

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 38 OF 104

What Defiles a Man

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Samuel 11-17
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 24-25
Gospels	Mark 7:14-8:10
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 4-5

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from an outward religion to an inward one without letting anybody conclude that outward obedience does not matter. All four readings press the same nerve. David kept his throne, his reputation, and his religious routine while a murder sat in his history. The Pharisees washed. The Corinthians tolerated. Psalm 24 asks who may stand in God's holy place and answers with hands and heart together. By the end of the week the class should be unable to separate the two.

Doctrinally, three things are at stake. First, forgiveness is real and free, and consequences are also real; 2 Samuel 12 holds both without embarrassment, and your class needs to hold both too. Second, the ceremonial law with its clean and unclean foods was fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14-17), so no Christian is bound by it. Third, the Lord's church is responsible for its own purity, and 1 Corinthians 5 describes that responsibility as congregational, grievous, and aimed at saving the sinner. Handle that chapter with more tenderness than force, and the class will trust you with it.

Formationally, the thread is exposure. David hid for nearly a year. The Corinthians hid behind their own sophistication. Jesus says the defilement is already inside, which means the only cure begins with light. Ask your class this, and ask it slowly: what is the one thing about your life right now that you would be most unwilling for this class to know, and what would it take for you to tell one person before next Sunday?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Samuel 11-17 first. It carries the week's theme in narrative form and gives you the clearest picture your class will ever see of how sin walks a good man down a staircase. Spend the hour on chapters 11 and 12, and let the consequences in 13 through 17 be summarized rather than retold.

Second session: Take up 1 Corinthians 4-5 second. It puts the same problem in a congregational setting and forces the practical question David's story leaves open: what does a church do when a member will not turn? Give at least twenty minutes to chapter 5 and do not leave it without speaking of restoration.

The other two readings: Mark 7:14-8:10 and Psalm 24-25 carry the private reading well. Point out before dismissal that Mark 7 supplies the diagnosis David's story illustrates, and encourage each member to pray Psalm 25 aloud once during the week, slowly, as his own words.

From the Rooftop to Ruin

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These seven chapters are the hinge of David's life and of the book. Up to chapter 10 almost everything David touches prospers. From chapter 11 forward the story darkens, and the writer does not soften a line of it. Scripture never protects its heroes. It tells the truth about them, which is one of the strongest arguments for its honesty and one of the kindest gifts it gives to readers who have failed.

Watch the structure of the fall. David is where he should not be, sees what he should not have looked at twice, asks about her anyway, takes, and then spends far more energy on the cover-up than the sin itself required. The murder of Uriah is not a second, unrelated sin. It is the first sin protecting itself. That progression is worth naming plainly for your class, because everyone in the room knows the feel of the second lie told to protect the first.

Then Nathan. "Thou art the man" is the most important sentence spoken to any king in the Old Testament, and David's answer, without excuse or negotiation, is why the Lord could still call him a man after His own heart. But mercy is not the same as immunity. Chapters 13 through 17 read like the slow unfolding of 12:10, and by the end David is walking up Olivet barefoot with his head covered while his own son sits on his throne.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Second Samuel covers the reign of David, roughly 1010 to 970 B.C., and the writer arranges the book around God's covenant promise in chapter 7 and David's failure in chapter 11.
- Ammon and its capital Rabbah form the background of chapter 11; Joab is besieging the city while David is at ease in Jerusalem.
- Bathsheba is the wife of Uriah, one of David's thirty mighty men (23:39), and the granddaughter of Ahithophel (11:3; 23:34), which helps explain why Ahithophel later sides with Absalom.
- Under the Law of Moses both adultery and murder carried the death penalty (Leviticus 20:10; Numbers 35:31). David's survival is undeserved mercy, and the text says so.
- Absalom's revolt begins at Hebron, David's own first capital, and the flight over Kidron and up the Mount of Olives (15:23, 30) is the same ground another Son of David would later cross in sorrow.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Chapter 11 opens with David at home at the time when kings go out to battle. Trace the small steps between that idle evening and Uriah's death, and name the places where this still could have been stopped.*

Walk the class through it slowly: he sent the army and stayed behind, he rose from his bed at evening, he walked the roof, he saw, he asked, he sent, he took. Every one of those is a decision, and every one of them had an exit. Sin almost never arrives as a single choice. It arrives as a chain of small permissions, each one reasonable by itself. James 1:14–15 describes the identical sequence from the inside.

