

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 41 OF 104

What You Will Not Give Up

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Kings 6–10
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 31
Gospels	Mark 10:1–31
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 9:1–10:22

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to get every person in the room to name, silently and specifically, the thing he will not give up. The readings supply four mirrors. Solomon built God a house and then built himself a bigger one. The rich man kept his possessions and lost what he came asking about. Paul had rights and refused to use them. David, with nothing left to protect, handed over his very spirit. The class does not need more information about surrender. It needs one name written on one piece of paper.

Doctrinally, three matters call for a steady hand. Marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman, and Jesus settled it from Genesis; teach the standard plainly and refuse to litigate individual cases in a classroom. Children are held up by Jesus as the model of innocence and reception, which rules out any doctrine of inherited guilt. And 1 Corinthians 9:27 with 10:12 rules out the notion that a saved person cannot fall; the warning is real and the way of escape in 10:13 is just as real.

Formationally, the thread is the open hand. The temple was magnificent and temporary; the possessions were real and could not come along; the rights were genuine and were laid down anyway. Ask your class this before dismissing, and give them the silence to answer it honestly: if Jesus looked at you the way He looked at that man in Mark 10, with love, and named one thing, what would He name, and what is the first small step toward letting go of it this week?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Mark 10:1–31 first. It contains the week's sharpest teaching and the questions your members are most likely to be asked at work. State at the outset that individual marriage situations belong with the elders privately, then teach Genesis, the children, and the rich man as one movement.

Second session: Take up 1 Corinthians 9:1–10:22 second. It answers the natural objection to Mark 10, that surrender is for spiritual heroes, by showing an apostle who knew he could be disqualified. Give the last twenty minutes to 10:1–13 and let 10:12 and 10:13 stand together.

The other two readings: 1 Kings 6–10 and Psalm 31 read well alone. Point out that the temple, magnificent as it was, became a ruin exactly as God warned in 9:6–9, and that the church is now God's dwelling. Suggest members read Psalm 31 slowly and notice that Jesus died with verse 5 on His lips.

A House for God's Name

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These five chapters are the high point of Israel's history, and the writer wants you to feel the scale. Stone shaped at the quarry so the site stayed silent. Cedar covering every wall so no stone showed. Gold over the cedar. Cherubim fifteen feet tall. Two bronze pillars named Jachin and Boaz, He establishes and In Him is strength. Hundreds of thousands of workmen. Seven years, and then a dedication with sacrifices too numerous to count.

The center of the reading is chapter 8, and the center of chapter 8 is a question. Solomon, who has just finished the most magnificent building in the nation's history, asks whether God will really dwell on earth, and answers himself: the highest heaven cannot contain Him, much less this house. Then he prays through seven situations in which Israel will need mercy, and nearly every one of them begins with the people sinning. Solomon knew what would happen. He built anyway, and he asked God to hear when it did.

Then chapter 9 sets the alternative in writing. If Solomon walks as David walked, the throne is established. If he or his children turn and serve other gods, this house that everyone admires will become a heap of ruins and a proverb among the nations. Chapter 10 ends with the queen of Sheba breathless and the gold piling up. Everything looks permanent. Nothing here is.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Construction begins 480 years after the exodus, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (6:1), roughly 966 B.C.
- The temple followed the pattern of the tabernacle enlarged: a porch, a holy place, and the most holy place containing the ark.
- The ark held the two tablets of stone (8:9); the temple was built to house the covenant, not an image, which set Israel apart from every surrounding nation.
- Solomon's dedication prayer anticipates defeat, drought, famine, captivity, and repentance, and it asks God to hear from heaven in each case.
- This temple stood until Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it in 586 B.C., exactly as 9:7-9 warned.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Standing inside the building he spent seven years on, Solomon prays, "Will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain Thee" (8:27). How does a man hold those two realities together without losing either one?*

Solomon holds both truths because he understands what the house is for. God is not contained by it; He has chosen to put His name there (9:3), which is a matter of covenant, not of real estate. The building is a designated meeting place granted by grace, not a residence God needed. Isaiah 66:1-2 says the same thing centuries later, and Stephen quotes it to a crowd that had made the opposite mistake.

