes a lament for the man who hunted him for years (1:17–27). Read it and notice what he refuses to say about Saul. What does grief like that require of a person, and could you write it about anyone you have been hurt by?*

Read the lament aloud and ask the class to listen for what is missing. There is no relief, no justification, no reference to the ten years of spears and caves. David calls Saul and Jonathan beloved and pleasant in their lives, and credits Saul with clothing the daughters of Israel in scarlet. He tells Judah to teach the song to their children. A man who had every right to a private satisfaction refused to take it, and then made sure nobody else would either.

Then ask the second question honestly, and expect a long pause. Grief like that requires a settled belief that the person who hurt you belongs to God, and that his fall is a loss rather than a victory. Ask whether the class can

name one person whose downfall they would quietly enjoy, and then ask what it would take to be able to write four honest sentences of tribute about him. This is not sentimentality; it is the difference between forgiveness and truce.

Question 2. *In 2 Samuel 7 David offers to build God a house, and God answers that He will build David one. Read 7:12–16 with Acts 2:29–36. Where is that throne right now, and what difference does the present reign of Christ make to an ordinary Tuesday?*

Walk through the promise carefully in 7:12–16: a seed from David's own body, a house built for God's name, a throne established forever, and a father-son relationship between God and this descendant. Solomon partly answers the description, and Solomon's throne did not last. Then read Acts 2:29–36. Peter says David is dead and buried, that he was a prophet, that God swore to raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, and that what the crowd was seeing and hearing on Pentecost was the proof. The throne is not empty, and it is not waiting.

Then answer the Tuesday question, because it is the point. If Christ reigns now, then no headline is a surprise to the throne room, no employer has final authority over a Christian, the church is not a holding pattern until something better arrives, and prayer is addressed to someone who has actual jurisdiction. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been transferred into His kingdom. Ask the class what they have been treating as though it outranks Him.

Question 3. *Uzzah put out his hand to steady the ark and died (6:6–7). Read David's own explanation in 1 Chronicles 15:13. Discuss why sincerity and good intentions did not cover the error, and where that principle presses on us today.*

Begin by admitting the difficulty honestly. Uzzah was trying to help, the ark was tipping, and his instinct was the most natural one in the world. That is exactly why the passage is uncomfortable. 1 Chronicles 15:13 gives David's own diagnosis: the Lord our God broke out against us, because we did not consult Him about the proper order. The failure was not a moment of carelessness by one man. It was a whole procession doing a holy thing by a method God had not given, borrowed from the Philistines because it looked more practical than carrying a box on poles.

Press it gently into the present. God has not told us everything about worship and work, but what He has told us is not merely a suggestion for those who find it convenient. The temptation is always the same: the cart is faster, the cart is what everybody uses, and the cart looks respectful. Ask where a congregation is most likely to adopt a method because it works rather than because it is authorized, and ask the class to hold the principle without becoming harsh with people who have never been taught it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace David's rise from 2 Samuel 1 through 5:5. List each stage and how long it took. What does the timeline tell you about God's patience, and about David's?*

Saul dies, David mourns and executes the messenger who claimed credit (chapter 1). David inquires of God and goes to Hebron, where Judah anoints him king (2:1–4); he reigns there seven years and six months. Meanwhile Abner makes Ish-bosheth king over the rest of Israel, and there is a long war in which David grows stronger and the house of Saul weaker (3:1). Abner defects and is murdered (3), Ish-bosheth is assassinated (4), and finally all the tribes come to Hebron and David is anointed king over all Israel at age thirty (5:1–5). Roughly fifteen years pass between Samuel's anointing oil and the united throne. God was not slow; David was not idle; and the waiting itself did most of the shaping.

2. *Read 2 Samuel 7:12–16, then Acts 2:29–36, Hebrews 1:5, and Luke 1:32–33. Write down how the New Testament says each part of that promise was kept.*

Luke 1:32–33 tells Mary that God will give her son the throne of His father David and that He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, with a kingdom that has no end. Acts 2:29–36 says David died and was buried, spoke as a prophet, and foresaw the resurrection of the Christ, whom God raised and exalted to His right hand, making Him both Lord and Christ. Hebrews 1:5 takes the father-son language of 2 Samuel 7:14 and applies it directly to the Son.