The most useful question for the room is not where David went wrong but where the exits were. He could have gone to war. He could have looked away. He could have stopped when he learned she was the wife of one of his own soldiers. Ask each person to identify the step in his own pattern where the exit still stands open, because after that step it is mostly momentum.

Question 2. *Nathan could have walked in and accused the king outright. Why does he begin with a story about a lamb instead, and what did the story accomplish in David that a direct charge might not have?*

Nathan's parable does what direct accusation rarely does: it gets David to render a verdict before he knows he is the defendant. David's anger in 12:5 is genuine. He still has a working conscience; it has simply been walled off

from his own behavior. The story slips past the wall, and then Nathan tears the wall down with four words. Compare how the parable of the two debtors functions in Luke 7:40–47.

There is a pastoral lesson here worth stating. Nathan went. He went to a king who had already killed to protect himself, and he went with God's word rather than his own opinion. Ask your class who would tell them the truth, and whether they have made it safe for that person to do so. A man with no Nathan is a man with no brakes.

Question 3. *God forgives David in 12:13, and yet the sword never leaves his house. How do we hold forgiveness and consequence together without treating forgiveness as a loophole or treating consequences as proof we were never really forgiven?*

Both are in the text, and both must stay. Nathan says plainly, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (12:13). He says just as plainly that the sword will not depart from David's house. Forgiveness removes guilt before God; it does not rewind history or cancel the harvest a man has planted (Galatians 6:7–8). Chapters 13 through 18 are that harvest, and David eats it in tears.

Guard the class from both ditches. One person will hear this and conclude that since consequences remain he was never forgiven; point him to Psalm 32:1–5 and 1 John 1:9. Another will conclude that since forgiveness is free the consequences do not matter much; point him at Tamar, at Amnon's corpse, at Absalom. Grace is free. Sin is never cheap.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 2 Samuel 11:1–5 again and list, in order, every separate decision David makes before Bathsheba ever arrives at the palace.*

The decisions are stacked: he sends Joab and the army out while he remains at Jerusalem; he rises from his bed toward evening; he walks on the roof; he sees the woman; he sends and inquires about her; and then, told plainly that she is another man's wife, he sends messengers and takes her. At least five separable choices precede the sin itself, and the text records them in that order for a reason.

2. *Read Psalm 51, written after Nathan came, alongside David's silence in 2 Samuel 11. What has to happen inside a man to move him from "the thing that David had done displeased the Lord" to "I have sinned against the Lord"?*

Answers will vary in wording, but the text supplies the substance. Between 11:27 and 12:13 stands the word of God through a faithful man. David had lived nearly a year in the silence Psalm 32:3–4 describes, bones wasting, hand heavy upon him. What changes is not that he learns new information but that he stops defending himself. Real repentance is the end of self-defense, not merely the feeling of regret.

3. *Uriah the Hittite is a foreigner keeping Israel's covenant better than Israel's king. Note everything Uriah says and does in 11:6–13, and write down what each detail exposes about David by contrast.*

Uriah refuses the comfort of his own house while the ark and the armies are in tents; he sleeps at the door with the king's servants; he will not go down to his house even after David gets him drunk. A Hittite by birth, he behaves like a covenant man, and he carries his own death sentence in his hand without opening it. The contrast is the writer's sermon: the outsider keeps faith and the anointed king does not.