The practical use of this for your class is the question of what a building is and is not. A church building is a convenience, not a sanctuary in the Old Testament sense, and God does not dwell in a room. He dwells in His people (1 Corinthians 3:16). Ask the class whether they behave more reverently in a building than in a home, and what that reveals about where they think God actually is.

Question 2. *Read God's second appearance to Solomon in 9:3-9. Lay the promise and the warning side by side, and talk about how that warning reads differently now that you know how Solomon's story ends.*

The promise is that God has heard the prayer, hallowed the house, and put His name there perpetually, and that if Solomon walks in integrity of heart as David did, his throne will be established. The warning is equally specific: if

they turn and serve other gods, Israel will be cut off from the land, the house will become a heap of ruins, and everyone who passes by will ask what happened here.

Knowing the ending changes how the warning sounds. It stops being a formality and becomes a tragedy already in motion. God said it plainly, in advance, twice, to the wisest man of his generation, and it happened anyway. Ask your class what warning they have already heard clearly and are already discounting, and remind them that knowing better has never once been the same as doing better.

Question 3. *Solomon deliberately includes the foreigner who comes from a far country because of God's name (8:41-43). Measure this congregation against that prayer. What would a visitor who knows nothing about us actually experience on a Sunday morning?*

The prayer is remarkable for its time. Solomon asks God to hear the foreigner, a man with no covenant standing, precisely so that all the peoples of the earth may know God's name and fear Him as Israel does. The temple was meant to have a door facing outward. Isaiah 56:7 says the same thing, and Jesus quotes it while driving out the merchants who had crowded the only court a Gentile could enter.

Get concrete about Sunday. Where does a visitor park, who speaks to him, does anyone use words he cannot possibly know, will he be handed something or left alone, and will anyone follow up? Ask the class to imagine someone who has never held a Bible. Then ask two or three members to sit in the back next Sunday and simply notice.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the situations Solomon names in 8:31-53 in which he expects people to pray toward this house. What runs through nearly all of them?*

Solomon lists an oath taken before the altar, defeat by an enemy, drought, famine or plague or blight or siege, the prayer of a foreigner, a nation going out to battle, and captivity in a far land. Nearly every one of them presumes that the people have sinned and are coming back. The prayer is built around repentance and God's willingness to hear it, which tells you what Solomon expected of his own nation, and what he trusted about God.

2. *Read 1 Kings 8:10-11 beside Exodus 40:34-35. Note what happens each time God takes possession of a place, and what the priests were unable to do.*

In both cases the glory of the Lord filled the place so completely that the priests could not stand to minister. The cloud is God taking visible possession of what He has claimed. It happened at the tabernacle when it was finished, and again here. Notice that the human work stops when God arrives; ministry gives way to presence. That is worth more than a passing comment in a class that measures worship by its program.

3. *Stephen quotes Solomon's insight in Acts 7:47-50 and Paul makes the same argument in Acts 17:24. Trace both, then read 1 Corinthians 3:16 and Ephesians 2:19-22 and state where God dwells now.*

Stephen says the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands and quotes Isaiah 66; Paul tells Athens the same thing, that God does not dwell in temples made with hands, nor is He served by human hands as if He needed anything. Under the new covenant God dwells in His people: the congregation is the temple of God and the Spirit dwells in it (1 Corinthians 3:16), and the church is built together as a habitation of God through the Spirit (Ephesians 2:22).

4. *Trace the amounts of gold, horses, and wives mentioned in chapters 9 and 10, then read Deuteronomy 17:16-17. Which of the three warnings given to Israel's kings is Solomon already ignoring?*

Deuteronomy 17:16-17 warned Israel's king not to multiply horses, not to multiply wives, and not to greatly multiply silver and gold. First Kings 10 records six hundred sixty-six talents of gold in a single year, a throne of ivory overlaid with gold, silver as common as stones, and horses imported from Egypt in quantity. Two of the three prohibitions are already broken here, and chapter 11 opens with the third. The writer is not admiring the wealth. He is building an indictment.