The seed is Jesus, the house built for God's name is the church (1 Timothy 3:15; Ephesians 2:19–22), and the throne established forever is occupied now.

3. *2 Samuel 9 records David's kindness to Mephibosheth. List everything David gives him, and name what the gift cost David and what it cost Mephibosheth to receive it.*

David gives him all the land that belonged to Saul, the service of Ziba and his household to farm it, and a permanent place at the king's own table, eating as one of the king's sons. It cost David the revenue of an entire estate and a daily reminder at his own table of the family that had tried to kill him. It cost Mephibosheth his self-protection: he had been living in Lo Debar, hidden, and calling himself a dead dog. Receiving kindness on that scale meant being seen, being lame in front of a king's household every evening, and giving up the safety of staying out of sight.

4. *Compare 2 Samuel 6:1–11 with 1 Chronicles 15:1–15. What did David do differently the second time he moved the ark, and where had he learned it?*

The first time, the ark is put on a new cart driven by Uzzah and Ahio, with David and the people playing music, and the procession ends in a death and three months of paralysis. The second time, 1 Chronicles 15 says David prepared a place, called for the Levites, and told them that no one but the Levites might carry the ark, because the Lord had chosen them; the Levites sanctified themselves and carried it on their shoulders with the poles, as Moses had commanded according to the word of the Lord. David had gone back to the text between the two attempts. That is the lesson: he did not merely become more careful, he became more informed.

5. *David asked whether anyone was left of the house of Saul that he might show him kindness for Jonathan's sake (9:1). Name the person you owe a kindness to because of someone else, and pay it this week.*

Answers will vary. Look for the shape of the thing rather than a grand gesture: the widow of the man who taught you, the child of a friend who helped you, a congregation that supported your family years ago, a parent's old friend who is now alone. David's kindness was not owed to Mephibosheth at all. It was owed to Jonathan, and Jonathan was dead, so it was paid to whoever was left.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- 2 Samuel 7 is the passage premillennial teaching is built on. Teach the fulfillment plainly from the New Testament: Christ is on David's throne now, at God's right hand, reigning over His kingdom, the church (Acts 2:29–36; Colossians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:24–25). There is no earthly throne in Jerusalem still waiting for Him.
- Uzzah's death raises hard feelings. Handle it with sympathy and let 1 Chronicles 15:13 supply the explanation. The issue is God's appointed order, not divine temper, and the whole nation had been careless, not just one man.
- 2 Samuel 5:13 records David taking more concubines and wives. Scripture reports and does not approve, and the bitter fruit appears within a few chapters. God's design is one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:4–6).
- David executes the Amalekite messenger and the murderers of Ish-bosheth. These are royal judicial acts under the old covenant, not a pattern for personal conduct. Christians do not avenge themselves (Romans 12:19).

The Shepherd Who Was Forsaken

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 22 divides at verse 21. The first two-thirds are a lament of extraordinary specificity: forsaken, scorned, mocked with the exact words the crowd would use at Golgotha, poured out like water, bones out of joint, heart like wax, strength dried up, tongue clinging to the jaws, hands and feet pierced, bones on display, garments divided and lots cast for clothing. David was writing out of his own suffering, and the Spirit was writing something larger. Nothing in David's life matches this description; the crucifixion matches it line by line.

Then comes the turn. From verse 22 onward the sufferer is not dying, he is preaching: I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. Hebrews 2:12 quotes that verse and puts it in the mouth of Jesus. The psalm ends with the ends of the world turning to the Lord, all the families of the nations worshiping, a people yet to be born being told that He has done this. The psalm that begins in abandonment ends in a global congregation.