4. *Absalom waits two full years before he kills Amnon (13:23). Trace what David does about Tamar, about Amnon, and about Absalom, and consider what unconfessed sin does to a household over time.*

David is furious about Tamar but does nothing (13:21). He neither disciplines Amnon nor defends his daughter, and Absalom's hatred has two years to cure. After the murder David mourns, lets Absalom stay away three years, then brings him back to Jerusalem and refuses to see him for two more. Sin that is never addressed does not evaporate; it ferments. A family can hold silence for years and call it peace while a rebellion is being built in it.

5. *Name one thing you are presently keeping hidden from your spouse, your elders, or a brother in Christ. Who will you tell before next Sunday, and what has hiding it already cost you that confessing it would not?*

Answers will vary, and this one should not be answered aloud in class. Say so plainly before the question is read. What the teacher listens for afterward is movement: that someone actually tells someone. Offer yourself and the

elders as safe ground, and remind the class that James 5:16 assumes confession happens between people, not only in private prayer.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Handle chapter 11 frankly and without detail. Say what the text says, that David committed adultery and then murdered to hide it, and move to the consequences. In a mixed class there is no reason to linger over particulars, and the moral weight of the passage does not depend on them.
- Chapter 13 records the rape of Tamar. Name it honestly as the violent crime it was, keep the description spare, and be aware that someone in your class may be carrying a similar wound. Note that Scripture takes her grief seriously even when her father did not.
- David's multiple wives and concubines are reported, not approved. The text shows the damage polygamy does to this family, and Genesis 2:24 and Matthew 19:4-6 remain the standard.
- Do not let anyone conclude that God has favorites who sin without consequence. Nor let anyone conclude that a great sin ends a man's usefulness. Both errors are answered in the same chapter.

Clean Hands and a Pure Heart

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 24 is a processional, most likely sung as the ark was carried up to Zion, which puts it in the same world as 2 Samuel 6. It moves in three parts: a declaration of God's ownership of everything (verses 1 and 2), an entrance liturgy asking who may come near (verses 3 through 6), and a call to the gates to open for the King of glory (verses 7 through 10). The logic runs from creation, to character, to worship.

Notice that the entrance requirements are moral, not ceremonial. Clean hands, a pure heart, no lifting of the soul to what is empty, no swearing deceitfully. A man could keep every ritual in Leviticus and fail all four. This is the same point the prophets made repeatedly and the same point Jesus makes in Mark 7, which is why these two psalms sit so well beside this week's Gospel reading.

Psalm 25 is more intimate. It is an acrostic, which means David composed it with care while his heart was in pieces, and it alternates between petition and confidence the way real prayer does. The center of it is verse 11, where he asks pardon for his iniquity "for it is great." Not small. Great. And that is the reason he gives for expecting mercy, which is either shocking or gospel, depending on how well you know God.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms carry the superscription "A Psalm of David." Psalm 24 is a royal processional; Psalm 25 is an individual lament with wisdom elements.
- The "hill of the Lord" is Zion, where the ark rested and where the temple would later stand.
- The acrostic form of Psalm 25 was an aid to memory and a mark of literary care; a few letters are irregular, which is common in Hebrew acrostics.
- "The Lord of hosts" in 24:10 means the Lord of the armies, a military title that fits a psalm celebrating the entrance of a victorious King.
- Neither psalm teaches salvation by personal merit. Under any covenant, entrance into God's presence is by His mercy; the clean hands and pure heart describe the person who genuinely seeks Him (24:6), not a man with a perfect record.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 24:1 says the earth and everyone in it belong to God. If you took that seriously for seven days, how would it change the way you hold your paycheck, your calendar, and your house?*

Verse 1 is a property claim, and it is total. Not a portion, not a tithe's worth, but the earth and its fullness, the world and those who dwell in it. Everything a Christian holds, he holds as a steward. That truth cuts two ways: it takes the weight of ownership off your shoulders, and it takes the right of absolute disposal out of your hands.