5. *Solomon gave seven years to God's house and thirteen to his own. Add up the hours you gave last week to your house and to the Lord's work. Name the one change to next week's calendar that would move the ratio, and put it in writing.*

Answers will vary, and most people will be startled by the arithmetic. Listen for honesty rather than guilt. The useful response is one specific slot moved on one specific day: an evening given to a visit, a Saturday morning given to a class preparation, an hour given to a struggling member. Avoid letting the class reduce this to attendance; Solomon's problem was not that he skipped services.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The temple belonged to the Old Covenant, which was fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8:13; 9:1-10). Do not transfer its priesthood, its altar, its sacrifices, or its worship arrangements into the church. The New Testament, not Solomon's temple, authorizes Christian worship.
- That includes the instruments mentioned in connection with temple worship. They belonged to that shadow and to that system, along with the incense and the animal sacrifices. Christians sing, teaching and admonishing one another, as the New Testament directs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). State this plainly and without heat when it arises.
- Do not let anyone connect this text to predictions of a rebuilt temple in a future earthly kingdom. Hebrews 9 and 10 declare the old system obsolete, and Christ reigns now over His church (Colossians 1:13, 18).
- Solomon's wealth is reported, not prescribed. Resist any use of these chapters to suggest that God's favor shows up in a bank balance; chapter 11 is the commentary on chapter 10.

Into Thy Hand I Commit

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 31 is a lament, and it refuses to be tidy. It opens with as strong a statement of trust as David ever wrote, collapses into some of the bleakest description in the Psalter, and then climbs back out. Anyone who has walked with God through a long trouble recognizes the shape immediately. Faith is not a straight line, and Scripture does not pretend it is.

Verse 5 is the verse the whole psalm is remembered for. In David's mouth it is a living man handing his life over to God for safekeeping while enemies close in. On the cross it becomes the last sentence of the Son of God. Stephen borrows it as the stones fall, changing only the name he addresses it to. Peter turns it into an instruction for suffering Christians: commit the keeping of your souls to Him in well doing.

The middle section is where the pastoral value lies. David says his strength fails, his bones are consumed, his neighbors dread him, his friends flee from him in the street, and he is like a broken pot nobody bothers to pick up. Then verse 14: "But I trusted in Thee, O Lord." The word but carries the whole psalm. Nothing about his circumstances has changed at that point in the text. What changes is where he fixes his attention.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 31 is an individual lament with a Davidic superscription, addressed to the chief musician.
- The setting fits David's years as a fugitive; verse 21 mentions a strong city, which some connect to Keilah (1 Samuel 23) where he was betrayed.
- Verse 5 is quoted by Jesus in Luke 23:46, the last of His seven sayings from the cross.
- Verse 13, "fear was on every side," is a phrase Jeremiah uses repeatedly (Jeremiah 20:10), and Paul's language in 2 Corinthians 4:8–9 runs along the same lines.
- Laments make up the largest single category in the Psalms. God gave His people more songs for trouble than for anything else.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5 as He died (Luke 23:46). Read the verse first in David's own setting, then discuss what it means that the Lord chose a line from this psalm to die with.*

In David's setting the words are about preservation. Commit is the language of entrusting something valuable to someone for safekeeping, the way a man hands a purse to a friend before a fight. David is asking God to hold his life while other men try to take it, and the reason he gives is that God has redeemed him, the Lord God of truth.

When Jesus takes the line to the cross, He does what godly Jews had done for a thousand years: He prays Scripture when His own words are gone. But there is more. He is not asking to be preserved from death; He is handing Himself over in the middle of it. Ask the class what it would mean to pray that sentence not as a rescue request but as a surrender, and note that Jesus said it out loud so that everyone standing there could hear.