Psalm 23 is best taught after all that, not before it. It is the same shepherd imagery David lived as a boy, but it is not a psalm about an easy life. There is a valley in it, there are enemies at the table, and the only reason the valley is not frightening is that someone is present in it. Notice the shift in verse 4, where David stops talking about the Lord and starts talking to Him. Up to the valley it is He, He, He. In the dark it becomes You are with me. The psalm ends where the whole week's theme lands, in a house to dwell in forever.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 22 is a lament that the New Testament treats as directly messianic. It is quoted or alluded to at least five times in the passion accounts (Matthew 27:35, 39, 43, 46; John 19:24), and Hebrews 2:12 quotes verse 22.
- Crucifixion was not practiced in Israel in David's time. Stoning was the Israelite method of execution. The details of Psalm 22:16–18 had no available model when they were written.
- The description in verse 16, they pierced My hands and My feet, is followed in verse 17 by I can count all My bones, and in verse 18 by dividing garments and casting lots, which John 19:23–24 records as fulfilled precisely.
- Psalm 23 is a psalm of confidence, one of the most beloved passages in Scripture. The shepherd image runs throughout the Old Testament for God's care of Israel (Psalm 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34).
- "The valley of the shadow of death" is better understood as a deep, dark ravine; the phrase covers any place of deep darkness and danger, including but not limited to dying.
- Jesus takes up the shepherd image for Himself in John 10, and the New Testament calls Him the good shepherd, the great shepherd, and the chief shepherd (John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 5:4).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 22 was written centuries before crucifixion existed. Read verses 1, 7–8, and 14–18, then read Matthew 27:35–46. How do you account for the detail, and what should it do to our confidence in the rest of Scripture?*

Let the class do the comparison themselves with two Bibles open. Verse 1 is the cry from the cross. Verses 7 and 8 are the taunt, He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him, which Matthew 27:43 records the chief priests actually saying. Verse 16 describes pierced hands and feet. Verse 18 describes dividing the garments and casting lots, which John says was fulfilled to the letter. Verse 15 describes the thirst. Nobody in the crowd at Golgotha was consulting a psalm; they were simply behaving the way people behave, and a thousand-year-old text had it in advance.

The second half of the question is the one that matters on Monday. If God told the details of a Roman execution to a Jewish shepherd a millennium before Rome existed, then the promises in the same book are not wishful thinking. Ask the class what they would do differently this week if they treated Scripture as that reliable. Prophecy fulfilled is not merely an apologetic argument to win; it is a reason to obey a text you would rather negotiate with.

Question 2. *At verse 22 Psalm 22 turns from agony to praise in the middle of the great assembly. Locate the turn, and discuss what it teaches about how to pray while the trouble is still going on.*

Locate the hinge first: verse 21 ends with a cry for rescue, and then the very next line begins declaring God's name to His brethren. Nothing in the psalm says the pain has stopped. What has happened is that the sufferer has kept talking to God through it, has reminded himself of what God did for the fathers and at his own birth, and has come out on the far side of his own honest complaint with praise in his mouth.

Teach the class that this pattern is normal in Scripture and rare in our praying. Most of us either complain without praying or pray without complaining. David does both, in that order, and the praise at the end is not a denial of the agony at the beginning; it grows out of it. Ask who in the room is currently in verse 14, and tell them plainly that verse 22 is not reached by pretending. It is reached by continuing to speak to God.

Question 3. *Psalm 23:5 says the table is prepared in the presence of my enemies, not after they have been driven off. Talk about what it means to be fed while the trouble is still in the room, and whether you have ever experienced that.*

The preposition is the whole lesson. Not after my enemies are defeated, not once the trouble is behind me, but in their presence. Ask the class to picture it: a table, a meal, an anointing of oil, and a cup running over, with the people who want to destroy you standing right there watching you eat. God's provision is not always rescue from a situation; often it is sustenance inside one.

Bring it into the room. A woman whose marriage is difficult still receives the Lord's Supper on Sunday. A man who is going to lose the business still has a Bible and a congregation and a family that prays. Ask who has eaten at that table, and let them tell it. Then note where the psalm ends: goodness and mercy following all the days of life, and dwelling in the house of the Lord forever. The table is temporary. The house is not.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything the sufferer says about his own body and about the people around him in Psalm 22:12–18. Then match each detail to a specific line in the gospel accounts of the crucifixion.*

He is surrounded by strong bulls and roaring lions, poured out like water, his bones are out of joint, his heart is like wax melted within him, his strength is dried up like a potsherd, his tongue clings to his jaws, dogs surround him, they pierced his hands and feet, he can count all his bones, they look and stare, and they divide his garments and cast lots for his clothing. Matthew 27:39–44 records the staring and mocking, John 19:23–24 records the soldiers dividing the garments and casting lots for the tunic, John 19:28 records the thirst, and John 19:33 notes that His bones were not broken, which fits a man whose bones could be counted but not shattered.