Push for specifics. If the paycheck is God's, giving is no longer a question of generosity but of accounting. If the calendar is God's, an evening is not simply yours to spend. If the house is God's, hospitality gets easier to say yes to. Ask each person to name one line item in the budget or one evening on the calendar that would look different if verse 1 were believed on Monday.

Question 2. *Verses 3 and 4 name two requirements, clean hands and a pure heart. Talk about the difference between them, and about which of the two we are usually more willing to settle for.*

Clean hands are what people can see: conduct, dealings, speech, what we do with our bodies and our money. A pure heart is what only God can see: motive, appetite, the thing we want when nobody is watching. Scripture never lets us choose between them. Psalm 51:6 and 10 ask for truth in the inward parts and a clean heart; Matthew 23:25–26 warns about the cup scrubbed on the outside.

Most of us settle for clean hands, because hands are what the congregation grades. Ask the class which is more painful to work on and why. Then point them to the fourth line of verse 4, which fences off the deeper problem: lifting the soul to an idol, that is, setting your deepest hope on something that cannot hold it.

Question 3. *In Psalm 25:7 David asks God not to remember the sins of his youth. What is he actually asking for, and how does the rest of the psalm show a man living as forgiven rather than living haunted?*

David is asking God to deal with him according to mercy and covenant love rather than according to the record. He is not asking for amnesia in the literal sense; he is asking that his past not be the basis of God's treatment of him. Isaiah 43:25 and Jeremiah 31:34 use the same language, and Hebrews 8:12 applies it to the new covenant.

The evidence that he lives forgiven is all over the psalm. He keeps asking to be taught, which a haunted man rarely does, because a haunted man is busy defending himself. He waits on God all day (verse 5). He expects to be shown paths (verses 8 and 9). Guilt paralyzes; forgiveness teaches. Ask the class which of the two is currently running their prayer life.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every request David makes of God in Psalm 25 and count how many of them ask to be taught rather than to be rescued. What does that proportion suggest about his priorities?*

The requests include: let me not be ashamed, show me Thy ways, teach me Thy paths, lead me in Thy truth, remember Thy mercies, remember not my sins, pardon my iniquity, turn to me, bring me out of my distresses, look on my affliction, forgive all my sins, keep my soul, deliver me, and redeem Israel. A striking share of them concern instruction rather than rescue. David wants out of trouble, but he wants direction more, which tells you what he believes the real danger is.

2. *Paul quotes Psalm 24:1 in 1 Corinthians 10:26. Read the surrounding paragraph there and describe the practical use he makes of the verse.*

In 1 Corinthians 10:25–26 Paul uses the verse to settle a conscience question about meat sold in the market. Because the earth is the Lord's, food is not contaminated by having passed through an idol's temple; the created thing still belongs to God. Paul then limits that liberty by love in the verses following. The same verse that frees a Christian also obligates him, since everything he holds belongs to Another.

3. *Psalm 25 is an acrostic, built line by line on the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Consider what that deliberate structure suggests about how to pray when you are distressed and your thoughts will not sit still.*

The acrostic is evidence of deliberate, disciplined work done in a season of distress. David did not wait until he felt composed to pray, and he did not let the distress make the prayer formless. There is a lesson here for people who think prayer is only honest when it is spontaneous. Structure, whether an acrostic, a written list, or a psalm read aloud, can carry you on the days when your own words scatter.

4. *Trace the words teach, show, lead, and guide through Psalm 25. What sort of guidance is David asking for, and on what condition does verse 14 say it comes?*

Verses 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12 use this vocabulary. David is asking for moral and practical direction, to know the way he should walk, not for secret information about the future. Verse 14 gives the condition: the secret, or intimate counsel, of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant. Guidance follows reverence. God does not hand His paths to people who have not first submitted to His right to choose them.

