

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 40 OF 104

An Understanding Heart

Week 40 of 104 • 38% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	1 Kings 1-5
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 29-30
Gospels	Mark 9:14-50
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 7:17-8:13

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Somewhere in the night at Gibeon a young king is told he may ask for anything, and he asks for a heart that listens. Not money. Not a long life. Not the heads of his enemies. A listening heart. Hold that scene all week, because everything else you read measures greatness with the same strange ruler. The disciples argue about rank on the road while Jesus is telling them plainly that He is going to be killed, and He answers by setting a child in the middle of them. Paul writes to a congregation full of people who are entirely right about idols and tells them that being right is not the point, since knowledge inflates and only love builds. And David, hauled up out of a pit, sings that God turned his mourning into dancing.

How to use this guide: Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the "Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study" questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT 1 Kings 1-5

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

David is old and failing, and his son Adonijah decides not to wait. Nathan and Bathsheba move quickly, Solomon is anointed at Gihon while Adonijah's party is still eating, and the attempted coup collapses at the sound of a trumpet. David gives his son a charge and dies, and old scores are settled. Then at Gibeon God appears to Solomon in a dream and offers him anything, and Solomon asks for an understanding heart.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. God offers Solomon anything he wants (3:5). Talk through what he asks for, what he deliberately does not ask for, and what your own answer would honestly be at three in the morning with nobody listening.
2. David's charge in 2:1-4 ties the future of the throne to keeping God's word. Trace exactly what he tells Solomon the condition is, and discuss why a dying father so often names the very thing he most wishes he had done himself.

3. Solomon asks for a listening heart so he can discern between good and evil. Where in your ordinary week do you most need that kind of discernment, and what would you have to quiet in order to hear anything at all?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Chapter 1 opens with Adonijah exalting himself and saying, "I will be king." List everything he does to make it happen, then read 2 Samuel 15:1 and note how much of it he copied from his older brother.
2. Read 1 Kings 3:5–14 and list what God gave Solomon beyond what he asked for. Compare the principle Jesus states in Matthew 6:33.
3. The case of the two mothers in 3:16–28 shows wisdom working in real time. Trace Solomon's method step by step, and explain how he got to the truth without a single witness.
4. Notice that 3:1 records a marriage alliance with Pharaoh's daughter and 3:2–3 mentions sacrificing at the high places. Consider why the writer would set those two details immediately before the greatest night of Solomon's life.
5. Solomon asked for something that would make him more useful to others rather than more comfortable himself. Write out the prayer you have actually been praying this month, then write the prayer you ought to be praying, and pray the second one every day this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 29–30

Thunder, Then Morning

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Psalm 29 is a thunderstorm set to music. The voice of the Lord sounds seven times, breaking cedars, shaking a wilderness, striking like lightning, until the whole scene resolves into a single picture of the Lord enthroned, giving strength and peace to His people. Psalm 30 is quieter and more personal. David has been in a pit, has cried out, and has been lifted. He admits what comfort had done to him, remembers what the silence of God felt like, and ends astonished that mourning can be turned into dancing.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The phrase “the voice of the Lord” sounds seven times in Psalm 29. Read them in order and describe the God who emerges, and then talk about what that picture does to the size of whatever you are worried about today.
2. In Psalm 30:6 David admits, “In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.” Why is comfort so quietly dangerous to faith, and where do you hear that same sentence running under your own thinking?
3. Psalm 30:5 says weeping may last for a night but joy comes in the morning. How can we say that to a grieving friend without cheapening the night that person is actually sitting in?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Count the occurrences of “the voice of the Lord” in Psalm 29 and list what that voice does each time. Against the storm gods the surrounding nations feared, what is this psalm claiming?
2. Psalm 29 closes with the Lord giving strength and peace to His people. Read Mark 4:39 and note who else spoke to wind and water and was obeyed.
3. The title of Psalm 30 connects it with the dedication of the house. Trace the psalm’s movement from crying out, to healing, to dancing, and mark the verse where David admits what he had learned about himself.
4. In Psalm 30:9 David argues that dust cannot praise God. Read Psalm 6:5 alongside 2 Timothy 1:10, and explain what an Old Testament believer did and did not yet know about life beyond death.
5. Psalm 30 was written to be sung at a dedication, that is, to say publicly what God had done. Write down three specific deliverances from your own life, with dates, and tell one of them out loud to someone this week.