Question 2. *David says in verse 12, "I am forgotten as a dead man out of mind; I am like a broken vessel." Why would God preserve language that raw in a hymnbook, and what does it offer to someone in this room who feels exactly that today?*

Because people in those conditions need words, and most of them cannot find any. A hymnbook that contains only triumph leaves a suffering believer feeling like a fraud on Sunday morning. God gave His people songs that say, out loud and in public worship, that a faithful man can feel discarded. That is not weak faith; it is honest faith, and Scripture puts it in the canon.

Be alert as you teach this. Someone in the class is in verse 12 right now, and the most valuable thing you can do is let the verse stand without hurrying to verse 24. Say plainly that God is not offended by this language, that He inspired it. Then read verse 14 slowly and let them hear where the psalm goes next, without suggesting the trip is quick.

Question 3. *Verse 15 says, “My times are in Thy hand.” Name the part of your future you are most tempted to keep hold of yourself, and talk about what handing it to God would look like on an ordinary Monday.*

The sentence is short and enormous. David says it while men are plotting his death, which means he is not describing a calm life; he is describing who controls the calendar of a dangerous one. Times here means the whole run of a life, its seasons and turns, its deliverances and its delays. Acts 1:7 uses the same idea when Jesus tells the apostles the times are in the Father’s authority.

Make Monday specific. For one person, surrender looks like stopping the nightly rehearsal of a worst case. For another, it is refusing to manipulate an outcome that belongs to God. For another, it is finally scheduling the appointment he has been afraid to schedule, because a man whose times are in God’s hand can afford to know the truth. Ask what the class is protecting, and what protecting it is costing them.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the words rock, fortress, and strength through Psalm 31. Then read Psalm 18:2 and note how consistently David reached for the same handful of images.*

David calls God his rock (verses 2 and 3), his house of defense and fortress (verses 2 and 3), and his strength (verse 4), and asks to be hidden in the secret of His presence (verse 20). Psalm 18:2 stacks the same words: rock, fortress, deliverer, strength, buckler, horn of salvation, high tower. These are the pictures of a man who spent years in the wilderness hiding among literal rocks. He learned the vocabulary where he learned the God.

2. *Psalm 31:5 is quoted in Luke 23:46 and echoed in Acts 7:59 and 1 Peter 4:19. List the three settings, and name what all three have in common.*

Luke 23:46 has Jesus dying; Acts 7:59 has Stephen being stoned and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”; 1 Peter 4:19 tells suffering Christians to commit the keeping of their souls to a faithful Creator in well doing. All three involve suffering that will not be relieved, and all three respond to it not by demanding rescue but by handing the self over to God. Notice also that Stephen addresses to Jesus the prayer David addressed to the Lord, which says a great deal about how the early church viewed Christ.

3. *List the physical effects David describes in verses 9 and 10. Consider what the psalm is willing to admit about the relationship between grief and the body.*

He says his eye is consumed with grief, along with his soul and his body; his life is spent with grief and his years with sighing; his strength fails and his bones are consumed. Scripture is not embarrassed by the fact that sorrow lands in the body. Elijah under the juniper tree needed sleep and food before he needed a sermon (1 Kings 19:5–8). A class member carrying grief should hear that exhaustion is not a spiritual failure.

4. *The psalm swings repeatedly between complaint and confidence. Mark each place it turns, and count how many times David changes direction before the end.*

The major turns come at verses 6, 9, 14, 19, and 21, with the final resolution in verses 23 and 24. Depending on how finely you count, David changes direction four or five times in twenty-four verses. The lesson is in the pattern, not the number: trust, collapse, trust again. A believer who expects his faith to move in one direction will conclude he has failed the first time it doubles back.