5. *Psalm 24:4 puts hands and heart together. Name one action this week that would clean your hands, and one habit of thought that would have to change for your heart to match it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for pairs that actually match: an action and the thought pattern underneath it. Someone who names an apology to make should also name the pride that delayed it. If a class member offers only the outward act, press gently for the inward source; that is precisely the move Psalm 24:4 and Mark 7:21 both require.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not let 24:3–6 become a doctrine of salvation by moral achievement. Verse 5 says the worshiper receives blessing and righteousness from the Lord, that is, as a gift.
- Psalm 24:7–10 is properly applied to Christ in preaching, but keep the psalm's own historical setting in view first and avoid turning every detail of the gates into allegory.
- Remind the class of genre: Psalm 24 is a processional hymn, Psalm 25 an individual lament. Reading a lament as if it were a promise, or a promise as if it were a lament, creates most of the trouble people have with the Psalms.

The Trouble Is Inside

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The first paragraph is one of the most consequential things Jesus ever said about religion. The scribes had built an elaborate system of ritual washing around the Law, and Jesus does not merely dismiss the tradition; He reaches past it to the Law itself and announces that the problem was never intake. Mark adds the editorial comment in verse 19 that would matter enormously to his Roman readers: in saying this, He declared all foods clean.

Then Mark does something deliberate. He immediately sends Jesus out of Jewish territory to Tyre and Sidon and then to the Decapolis, and ends with a feeding in Gentile country where the leftovers fill seven large hampers rather than twelve Jewish baskets. Having removed the ceremonial wall around food, Jesus walks straight through the wall around people. The order of the stories is the argument.

The Syrophoenician mother deserves care. Jesus' words about children and dogs sound harsh until you notice the diminutive He uses, the household pet rather than the scavenger, and until you watch what the words draw out of her. She does not dispute her place; she takes it and presses her claim anyway. Faith that keeps asking after an apparent refusal is the faith Mark wants his readers to see, and Jesus says so.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Mark writes to a largely Gentile, probably Roman audience, which is why he stops to explain Jewish customs (7:3–4) and why 7:19 is stated so plainly.
- Tyre and Sidon were Phoenician cities on the coast, outside Israel; the Decapolis was a league of Greek cities east of Galilee. Jesus is deliberately in Gentile territory through most of this reading.
- The woman is called Greek, a Syrophoenician by birth (7:26), that is, a Gentile by culture, language, and religion.
- The two feedings are distinct events; Jesus Himself distinguishes them in 8:19–20, with different numbers, loaves, locations, and even different Greek words for the baskets.
- This section sits just before Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, and Mark is steadily building the question of who Jesus is.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus names thirteen evils that come out of the heart in Mark 7:21–22. Read the list slowly together and discuss why He locates the problem there instead of in the hands or the diet.*

The list moves from acts to attitudes and back again: evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. Jesus puts an evil thought at the head of the list and pride near the end, which means the catalog is not arranged by how much damage a sin does to a reputation. It is arranged by source. All of it comes from inside.

The reason this matters is that every religion of the hands can be kept by a person whose heart is untouched. Moral behavior management can produce a clean exterior and leave the spring poisoned. Ask the class what they have been trying to fix on the outside, and what it would mean to ask God for a clean heart (Psalm 51:10) rather than a cleaner performance.

Question 2. *The Syrophenician woman answers Jesus with wit and humility rather than offense. What does her reply reveal about her view of Him, and what would it take for us to keep asking when heaven seems to have said no?*

Her reply, that even the little dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs, concedes everything about her standing and concedes nothing about His power. She does not argue that she deserves a seat. She argues that His table is so full that the overflow is enough for her. That is a very high view of Christ, and He names it for what it is.

For application, be careful not to promise that persistence always changes God's answer; Paul asked three times and got a no with a reason (2 Corinthians 12:8-9). The point is the posture. Ask the class where they have quietly stopped praying about something because the first answer looked like a closed door, and whether the closing was God's or their own discouragement.