2. *Compare Psalm 22:1 with Matthew 27:46. Why would Jesus quote the first line of this particular psalm, and what would a Jewish hearer have known about how it ends?*

Jesus quotes the first line because in that setting the opening line named the whole psalm, the way a title does. He is not merely voicing despair; He is identifying the text that is being fulfilled in front of them. A Jewish hearer who knew the psalm would know the pierced hands and feet, the divided clothing, and the taunt that had just been spoken aloud, and he would also know how it ends: with the ends of the earth remembering and turning to the Lord, and with a people yet to be born being told that He has done this. The cry of dereliction is real, and it is the opening of a psalm that finishes in worldwide worship.

3. *Trace the shepherd's actions through Psalm 23. Which of those actions is God doing for you right now, and which one are you resisting?*

He makes me lie down in green pastures, leads me beside still waters, restores my soul, leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake, is with me in the valley, comforts me with rod and staff, prepares a table, anoints

my head with oil, and fills my cup to overflowing. Answers will vary. The verb people most often resist is the first one: He makes me lie down. Many of us will accept leading, provision, and comfort, and will not accept rest, and God sometimes arranges the circumstances that finally put us on the ground.

4. Read John 10:11–18 beside Psalm 23. What does Jesus add to David's picture of the shepherd that David could not have written?

David could describe the shepherd's care. Jesus adds that the good shepherd gives His life for the sheep, that He knows His own and is known by them as the Father knows Him, that He has other sheep to bring so there will be one flock and one shepherd, and that He lays down His life of His own accord and takes it up again. Psalm 22 and Psalm 23 sit side by side for exactly this reason: the shepherd of Psalm 23 is the sufferer of Psalm 22, and the table is set because of the cross.

5. Psalm 23:6 says *goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life*. Write down three specific mercies from the last twelve months, and tell somebody about one of them before Sunday.

Answers will vary, and the telling is half the assignment. Look for specifics rather than categories, since "God has been good to me" costs nothing to say. Note that the Hebrew behind follow is stronger than trailing along; it carries the sense of pursuing. Goodness and mercy are not merely keeping up with us; they are chasing us down.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Handle the cry of Psalm 22:1 and Matthew 27:46 reverently and without speculation about a rupture within the Godhead. Jesus bore our sin and its penalty (2 Corinthians 5:21; Isaiah 53:5–6), and He quoted a psalm that ends in triumph. Say what Scripture says and stop there.
- Psalm 23 is not a promise of comfortable circumstances. The valley and the enemies are inside the psalm. Guard the class against the idea that the shepherd's care means an easy pasture.
- Do not allegorize every detail of Psalm 23 into a hidden meaning. The rod and the staff are a shepherd's tools, and the imagery is plain. Its power is in its simplicity.
- When you use the shepherd image, connect it where the New Testament connects it: Christ is the chief shepherd, and elders shepherd the flock under Him (1 Peter 5:1–4; Acts 20:28). The flock belongs to God, not to the men who tend it.

Sheep Without a Shepherd

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The apostles return from their mission and report everything, and Jesus takes them to a deserted place because so many were coming and going that they had no leisure even to eat. It is a striking little detail: the Lord builds rest into the work. But the rest is interrupted, the crowd beats them to the spot, and Mark tells us what Jesus saw. Not an intrusion. Sheep without a shepherd, which is a phrase straight out of Numbers 27:17 and Ezekiel 34, a description of a nation whose leaders had failed it. And the first thing He does, before a single loaf is broken, is teach them many things.

The feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle recorded in all four gospels. Mark gives you the green grass, the groups of hundreds and fifties, the five loaves and two fish, the looking up to heaven, and the twelve baskets left over, one for each disciple who had just told Him it could not be done. Then He sends them across the lake and comes to them near dawn, walking on the sea. Mark's comment in verse 52 is devastating: they were greatly amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves, and their heart was hardened. They had handled the baskets and still had not drawn the conclusion.

