

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 44 OF 104

Open His Eyes

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Kings 1-8
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 35-36
Gospels	Mark 12:18-13:13
General New Testament	1 Corinthians 14

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is perception. Every one of these readings turns on the difference between what is visible and what is actually there. A servant sees an army and misses the fire on the hills. A psalmist looks at a world where liars prosper and has to preach to himself about the mercy that reaches to the heavens. A religious party looks at Exodus 3 for a lifetime and never notices the verb. A rich congregation looks at spiritual gifts and cannot tell the difference between edifying and impressive. By the end of the week your class should be asking a better question than "what does this look like," namely, "what is really going on here."

Doctrinally, two anchors carry the week. The first is the resurrection, which Jesus proves from the books of Moses in Mark 12:26-27 and which underwrites everything a Christian hopes for. The second is 1 Corinthians 14, where you should say clearly and kindly what the miraculous gifts were for, that they confirmed the word and have ceased, and what the chapter directs about order and about the role of women in the assembly. Mark 13:1-13 also begins the Olivet Discourse; handle it as you handled Matthew 24, as the destruction of Jerusalem, with no premillennial framework attached.

Formationally, watch the small people in these readings. A captive servant girl who told her mistress about a prophet. A widow with two coins. A woman in Shunem who built a spare room. A man who would rather say five words people understood than ten thousand that made him look gifted. God keeps noticing exactly the people nobody else is counting. Ask your class this: if Jesus sat down across from your life the way He sat down across from the treasury, what would He see that nobody else in the building knows about, and would you want Him to?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Mark 12:18-13:13 first. It carries the doctrinal weight of the week in the resurrection argument and the greatest commandment, and it ends with the widow and the temple, which is the most teachable pair of scenes in the whole reading. Save Mark 13 itself for a few closing minutes and point ahead to next week.

Second session: Take up 1 Corinthians 14. Tell the class at the start that you will deal directly with tongues and with verses 34 and 35, so nobody spends the hour waiting for it. Build the whole lesson on the word edification, then let chapter 13:8-10 and 1 Timothy 2:11-12 do the rest of the work.

The other two readings: Second Kings 1-8 and Psalms 35 and 36 fit the extended questions well. Encourage the class to read the Elisha chapters at one sitting and to keep a list of who gets helped. Warn them ahead of time about the bears at Bethel and about the bluntness of Psalm 35, and offer to take questions on either next week.

The Prophet's Double Portion

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These chapters are the hinge between two prophets. Elijah is the thunderstorm: fire on Carmel, fire on the captains, a life lived mostly in confrontation with kings. Elisha is the steady rain that follows. He asks for a double portion, which is not twice the power but the inheritance share of the firstborn son, and he receives it by seeing Elijah taken. Then he picks up the mantle, strikes the water, and the Jordan parts again. The school of the prophets at Jericho says it exactly right: “The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha.”

What Elisha does with that inheritance is the surprise. Most of it is spent on people whose names the kings never learned. A widow about to lose her boys to a creditor. A woman with no son and then with a dead one. A hundred hungry men and a poisoned pot. A young prophet who lost a borrowed tool and could not replace it. Even the great miracle of the block, the healing of Naaman, begins with a captive Israelite girl who could have kept her mouth shut and did not. God's power in these chapters keeps showing up in kitchens and at riverbanks.