5. *Verse 24 commands courage to everyone who hopes in the Lord. Name one thing you have been avoiding because you are afraid of it, and set the day this week you will do it anyway.*

Answers will vary. Press for one thing with a date attached. Common answers include a medical appointment, a conversation with an estranged family member, a confession, an apology, and telling a coworker what one believes. Note that verse 24 pairs courage with hope in the Lord; the command is not to feel brave but to act while afraid, because of who is holding your times.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Name the genre. This is a lament, and its complaints are not a lapse in faith but a legitimate form of prayer God preserved for His people.
- Verses 17 and 18 ask that the wicked be silenced and ashamed. Handle it as an appeal to God's justice by a man under attack, not as a model for private vengeance (Romans 12:19).
- Jesus quoting verse 5 does not make every line of the psalm a prediction about Him. Verse 10 speaks of the writer's own iniquity. Teach it as a psalm of David that the Lord took on His lips, which is different from a messianic prophecy.
- Do not rush the class from verse 12 to verse 24. Someone is living in the middle of the psalm, and the speed of your teaching will tell them whether this class is a safe place to say so.

Marriage, Children, and Riches

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Mark 10 gathers three encounters that press on the three things people hold tightest: their marriages, their children, and their money. Each begins with someone approaching Jesus, and each ends with an answer nobody expected. The chapter sits on the road to Jerusalem, which is to say the shadow of the cross lies over all of it. Read the three accounts in one sitting and the pattern is hard to miss: in every one of them, somebody has to let go of something.

On divorce, Jesus refuses the rabbinical argument entirely. The schools debated what counted as an acceptable cause; Jesus goes to the beginning, to God making them male and female and joining two into one flesh. Moses permitted the certificate because of hardness of heart; it was a concession regulating a disaster, not a divine design. What God has joined, man is not to separate. Matthew's parallel records the one exception the Lord stated, and a careful teacher will read Matthew 19:9 aloud alongside this passage.

The children and the rich man belong together. Jesus says the kingdom belongs to such as these and that no one enters it except as a child receives, and then a successful man demonstrates the opposite: coming with a résumé, asking what to do, and unable to let go. The disciples are astonished, and Jesus does not soften it. With men it is impossible. With God all things are possible. Peter's protest that they have left everything gets a warm and generous answer, with persecutions included in the list of blessings.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Two rabbinic schools debated divorce in Jesus' day, one allowing it for almost any cause and one restricting it to sexual immorality. The question in 10:2 is an attempt to pull Him into that fight, and possibly into trouble with Herod Antipas.
- Jesus grounds marriage in Genesis 1:27 and 2:24, which He treats as historical and binding, not cultural.
- Mark gives the general principle; Matthew 19:9 supplies the stated exception. Both are inspired, and the fuller statement must be read with the shorter one.
- Children in that culture had no legal standing. That is precisely why Jesus uses them as the picture of kingdom reception: they receive because they have no leverage.
- The "eye of a needle" is a literal sewing needle. There is no evidence for a gate in Jerusalem by that name; the saying is a deliberate impossibility, which is why the disciples react as they do.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *The Pharisees ask whether it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Rather than arguing about the certificate Moses allowed, Jesus goes back to Genesis. Why does He start there, and what does that say about where every question about marriage has to begin?*

He starts at the beginning because that is where God's design is stated, and design settles questions that case law never will. The Pharisees wanted to argue about grounds; Jesus reframes it as a question about what God did. He made them male and female. He joined them. The two become one flesh, which means divorce is not the dissolving of a contract but the tearing of a union.

The practical force is that marriage questions cannot start with what a person can get away with. They start with what God made. Ask the class how differently a couple would handle a hard year if they genuinely believed God had joined them, and what a congregation ought to be doing for couples long before anyone reaches a lawyer. Keep the conversation on God's design and on prevention, and hold individual situations for private conversation with the elders.

Question 2. *Jesus was indignant when the disciples turned the children away (10:14). What provoked a reaction that strong, and what did He mean by telling grown men to receive the kingdom like a little child?*

The disciples were protecting His time and, without meaning to, communicating that these people did not matter enough. Jesus was indignant, a strong word Mark uses only here of Him. He takes the children in His arms, puts His hands on them, and blesses them, and says the kingdom belongs to such as these.