Question 3. *In 8:4 the disciples ask where anyone could get bread in this wilderness, not long after watching Him feed five thousand. Where do we do the same thing, forgetting last year's provision in this month's panic?*

The disciples had gathered twelve basketfuls of leftovers themselves. Weeks later they stand in another wilderness and calculate the impossibility out loud. Mark is not mocking them; he is describing us. Memory of God's past provision does not automatically transfer to the present crisis, which is exactly why Israel was commanded to build memorials and rehearse the story (Deuteronomy 6:10-12).

Give the class something concrete to do about it. Suggest each person write down three specific occasions when God provided, with dates, and keep the list where the next panic will find it. The antidote to spiritual amnesia is not more emotion; it is a record. Jesus Himself prescribes remembering in 8:18-19.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Mark 7:19 notes that in saying this Jesus declared all foods clean. Read Acts 10:9-16 and Colossians 2:16-17, then explain what that means for how Christians relate to the Old Testament dietary laws.*

Mark's comment means that with this word Jesus set aside the ceremonial distinction between clean and unclean foods. Peter needed the vision of Acts 10 to accept what he had already been told, which shows how deep the habit ran. Colossians 2:16-17 settles the matter for Christians: food, drink, feast days, new moons, and sabbaths were a shadow, and the substance is Christ. The Law of Moses was fulfilled and taken out of the way at the cross (Colossians 2:14), so no Christian is under its dietary code.

2. *Write out the evils Jesus lists in 7:21-22, and mark the ones a respectable church member could commit all week without anyone noticing.*

The thirteen are evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye (envy), blasphemy, pride, and foolishness. At least half can be carried through an entire Sunday undetected: evil thoughts, covetousness, deceit, envy, pride, and foolishness in the biblical sense of moral senselessness. That is precisely the point of the passage. The sins that ruin people quietly are the ones no committee will ever notice.

3. *Compare the feeding of the five thousand in Mark 6:35-44 with the feeding of the four thousand in 8:1-9. Note every difference you can find: the crowd, the region, the number of loaves, and the baskets.*

In chapter 6 there are five loaves and two fish, five thousand men, Jewish territory near Bethsaida, green grass, and twelve small baskets left over. In chapter 8 there are seven loaves and a few small fish, four thousand people, Gentile country in the Decapolis, no mention of grass, and seven large hampers left over. The crowd in chapter 8 has been with Him three days. Jesus treats them as two separate events in 8:19-20, which settles the question.

4. *In 7:37 the people say He has done all things well. Trace exactly what Jesus did in 7:31-37, step by step, and notice how much of it He did away from the crowd.*

Jesus takes the man aside from the crowd, puts His fingers in his ears, spits and touches his tongue, looks up to heaven, sighs, and says Ephphatha, be opened. Nearly all of it is private and physical, addressed to a man who could not hear a word of instruction. Jesus communicates in the only language the man could receive. Then He charges them to tell no one, and they cannot stop talking.

5. *Jesus said defilement starts inside. Identify one appetite you have been managing on the surface, and name the specific step you will take this week to deal with its root instead.*

Answers will vary and should not be reported to the class. Listen for a root rather than a symptom: not “I will watch less television” but “I will stop feeding the appetite that sends me there at eleven at night.” Encourage each person to pair the step with accountability, since the entire passage argues that what is hidden inside will not police itself.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Be clear that the Law of Moses, including its food laws, is fulfilled and no longer binding (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13; Romans 7:4–6). Do not let a class bind Old Covenant regulation on Christians, and do not let anyone dismiss the Old Testament as useless either (Romans 15:4).
- The exchange with the Syrophenician woman is often misread as a slur. Explain the setting and the diminutive, note Jesus’ own stated order of ministry (Matthew 15:24; Romans 1:16), and let the woman’s faith be the point.
- Do not allegorize the loaves and the baskets into the Lord’s Supper or into hidden numerology. Mark treats both feedings as real events with a plain lesson about who Jesus is.
- The miracles here, as everywhere in the Gospels, confirm the messenger and His message (John 20:30–31; Hebrews 2:3–4). Handle any question about miracles today from that framework rather than from experience.