GOSPELS Mark 9:14–50

Help My Unbelief

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus comes down from the mountain into an argument. A father has brought his son to the disciples, they could not help him, and the boy is thrown to the ground in front of everyone. The father’s confession, “Lord, I believe;

help my unbelief,” is one of the most honest sentences in the Bible. Afterward Jesus tells the Twelve again that He will be killed, and they argue about which of them is greatest. He answers with a child.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. The father cries out, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief” (9:24). Is that a contradiction, and what does his honesty teach us about praying when our faith is thinner than we want to admit?
2. While Jesus is telling them He will be killed, the disciples argue on the road about who is greatest. Look at what He does with a child in 9:36–37, and talk about where that same competition runs quietly through a congregation today.
3. In 9:43–48 Jesus speaks of cutting off a hand and tearing out an eye. He is plainly not commanding self-mutilation, so what is He commanding, and what would obeying it actually cost you this week?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace the father’s words through 9:17–24. Notice how his request moves from “if You can do anything” to his final cry, and note the sentence of Jesus that came between the two.
2. Read Mark 9:35 with Mark 10:43–45 and Philippians 2:5–8, and then state the kingdom’s standard of greatness in one sentence of your own.
3. In 9:38–41 John reports that they stopped a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not one of their group. List the reasons Jesus gives for not forbidding him, and consider how party spirit still shows itself among Christians.
4. Jesus warns about causing one of these little ones to stumble (9:42). Read Romans 14:13 and 1 Corinthians 8:12, and list concrete ways an older Christian can trip a younger one.
5. Jesus says to have salt in yourselves and be at peace with one another (9:50). Name the one relationship in this congregation where you are not at peace, and the specific step you will take toward it before next Sunday.

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Paul finishes his answer about marriage with a principle repeated three times: let each one walk where God called him. Circumcision and slavery, marriage and singleness, all of it matters less than keeping God's commandments where you stand. He speaks frankly about the advantages of the unmarried life without ever making it superior. Then he turns to meat sacrificed to idols. The Corinthians are right about idols, and being right is not enough. Knowledge inflates. Love builds.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Three times in 7:17–24 Paul tells the Corinthians to remain where God called them. How is that different from resignation, and where do we burn energy wishing for a different life instead of serving God in the one we have?
2. Paul writes in 8:1 that knowledge puffs up but love builds up. Describe a time you have watched that happen, and talk about how a congregation can be well taught and humble at the same time.
3. Paul says he would give up meat permanently rather than trip a brother (8:13). Which of your own liberties would you surrender for someone whose conscience is weaker, and what makes that surrender so difficult?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the advantages Paul names for remaining unmarried in 7:32–35, and note carefully the reason he gives in verse 35 for saying any of it.
2. Paul says an idol is nothing in the world (8:4). Read 1 Corinthians 10:19–20 and explain how both of those statements can be true at the same time.
3. Trace the word conscience through 8:7–12. What happens to a weak conscience when it is pressured, and against whom does Paul say the stronger brother is sinning?
4. Compare Romans 14:1–4 with 1 Corinthians 8. Who is called weak in each passage, and what does the stronger Christian owe him?
5. Name one thing you do that is genuinely permitted but that a younger or weaker Christian could easily misread. Decide this week whether love asks you to lay it down, and tell one person what you decided.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Kings 6–10 · Psalm 31 · Mark 10:1–31 · 1 Corinthians 9:1–10:22

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