Then the scene changes entirely. A delegation from Jerusalem objects that the disciples eat with unwashed hands, which was a matter of rabbinic tradition, not of the law of Moses. Jesus answers with Isaiah, in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men, and then gives an example with teeth. A man could declare his property Corban, dedicated to God, and thereby escape the obligation to support his aging parents. The tradition had been constructed in such a way that keeping it meant breaking the fifth commandment. His verdict is that they made the word of God of no effect through their tradition, and He adds that they did many such things.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This is the only miracle in all four gospels (Matthew 14, Luke 9, John 6). John 6:4 notes that the Passover was near, which fits Mark's detail about green grass, meaning spring.
- "Sheep without a shepherd" echoes Numbers 27:17, where Moses asks God to appoint a successor, and Ezekiel 34, where God condemns the shepherds of Israel and promises to shepherd the flock Himself.
- The fourth watch of the night is roughly three to six in the morning, so the disciples had been straining at the oars for the better part of a night against a contrary wind.
- The traditions of the elders were an accumulated body of oral interpretation. The ceremonial handwashing at issue was not required by the law of Moses for ordinary people; it was a rabbinic addition treated as binding.
- Corban means devoted or given to God. A man could pronounce his assets Corban and then treat them as unavailable for family obligations while continuing to use them himself.
- Isaiah 29:13, which Jesus quotes, was originally spoken against Judah in Isaiah's own day. Jesus applies an old indictment to a new generation doing the same thing.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus planned a rest and got a crowd, and He was moved with compassion because they were like sheep without a shepherd (6:34). Notice what He does for hungry people first. What does that order say about what people most need, and about how we tend to reverse it?*

Mark is careful about the order. The crowd is hungry, the hour is late, and the first thing Jesus does is teach them many things. The bread comes later, and there is plenty of it, and nobody goes home empty. He does not choose

between the soul and the stomach; He simply refuses to reverse the order. People without a shepherd need direction before they need dinner, and then they need dinner too.

Ask the class where we get the order backwards. Sometimes we reverse it by meeting physical needs and never speaking about Christ, so that a benevolence ministry never becomes a gospel ministry. Sometimes we reverse it by preaching to people whose lights are about to be shut off and never opening our wallets, which James 2:15–16 calls useless. Ask what our congregation does well and where it is thin, and get one specific commitment out of the hour.

Question 2. *Mark 6:52 says the disciples were astonished at the walking on the water because they had not understood about the loaves, and their hearts were hardened. Discuss how a person can watch a miracle and learn nothing from it.*

Start with how unflattering this is, and remember that Peter is very likely the source. Twelve men had personally distributed bread that multiplied in their hands and had personally gathered twelve baskets of leftovers, one apiece. Hours later they saw a figure on the water and cried out in terror, thinking it was a ghost. Mark says the reason is that they had not understood about the loaves. The miracle had been an event rather than a lesson.

The application is uncomfortable and necessary. It is possible to know a great deal about what God has done, including in your own life, and to draw no conclusion from it when the next crisis arrives. Ask the class to name a specific deliverance God gave them that they have already stopped reasoning from. Hardness of heart here is not rebellion; it is a failure to think. That is why remembering is commanded so often in Scripture.

Question 3. *In Mark 7:9–13 Jesus says the Pharisees had a fine way of setting aside God's commandment in order to keep their tradition. Name the traditions we would fight hardest to keep, and work out how a congregation distinguishes a useful custom from a binding law.*

Define the categories first, because the class will need them. Some practices are commanded or shown by apostolic example and are not ours to alter: the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week, singing, giving, preaching the word, baptism for the remission of sins. Others are matters of expediency that help us carry out what is commanded: the time of services, a building, songbooks, classes, a schedule. The first group we keep because God spoke. The second group we adopt because they serve, and we must never bind them as though God had spoken.