Receiving the kingdom as a child means receiving it with empty hands. A child brings no credentials, no bargaining position, and no suspicion; he simply receives what is given. Adults come with résumés, exactly like the man in the next paragraph. Ask the class what they are still trying to bring to God as a qualification. Note too what this passage says about children's innocence: Jesus holds them up as the model, not as sinners needing to be cleansed.

Question 3. *The rich man went away grieving because he had great possessions, and Jesus, who loved him, let him go. What does that tell us about the terms of following Him, and what is the thing He might name if He looked at you?*

It tells us that Jesus never lowered the price to keep a promising prospect, and that He loved the man while He named it. That combination is the whole gospel. He did not chase him down the road with an easier offer, and He did not despise him. He told the truth and let the man decide, which is what love does when the stakes are eternal.

Then turn it on the room, gently and without a hint of superiority. For most people it is not money in the abstract; it is a standard of living, a plan, a relationship God has fenced off, a grudge held for decades, a career that runs the family calendar. Ask each person to write the word down rather than say it. Then remind them of verse 27, because the point of the passage is not that the rich cannot be saved but that nobody can save himself.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write Mark 10:6–9 out in your own words, then read Matthew 19:9 and note the single exception Jesus states there.*

The substance is that from the beginning of creation God made them male and female, that a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, that the two become one flesh so they are no longer two, and that what God has joined together no man is to separate. Matthew 19:9 adds the stated exception: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery. Both passages come from the same Lord on the same occasion, and neither may be used to cancel the other.

2. *Trace everything Jesus does with the children in 10:13–16. List each separate action, and consider what it cost Him in a day already crowded with teaching.*

He was displeased with the disciples, He called the children to Himself, He said the kingdom belongs to such as these, He warned that no one enters except as a child receives, He took them up in His arms, He laid His hands on them, and He blessed them. Every one of those costs time, and He was on the road to Jerusalem to die. He stopped anyway. A man's priorities are visible in what he refuses to hurry past.

3. *The man asks what he must do to inherit eternal life. List the commandments Jesus names, notice which one of the ten He leaves out, and read Exodus 20:17 before you decide why.*

Jesus names do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not bear false witness, do not defraud, and honor your father and mother. He omits the tenth commandment, do not covet, and covetousness is precisely what the next instruction exposes. In place of it He inserts "do not defraud," which points at how wealth is often gathered. Jesus knew which commandment this man had never examined, and He went there last.

4. *Read Mark 10:23–27 alongside 1 Timothy 6:6–10 and 17–19. Where exactly does Paul locate the danger, and what does he tell wealthy Christians to do rather than simply divest?*

Paul locates the danger not in money but in the desire to be rich, which plunges men into destruction, and in the love of money, which is a root of all kinds of evil. His counsel to those who are already rich is not to divest but to stop being highminded, to stop trusting in uncertain riches, to trust God, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to distribute and willing to share. Wealth is a stewardship with a strong undertow.

5. *Jesus put His finger on the one thing that man could not surrender. Write down what yours is. Then name one step this week that loosens your grip on it, and take that step before Sunday.*

Answers will vary, and this one stays private. Watch for the difference between a token gesture and an actual loosening: selling something, giving an amount that changes the month, canceling a commitment that has been eating the family, ending a relationship, making a call. Remind the class that Jesus followed the hard word with verse 27 and with the promise of verses 29 and 30. Nobody gives up anything to God at a loss.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Divorce and remarriage is the sharpest issue in this reading. Teach the standard plainly: God's design is one man and one woman for life, and Jesus stated one exception, sexual immorality (Matthew 19:9). Then say out loud, before the discussion begins, that the class will not evaluate anyone's particular situation, and invite anyone with a personal question to come to the elders privately. Nearly every class includes someone in a painful second marriage or a child of divorce. Teach the truth without using it as a club.
- Do not use 10:13–16 to support infant baptism or inherited guilt. Jesus blessed the children; He did not baptize them. They are held up as the pattern of innocence and receptivity, which is the opposite of teaching that they are born guilty (Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 18:3).
- Avoid the popular story about a low gate called the needle's eye. There is no historical support for it, and it blunts the point Jesus was making, which the disciples clearly understood as impossibility.
- Do not let anyone conclude that wealth itself is sin or that poverty is holiness. The problem in the account is not the man's bank balance but what it had done to his heart, and Jesus named it with love rather than contempt.