Two scenes deserve extra time. The first is the healing of Naaman, which is a study in how pride resists a simple command and how servants sometimes save us from ourselves. The second is 2 Kings 6:15–17, where a terrified young man learns that the odds he was calculating were never the real numbers. Teach these chapters so that your class leaves with both: God is not too proud to help an ordinary person, and God is never as outnumbered as He looks.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Second Kings continues the divided kingdom narrative without a break; the split at 1 Kings and 2 Kings is a scroll division, not a change of subject.
- Elisha's ministry runs roughly from the middle 800s B.C. through the reigns of several kings of Israel, and it overlaps repeatedly with Syria (Aram) under Ben-Hadad and later Hazael.
- The “sons of the prophets” were communities of men in training at Bethel, Jericho, and Gilgal, which explains the group scenes in chapters 2, 4, and 6.
- Leprosy in the Old Testament covers a range of serious skin diseases; the law in Leviticus 13 and 14 made a leper ceremonially unclean and socially isolated, which is why Naaman's condition was more than a medical problem.
- Miracles cluster in Scripture at points where God is confirming a new spokesman or a new revelation: Moses, Elijah and Elisha, and then Christ and the apostles. They are not evenly distributed across biblical history.
- Hazael's rise in chapter 8 fulfills what God had told Elijah in 1 Kings 19:15 and sets up the long Syrian oppression of Israel.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Elisha asks for a double portion of Elijah's spirit and is told it is a hard thing (2:9–10). Read what he is actually asking for, the portion of the firstborn heir, and talk about what it cost him to receive it and to carry it for the next fifty years.*

The double portion is inheritance language from Deuteronomy 21:17, where the firstborn receives twice the share of any other son. Elisha is not asking to out-miracle his master; he is asking to be the heir, to carry on the prophetic work when Elijah is gone. Elijah calls it a hard thing because it is not his to grant, and he attaches a condition that only God could arrange: if you see me taken, it is yours. Elisha does see, and he tears his own clothes in grief before he ever picks up the mantle.

Draw out the cost, because your class may imagine that inheritance means ease. Elisha spent the rest of his life telling kings what they did not want to hear, walking between famine and siege, and being mocked on a road outside Bethel. Ask the class what they are asking God for, and whether they have counted what it would mean to actually receive it. Most of us pray for influence and hope it arrives without responsibility.

Question 2. *Naaman comes with horses, chariots, silver, and a letter, and is told to go wash in a muddy river seven times (5:9–14). Why did that enrage him, and where do we still prefer a religion with more dignity in it than simple obedience to what God actually said?*

Naaman had a script in his head. He expected the prophet to come out, stand, call on the name of the Lord, wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy. Instead a messenger comes to the door with seven words of instruction and a river Naaman considers beneath him. “Are not the Abanah and the Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?” He is furious, and the fury is not about water quality. It is about being handed something simple when he had brought ten talents of silver and a letter from a king.

His servants save him with a beautiful argument: if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, you would have done it. Then he goes down and dips seven times, and his flesh comes back like a little child’s. Press this into the room. We will take on a hard religious project more readily than a plain command. We will discuss a doctrine for an hour rather than obey it on Tuesday. Ask which specific instruction of Christ each person has been negotiating with because it seemed too ordinary to matter.

Question 3. *In 6:15–17 the servant sees an army and Elisha sees the same hillside filled with horses and chariots of fire. Both men were looking at the same view. Discuss what the servant was missing, and name the fears in your own week that come from counting only what can be counted.*

The servant’s arithmetic was correct and his conclusion was wrong. There really was a Syrian army, with horses and chariots, surrounding the city, and there really were two men inside it. What he could not see was the larger reality standing on the mountain behind him. Elisha does not tell him to calm down or to think positively. He prays, “Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see,” and the young man sees the hills full of horses and chariots of fire.

Be careful how you apply this, because the point is not that Christians should expect visions. The point is that our fear is usually a math problem caused by leaving out everything we cannot count. Ask the class what they are afraid of right now, then ask what is left out of that calculation: the providence of God, the prayers of brethren, the fact that the same God who raised Christ is still on the throne (Romans 8:31; 2 Chronicles 32:7–8). Fear rarely survives an honest inventory.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Make a list of every person Elisha helps in these chapters. Note how many of them are poor, foreign, female, or otherwise powerless, and write down what that pattern says about the God who sent him.*

The list includes the men of Jericho with a bad spring, a widow in debt, the woman of Shunem and her son, the sons of the prophets with the poisoned pot, a hundred men with too little bread, Naaman the Syrian, a young prophet who lost a borrowed axe head, a blinded Syrian army who were fed rather than killed, a starving city, and four lepers outside the gate. Almost none of them had rank. The pattern says that the God of Israel is not chiefly interested in the palace, and that He notices need that the powerful never hear about.