Then get uncomfortable. Ask what would cause more trouble in our congregation: dropping something God commanded, or changing something we have merely always done. The Pharisees were not careless men. They were devoted, and their devotion had attached itself to their own additions so firmly that God's actual command became the thing they were willing to sacrifice. Ask each person to name one custom he treats as though it came from Scripture and check whether it did.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Jesus tells the disciples to do in the feeding of the five thousand (6:37–43). Which parts were their work, and which part could only He do?*

He tells them to give the crowd something to eat, to go and see how many loaves they have, to make the people sit down in groups on the green grass, to distribute the loaves and fish, and afterward to gather up the fragments. They organized, served, and cleaned up, which is very nearly a description of ordinary congregational work. What only He could do is the part in verse 41: He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and they multiplied. We hand out what He supplies. Note that He began by telling them to do something impossible and then let them discover where the sufficiency was.

2. *Compare Mark 6:45–52 with Matthew 14:22–33. What does Matthew include that Mark leaves out, and why might Mark, writing with Peter's preaching behind him, tell it the way he does?*

Matthew adds Peter's request to come to Him on the water, his walking, his fear at the wind, his sinking cry, and the Lord's hand catching him, along with the worship in the boat and the confession that He is truly the Son of God. Mark records none of it. Early witnesses connect Mark's gospel with Peter's preaching, and Mark consistently includes the

details that make Peter look worst and omits the ones that would make him look best, which is exactly what you would expect from a humble man telling his own story.

3. Read Mark 7:6–7 and then Isaiah 29:13. Explain in your own words what makes worship vain according to these two passages.

Isaiah 29:13 says these people draw near with their mouths and honor God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him, and their fear toward Him is taught by the commandment of men. Jesus applies both halves: the heart is disengaged, and the content is human. Worship becomes vain when it is offered by a heart that is not actually engaged with God, and when what is offered is something men devised rather than something God authorized. Sincerity does not fix the second problem, and authorization does not fix the first. Both matter.

4. Trace the Corban argument in 7:9–13. How exactly did the tradition work, and which of the ten commandments did it nullify?

The tradition allowed a man to declare property Corban, that is, dedicated to God, and thereafter to claim it was unavailable for any other purpose, including the support of his aging parents, while in practice retaining the use of it himself. The rabbis then treated the vow as binding and irrevocable. Jesus points out that this nullifies the fifth commandment, honor your father and your mother, and He notes that Moses attached the death penalty to cursing father or mother. A tradition designed to show devotion to God had become a legal instrument for abandoning your parents.

5. Jesus quotes Isaiah about people who honor God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. Name one part of your worship that has become mechanical, and decide now what you will do differently this Sunday.

Answers will vary. Listen for honesty about the Lord's Supper taken while the mind is on lunch, singing words nobody is thinking about, the prayer during which we plan the afternoon, the sermon heard through the filter of who else needs to hear it. The remedy is usually preparation rather than intensity: reading the crucifixion account before coming, arriving early, praying for the man who will lead, reading the words of the songs beforehand.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The feeding of the five thousand is a sign of who Jesus is, and John 6 makes that explicit. Do not reduce it to a lesson about generosity or sharing lunches, and do not let it become a proof text for a purely social gospel.
- Mark 7 abolishes the traditions of men, not the commandments of God. Be careful that no one leaves thinking Jesus is dismissive of all inherited practice; the apostles themselves delivered traditions that are binding because they came from God (1 Corinthians 11:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:15). The test is the source.
- Do not use this passage as a lever for whatever change someone happens to want. Jesus condemned traditions that nullified God's word. A custom that serves God's command is not the same thing, and neither is a preference dressed up as freedom.
- The handwashing at issue was ceremonial, part of rabbinic oral tradition, and not a requirement of the Law of Moses for ordinary Israelites. Say so clearly, or a class will conclude Jesus was setting aside Scripture.

Building on the Foundation

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 answers an obvious objection. If the cross is the wisdom of God, why did the preacher not sound wise? Paul says it was deliberate. He came in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling, and his speech and preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that their faith would not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. A faith built on the preacher's brilliance will last exactly as long as the preacher does.

Then Paul explains where the message came from, and this is one of the clearest statements of inspiration in the New Testament. No eye had seen it, no ear had heard it, no heart had imagined it, but God has revealed it to us by His Spirit. The Spirit searches the deep things of God. And in verse 13 Paul says these things are spoken not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches. The words themselves were given. That is why a class can study a text carefully, down to its phrasing, and expect to find something there.