Lest I Be Disqualified

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 9 looks like a detour and is not. Paul has just told the Corinthians to surrender a liberty for a brother's sake, and now he offers himself as the exhibit. He establishes his apostleship, then his rights, and he does it thoroughly, because a man who waives a right he never had has given up nothing. Only then does he say that he has used none of these things, and that he would rather die than lose the ground of his boasting, which is preaching the gospel free of charge.

Verse 14 must not be lost in the argument: the Lord ordained that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel. Paul's personal choice not to accept support from Corinth does not cancel the principle, and a congregation should not quote chapter 9 to underpay a preacher. Paul chose to work with his hands in a particular place for particular reasons, and he defends the right of others in the same breath.

Then the tone sharpens. Athletes deny themselves for a wreath that wilts. Paul disciplines his body, fearing that after heralding the contest to others he might himself be ruled out. Chapter 10 supplies the historical proof: a whole generation was baptized unto Moses in the cloud and the sea, ate the same spiritual food, drank from the Rock that was Christ, and God was not pleased with most of them, and their bodies were scattered across the wilderness. Paul's conclusion is verse 12, and it is written for people who are sure they are fine.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul had supported himself in Corinth by tentmaking (Acts 18:3), partly so that no one could accuse him of preaching for money in a city full of traveling philosophers who did.
- The Isthmian games were held near Corinth every two years, which makes the racing and boxing imagery of 9:24–27 immediate and local.
- The examples in 10:6–10 come from Exodus 32 (the golden calf), Numbers 25 (Baal of Peor), Numbers 21 (the serpents), and Numbers 16 (the murmuring).
- “That Rock was Christ” (10:4) identifies Christ as the source of Israel's sustaining provision; Paul is drawing a real connection, not inventing an allegory.
- First Corinthians 10:16–17 is one of the New Testament's clearest statements about the Lord's Supper as a communion in the body and blood of Christ, and about the one loaf picturing the one body.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Paul spends most of chapter 9 proving he has rights and then says he has never used them (9:15). Why take the trouble to establish a right you intend to waive, and where might that pattern apply to us?*

Because giving up something you never possessed costs nothing and proves nothing. Paul's entire argument to the strong brother in chapter 8 depends on his own example being real. He had the right. He proved the right from six different angles. And then he laid it down so that no one in Corinth could say the gospel had a price tag attached.

Ask where this applies now. A Christian may have every right to be angry, to be repaid, to be publicly vindicated, to insist on his preference in a matter of judgment. The question is never only whether he may, but what the exercise of it will do to somebody else. Ask each person to name a right he is currently exercising that he could quietly lay down this month, and what it would purchase for the congregation.

Question 2. *In 9:27 Paul says he disciplines his body so that after preaching to others he himself is not disqualified. If Paul could seriously entertain that possibility, how should that shape what we believe about whether a Christian can fall away?*

It settles it. Paul, an apostle who wrote Scripture, took seriously the possibility that he himself could be disqualified, and he adjusted his life accordingly. The doctrine that a saved person cannot fall does not survive this verse, and it does not survive Galatians 5:4, Hebrews 3:12–14, Hebrews 10:26–31, or 2 Peter 2:20–22 either.

Do not leave the class anxious. The New Testament never teaches that salvation is precarious in the hands of a faithful God; it teaches that it is conditional on continuing in Him. The warnings exist precisely so that people heed them and do not fall. Tie it to 10:13: no temptation has taken you but such as is common, God is faithful, and He always makes the way out. The danger is real, and so is the provision.