2. *Read 2 Kings 2:11 alongside Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5. Only two men in Scripture are said to have left this life without dying; note what each account emphasizes and what it does not tell us.*

Genesis 5:24 says simply that Enoch walked with God and was not, for God took him. Hebrews 11:5 adds that he was taken away so that he did not see death, and that before he was taken he pleased God. Second Kings 2:11 gives the fullest scene: a chariot of fire, horses of fire, a separation, and a whirlwind into heaven. What the accounts emphasize is God’s initiative and the man’s walk. What they do not give is a doctrine of escaping death for anyone else; Hebrews 9:27 remains the rule.

3. Trace Gehazi through 2 Kings 4:12–37 and 5:20–27. Write down what he says out loud and what he says in his heart, and mark the moment his usefulness turned into appetite.

Out loud Gehazi is useful and correct. He tells Elisha the woman has no son, he pushes the Shunammite away from his master, he runs ahead with the staff. In private, after Naaman leaves, he says in his heart that his master has spared this Syrian too easily and swears, “As the Lord lives, I will run after him and take something from him.” The turn is exactly there, in a sentence he never meant anyone to hear. Then come the lies, the two talents, the hidden bags, and “Your servant did not go anywhere.” Ministry had become a position with benefits.

4. In Luke 4:25–27 Jesus deliberately reminds a synagogue of the widow of Zarephath and of Naaman the Syrian, and they try to throw Him off a cliff. Explain, from these chapters, why those two examples were so offensive.

Jesus points out that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s day and he was sent to a Gentile woman in Sidon, and many lepers in Israel in Elisha’s day and none was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian. These chapters show the pattern plainly: an Israelite servant girl’s testimony heals a Syrian general while the king of Israel tears his clothes in panic. The synagogue at Nazareth heard the implication and hated it. God has never been the property of an ethnic group, and He has repeatedly gone to outsiders when insiders would not listen.

5. The woman of Shunem looked at a traveling preacher and said, “Let us make a small upper room” (4:8–10). Name one person God has put on your road, and do one specific, inconvenient thing for that person before the week is out.

Answers will vary. Watch for the shape of the Shunammite’s decision, which was deliberate, planned, and costly in space and privacy rather than merely emotional. She built a room before there was any promise attached to it. Look for specifics: a meal cooked, an evening given, a guest room actually used, a young family invited in. If someone offers only a good intention, ask when.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The youths at Bethel and the bears (2:23–25) will come up. These are not toddlers teasing a bald man; the phrase describes young men, they come out in a mob of considerable size from a center of calf worship, and “Go up, you baldhead” mocks the very ascension of Elijah that had just occurred. It is contempt for God’s prophet and God’s word. Say plainly that God defended His messenger, that the account reports the judgment without inviting us to imitate it, and do not let the class spend the hour there.
- Naaman’s seven dippings illustrate obedient faith beautifully, and the parallel to baptism is natural and fair to draw (the command was specific, the water was not the power, and partial obedience would have healed nothing). Do not, however, teach it as though 2 Kings 5 were the authority for baptism. The authority is Acts 2:38, Romans 6:3–4, and 1 Peter 3:21.
- Miracles here confirm a prophet in a period of national apostasy. Resist turning these chapters into a promise that God will do the same today. The confirming signs served to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). God still answers prayer and still works providentially, which is a different claim and a truer comfort.
- Elijah’s translation is not a model of how the righteous leave this world, and it does not teach a rapture. It is a singular event, like Enoch’s, and Scripture treats it as such.