Chapter 3 turns and confronts them. He could not speak to them as spiritual people but as babies in Christ, and the proof is that they are still saying I am of Paul and I am of Apollos. Then comes the great deflation: who then is Paul, and who is Apollos? Servants. One planted, one watered, God gave the increase, so neither the planter nor the waterer is anything. They are God's field and God's building. The foundation is laid and it is Jesus Christ, and no one can lay another. But what a man builds on it, gold or straw, will be revealed by fire. Then the warning in verse 17 to anyone who would damage God's temple, which in context is the congregation itself.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Corinth prized rhetoric. Professional speakers drew crowds and fees, and a preacher who refused to compete in that arena was making a deliberate statement about what his message rested on.
- 1 Corinthians 2:9 quotes Isaiah 64:4. In context Paul is not describing heaven but the gospel God had kept hidden and has now revealed, which is why verse 10 begins, "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit."
- 2:13 teaches verbal inspiration: not only the ideas but the words were given by the Spirit to the apostles. Compare 2 Timothy 3:16–17 and 2 Peter 1:20–21.
- "Natural man" in 2:14 renders a word meaning the merely human person who lives by his own resources. He rejects what he has no way of discovering on his own and no willingness to receive.
- Apollos came to Corinth after Paul and watered what Paul had planted (Acts 18:24–19:1). The two men were colleagues; the factions were the invention of the members, not of the preachers.
- The temple in 3:16–17 is the congregation, since the pronoun is plural and the subject is the church at Corinth. Paul addresses the individual Christian's body as a temple later, in 6:19.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. 1 Corinthians 2:1–5 says Paul deliberately set aside excellence of speech so their faith would not rest in the wisdom of men. Where do we still try to make the gospel persuasive by means other than the gospel, and what does that cost in the long run?

Name the modern equivalents carefully and without cynicism. Production quality, a gifted speaker, an attractive building, programming that competes with what the community already offers, a personality that draws a crowd. None of those things is sinful in itself, and some of them are simple good stewardship. The danger Paul names is when faith comes to rest on them, because then whatever was built with them has to be maintained by them forever.

The cost shows up later, which is why it is hard to see now. People gathered by a personality leave when the personality does. People gathered by a program go to the next congregation with a better one. People convicted by the word of God and buried with Christ in baptism stay when everything else is stripped away. Ask the class what would remain here if the building, the budget, and the most visible people were removed tomorrow.

Question 2. *Paul calls the Corinthians carnal and says he had to feed them milk, and his evidence is envy and strife (3:1–4). Discuss why Scripture treats division as a mark of immaturity rather than of conviction, and how you tell the difference.*

Paul's reasoning is that the party spirit is a sign of thinking like the world rather than of caring deeply about truth. He says, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men? Taking sides behind personalities is exactly what Corinth did in politics, in philosophy, and at the games. A Christian who has grown up sees the church as one body with many members serving one Lord. A Christian who has not is still keeping score.

Then draw the distinction the class needs, because Scripture does require division over some things (Romans 16:17; Galatians 1:8–9; 2 John 9–11). The test is the subject matter. Is the line being drawn where God drew it, over the gospel and the pattern of New Testament teaching, or is it being drawn around a man, a style, a building program, or an old grudge? Ask each person to think of a conflict he has been part of and name honestly which kind it was.

Question 3. *1 Corinthians 3:11–15 says each man's work will be tested by fire. Look honestly at what you are currently building into other people, at home and in this congregation. Which of your materials would come through that?*

Set the picture up carefully. The foundation is already laid, and it is Christ; nobody is being asked to lay it again. The question is what gets built on top of it, and Paul contrasts gold, silver, and precious stones with wood, hay, and straw. The difference is not size or visibility. Straw stacks up fast and looks like progress. The difference is what survives being tested.