Question 3. *First Corinthians 10:1–12 says Israel had the cloud, the sea, the bread, and the water, and most of them still fell in the wilderness. What is Paul warning the Corinthians about, and which verse in that paragraph is aimed straight at confident church members?*

He is warning them that privilege is not protection. The Corinthians had gifts, knowledge, baptism, and the Lord's Supper, and they were sitting in idol temples telling themselves it meant nothing. Paul says Israel had the equivalent of all of it and still ended up scattered across a desert, and that those events were written for our admonition. The verse aimed at confident members is 10:12: let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Press the application at the level of habit, not theory. The people most likely to fall are rarely the ones worried about it. Ask who in the class has known someone who had everything going for him spiritually and is no longer here. Then ask what the first small step away looked like, because it is almost never dramatic.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the rights Paul names in 9:4–14 and the six or seven arguments he uses to prove them, from the soldier and the farmer through the Law and the command of the Lord.*

The rights are: to eat and drink at the churches' expense, to take along a believing wife as the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas did, and to be free from working for a living while preaching. His arguments are drawn from the soldier who does not pay his own wages, the man who plants a vineyard and eats its fruit, the shepherd who drinks of the flock, the Law of Moses about not muzzling the ox, the principle of sowing spiritual things and reaping material things, the priests who live from the temple, and finally the command of the Lord Himself that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

2. *Paul says he became all things to all men (9:19–23). Trace exactly what he adapted, then read Galatians 2:11–14 and note what he flatly refused to adapt.*

He adapted his manner of life, not his message: to the Jews he became as a Jew, to those under the law as under the law, to those without law as without law (while being under law to Christ), and to the weak he became weak. He gave up personal preference and cultural comfort to remove every barrier he could. In Galatians 2:11–14 he confronts Peter to his face for withdrawing from Gentile tables, because that adaptation compromised the truth of the gospel. Method bends; truth does not.

3. *Compare 1 Corinthians 10:1–5 with Exodus 14 and Numbers 14:26–35. List Israel's privileges, and then state what happened to the generation that enjoyed them.*

Israel's privileges: all were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink from the Rock, which was Christ. Five times Paul says all. Then he says that with most of them God was not well pleased, and their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Numbers 14:29–30 records that of the generation twenty years old and upward, only Caleb and Joshua entered the land.

4. Write out 1 Corinthians 10:13 and mark its three separate promises. Name a temptation you have been treating as unique to you, and test it against that verse.

The three promises are: no temptation has overtaken you except what is common to man, God is faithful and will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, and with the temptation He will make the way of escape so you may be able to bear it. Answers about the personal temptation will vary; listen for the word unique, because the belief that one's struggle is unprecedented is usually the beginning of surrendering to it. The verse says otherwise, and it also says the exit exists before the temptation arrives.

5. Paul ran like a man who intended to win and trained his body to that end. Name one specific discipline you will take up this week, and name what you will give up to make room for it.

Answers will vary. The paired structure matters: a discipline taken up and something given up to make room.

Realistic pairs include rising thirty minutes earlier and going to bed earlier, adding a weekly visit and dropping an evening of television, fasting from a habit and using that time in prayer. Discourage grand resolutions. Paul's point in 9:25 is not intensity but training, which is by definition repeated and unspectacular.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This passage is one of the strongest in Scripture against the idea that a Christian cannot fall away. Teach 9:27 and 10:12 plainly, and pair them with 10:13 so the class hears both the warning and the promise.
- Do not let a congregation misuse chapter 9 to justify underpaying a preacher. Verse 14 states the Lord's own ordinance; Paul waived a right that was genuinely his, and he waived it voluntarily.
- In 10:16–17, note that the Lord's Supper is a communion in the body and blood of Christ and that the one loaf pictures the one body. It is a memorial and a participation, not a re-sacrifice of Christ (Hebrews 10:10–14), and the New Testament pattern is to observe it on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
- Do not sensationalize 10:20. Paul's point is that idolatry is not spiritually neutral and that a Christian cannot sit at both tables, not an invitation to speculate about the demonic.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 1 Kings 11–17 · Psalm 32–33 · Mark 10:32–11:14 · 1 Corinthians 10:23–11:34

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