Stewards and a Little Leaven

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 4 closes the argument that began in chapter 1. The Corinthians had been grading their preachers like debate contestants, and Paul dismantles the whole exercise. Ministers are under-rowers and household stewards. A steward does not own the goods and does not set the standard; he simply handles what belongs to his master, and the only question that matters is whether he was faithful with it. Paul is so unimpressed by human evaluation that he will not even trust his own (4:3–4).

Then comes one of the sharpest paragraphs Paul ever wrote, the contrast in 4:8–13. The Corinthians are full, rich, reigning as kings. The apostles are last, condemned men in the arena, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, working with their hands, the filth of the world. Paul is not complaining. He is showing them what the cross looks like when it is actually carried, and then he calls them to imitate him (4:16).

Chapter 5 turns to a case so plain that even the pagans were scandalized. A man has his father's wife, and the church is puffed up. Paul's instruction is unambiguous: assemble, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, purge out the old leaven. But note both stated aims. The man is to be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus, and the congregation is to be kept from being permeated by what it tolerates. Discipline in the New Testament is surgery, not execution.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Corinth was a wealthy port city with a reputation for sexual license even among Greeks; the church was young, gifted, and badly divided.
- Paul writes from Ephesus about A.D. 55, roughly five years after establishing the congregation (Acts 18).
- The sin of 5:1 is a man living with his stepmother, forbidden by the Law of Moses (Leviticus 18:8) and by Roman law as well, which is why Paul says it is not even named among the Gentiles.
- “Delivering to Satan” (5:5) is Paul's way of describing removal from the fellowship of the church into the realm outside it; the same phrase appears in 1 Timothy 1:20 with a stated corrective purpose.
- The leaven imagery draws on Passover, when all leaven was searched out and removed from the house (Exodus 12:15; 13:7).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul says the one thing required of a steward is that he be found faithful (4:2). If faithfulness rather than visible results were the measure, what would change about how you serve this congregation?*

Faithfulness is measurable in a completely different currency than success. A steward is asked whether he handled his master's goods according to his master's will, not whether the numbers grew. That standard protects a preacher from despair in a hard field and from pride in an easy one, and it protects a congregation from evaluating men by personality.

Bring it down to the members. The teacher with four in the class, the woman who visits shut-ins nobody thanks her for, the man who sets up chairs: none of them will be assessed by visibility. Ask the class to name one area where they have been measuring themselves by results and to restate the standard as faithfulness. Then ask whether that makes the work easier or harder, because for some people it makes it harder.

Question 2. *The Corinthians were puffed up over the very situation they should have mourned. How does Paul reframe what love actually requires here, and what does he say in 5:5 the goal of the action is?*

Paul says they should have mourned (5:2). That single word reframes everything. Their tolerance was not compassion; it was pride in their own broad-mindedness, and it left a brother in sin and the church at risk. Genuine love grieves. It also acts, because 5:5 states the purpose: that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. The action aims at the man's salvation, not his humiliation.

Expect discomfort in the room, and do not rush past it. Many members have seen discipline done badly or not at all. Say plainly that the process is the congregation's, exercised under the elders, applied to a member living in unrepentant sin, carried out with grief and prayer, and always aimed at restoration (Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:14–15). Then stay away from naming individuals or rehearsing old cases.