Make it personal rather than theoretical. What are we building into our children: Scripture and character, or activities and achievements? What are we building into new Christians: understanding of the word, or attachment to us? What are we building into this class: conviction, or entertainment? Note verse 15, that a man whose work is burned up suffers loss but is himself saved, which means a person can spend a great deal of a Christian life on things that will not last. Ask what one material each person is going to change.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace what 1 Corinthians 2:9–13 says about how the truth traveled from God to us. List each step in order, and note who does what at every stage.*

God prepared things no eye had seen, no ear heard, and no human heart imagined. God revealed them through His Spirit, who searches all things, even the deep things of God. The Spirit, who alone knows the things of God, made them known to the apostles, who received the Spirit in order to know the things freely given by God. The apostles then spoke those things in words the Holy Spirit taught, not in words human wisdom taught. Every step is God's initiative: God prepares, the Spirit searches and reveals, the apostles receive and speak. Our part is to read what they wrote (Ephesians 3:3–5).

2. *Read 1 Corinthians 2:14 about the natural man. Compare Acts 17:11 and Romans 10:17. Does the verse mean an unbeliever is incapable of understanding Scripture, or something narrower? Give your reasons from the text.*

The natural man is the person living by human resources alone, who receives not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them because they are spiritually discerned. It does not mean an unbeliever is intellectually incapable of reading a Bible, since the whole enterprise of preaching assumes otherwise. The Bereans, who were not yet Christians, searched the Scriptures daily to see whether Paul's claims were so, and Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing the word. What the natural man cannot do is arrive at this truth on his own, apart from revelation, and what he will not do, as long as he insists on human wisdom as his standard, is accept it. The word is understandable; the resistance is in the will.

3. *1 Corinthians 3:6–9 divides the labor between the preachers and God. List what belongs to each, then note who gets the credit in verse 7 and what that does to a party spirit.*

Paul planted, Apollos watered, and God gave the increase. Paul and Apollos are called ministers, that is, servants, through whom the Corinthians believed, each doing the work the Lord gave him. God alone gives growth. Verse 7 puts it starkly: neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but God who gives the increase. A congregation that takes that seriously cannot sustain a party spirit, because there is nobody left to form a party around. Note also verse 8, that each worker will receive his own reward according to his own labor, so the work still matters even though the credit does not belong to the worker.

4. *Read 1 Corinthians 3:16–17 and notice that the word you is plural. Compare Ephesians 2:19–22 and 1 Peter 2:5. Which temple is Paul talking about here, and what exactly is the warning?*

The temple here is the congregation. The pronoun is plural throughout, and the subject of the paragraph is the church at Corinth, which Paul has just called God's field and God's building. Ephesians 2:19–22 describes the whole church as a holy temple growing together, and 1 Peter 2:5 calls Christians living stones built up as a spiritual house. The warning is severe: if anyone defiles or destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, which you are. Dividing and damaging a congregation is not a minor sin. It is vandalism against something God is building.

5. *1 Corinthians 3:21–23 says all things are yours, and you are Christ's. Name one thing, a class, a work, a building, a ministry, that you have quietly been treating as belonging to a man, and change the way you speak about it this week.*

Answers will vary, and the change in language is the assignment. We say the preacher's church, my class, his song leading, our building, and the words shape the loyalty. Paul's point in 3:21–23 is the reverse of what Corinth thought: they imagined they belonged to Paul or Apollos, and Paul says Paul and Apollos belong to them, and they belong to Christ, and Christ is God's. Everything is a gift held under Christ. Listen for people naming something concrete and then saying it differently out loud.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- 1 Corinthians 2:9 is regularly quoted as a description of heaven. In context it describes the gospel God had kept hidden and has now revealed; verse 10 says so directly. There are better passages for heaven, and misusing this one costs you a strong text on revelation.
- 2:14 must not be turned into total depravity or an inability to understand Scripture without a direct operation of the Spirit. The Spirit works through the revealed word (Ephesians 6:17; Romans 10:17). The natural man will not accept what God has revealed, and cannot discover it on his own, which is precisely why preaching is necessary.
- 3:15, saved yet so as through fire, gives no support to purgatory. The fire tests the work, not the man; the builder survives and the shoddy work does not. Say so plainly if anyone raises it.
- Keep 3:16–17 in its context. The temple here is the congregation, and the warning is against those who damage it. The individual Christian's body as a temple comes later, in 6:19, and both are true in their places.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Samuel 11–17 · Psalm 24–25 · Mark 7:14–8:10 · 1 Corinthians 4–5

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