Question 3. *In 5:9–13 Paul draws a sharp line between the immoral man outside the church and the man who wears the name of brother. Why do we find that distinction so easy to reverse, treating outsiders harshly and insiders as untouchable?*

Paul had to correct a misunderstanding of his earlier letter. He never meant that Christians should avoid immoral people in the world; that would require leaving the world, and it would end evangelism. His concern is the man who bears the name of brother and lives in open sin, because the church's witness is bound up with what it approves.

The reversal is easy because outsiders cost us nothing and insiders cost us relationships. It is far simpler to be indignant about the culture than to have one hard conversation with someone who sits three rows back. Ask the class which direction their indignation usually points, and what 5:12 says about the boundary of their responsibility.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 1 Corinthians 4:6–7 and write out the three questions of verse 7. How would honest answers to those three cure a congregation of party spirit?*

Verse 7 asks: who makes you different from another, what do you have that you did not receive, and why do you boast as if you had not received it? The three questions remove every basis for party spirit at once. Talent, opportunity, background, and even faith itself came to each person by gift, so comparison becomes absurd. A congregation that answers those three honestly has no material left to build factions with.

2. *Trace the description of apostolic life in 4:9–13. Count the hardships, and note what Paul says they do in response to reviling, persecution, and slander.*

Paul lists being made a spectacle, counted last, fools for Christ's sake, weak, dishonored, hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, beaten, homeless, laboring with their own hands, reviled, persecuted, slandered, treated as the world's refuse. That is fourteen or more depending on how you count. Their response is threefold: being reviled, they bless; being persecuted, they endure; being defamed, they entreat. That is the same pattern Jesus taught in Matthew 5:44 and lived out in 1 Peter 2:23.

3. *Compare 1 Corinthians 5:5 with 2 Corinthians 2:6–8. What seems to have happened to the disciplined man later, and what does that tell you about the purpose of the whole procedure?*

In 2 Corinthians 2:6–8 Paul speaks of a man punished by the majority who now needs forgiveness and comfort, lest he be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Most conclude this is the same man, restored. Whether or not it is, the principle is the same: the goal was always repentance and return. Discipline that has no path back is not the discipline the New Testament describes.

4. *Paul uses Passover language in 5:6–8. Read Exodus 12:15 and explain what the leaven pictured then and what Paul says it pictures in a congregation now.*

At Passover, Israel removed every trace of leaven from the house, a picture of separating from what belonged to the old life in Egypt. Paul says Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us, and that the feast is therefore to be kept with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. The leaven he names in a congregation is malice and wickedness, and his

warning is that a small amount left alone will work through the entire lump. Tolerated sin does not stay where you put it.

5. Withdrawal is the congregation's work under its elders, not one member's private project. Name one thing you can do this week that supports that work rather than substitutes for it: a prayer, a conversation with an elder, or a silence you will keep.

Answers will vary. Listen for humility and for restraint. Support looks like praying by name, refusing to gossip about the case, respecting the elders' judgment, and being ready to receive a repentant person warmly. Substitution looks like a member deciding on his own who is in and who is out, or using the passage as a weapon in a personal dispute. If the class has never seen this done rightly, say so honestly and teach the text anyway.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- State plainly what 1 Corinthians 5 is and is not. It addresses a member in open, unrepentant sin, and the action belongs to the assembled congregation under the oversight of its elders. It is not a license for individuals to shun people they dislike.
- Hold together 4:5, which forbids judging motives before the Lord comes, and 5:12, which commands judging those inside. The first concerns hidden motives; the second concerns open conduct. Confusing them produces either a church that judges nothing or one that judges everything.
- Describe the sin of 5:1 in a single clear sentence and move on. The passage requires no detail, and the class will follow your lead on tone.
- Keep restoration in front of the class at every step (5:5; 2 Corinthians 2:6–8; Galatians 6:1; James 5:19–20). Any discussion that ends in satisfaction rather than sorrow has gone wrong somewhere.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Samuel 18–24 · Psalm 26–28 · Mark 8:11–9:13 · 1 Corinthians 6:1–7:16

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