Plead My Cause, O Lord

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 35 is an individual lament with strong imprecatory language, which means your class needs a frame before you read a word of it. David is being hunted by men who repay him evil for good, and he does the only thing an innocent man under false accusation can do without sinning: he turns the whole case over to the Judge. Notice that every violent request is addressed to God. David never says he will do these things. He says, “Plead my cause, O Lord.” That distinction is the entire ethics of the psalm.

The most human lines are verses 11 through 16. False witnesses rise, they ask him things he knows nothing about, and he remembers that when they were sick he wore sackcloth, humbled himself with fasting, and went about as one who mourns for his mother. Then they gathered against him and he did not know it. Anyone in your class who has been betrayed inside a family or a congregation will recognize this exactly. The psalm ends, three times, with a vow to give thanks in the great assembly. Grief that keeps returning to worship is grief that will survive.

Psalm 36 is a different genre, a wisdom meditation, and it is built on a contrast. Verses 1 through 4 dissect the wicked man from the inside: transgression speaks in his heart, he flatters himself, his words are wickedness and deceit, he has stopped being wise, he devises evil on his bed. Then verse 5 lifts the roof off. Mercy to the heavens, faithfulness to the clouds, righteousness like the mountains, judgments like the great deep. And the line that has fed believers for three thousand years: “In Your light we see light.”

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms carry a Davidic heading; Psalm 36 is addressed to the chief musician and identifies David as “the servant of the Lord.”
- Psalm 35 is an individual lament containing imprecation, a legal appeal in poetic form. The courtroom language (“plead my cause,” “false witnesses,” “let them be ashamed”) runs through the whole psalm.
- Imprecatory passages belong to the Old Covenant setting, where God’s justice was largely expected within this life. The New Testament directs the same instinct to the same Judge while forbidding personal retaliation (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23).
- Psalm 35:19, “they hated me without a cause,” is applied by Jesus to Himself in John 15:25, which makes this psalm a window into what the Lord endured.
- Psalm 36:1 is quoted by Paul in Romans 3:18 as the final line of his catalog showing that both Jews and Gentiles are under sin.
- “Lovingkindness” in Psalm 36:7 and 10 translates the Hebrew word for covenant loyalty, God’s steady, promise-keeping love rather than mere sentiment.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 35 asks God to fight, to bring shame on the attackers, and to let their net catch them. How can a Christian pray this psalm honestly, and what keeps it from becoming permission for personal revenge (Romans 12:19)?*

Begin by naming what the psalm is and is not. It is a prayer of a man under false accusation asking God, the only rightful Judge, to act. It is not a curse David pronounces, not a plan he carries out, and not a private grudge dressed in religious clothes. Every request is in the second person addressed to God. He asks for vindication, for the ambush to fall on the men who dug it, and then he ends by promising to tell the whole congregation what God did.

What keeps it clean today is the same thing that kept it clean then. Romans 12:19 does not tell Christians to stop caring about justice; it tells them to give place to wrath, because vengeance belongs to God and He will repay. First Peter 2:23 says that Jesus, reviled, did not revile back but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. Teach your class to pray the desire honestly rather than to bury it, and then to leave it in God's hands and go do good to the person (Romans 12:20–21). Buried anger does not die. It ferments.

Question 2. *Read 35:11–16, where David describes mourning and fasting for people who later gathered to tear at him. Talk about the particular sting of being repaid evil for good, and about what that memory does to a person over the following years if he does not hand it to God.*

Verses 11 through 16 describe a specific kind of wound: the betrayal of someone you have already carried. David had fasted for these men. He had worn sackcloth when they were sick and prayed with his head bowed on his chest, grieving as though for his own mother. Then when he stumbled, they gathered, tore at him, and did not stop. He uses the word “hypocritical mockers at feasts,” men who made him the entertainment at dinner. There is no clean way to feel about that, and the psalm does not pretend otherwise.

Ask the class, gently, what such a memory does over ten years if it is never surrendered. It hardens into a policy: never help anyone that way again. That policy protects a person and slowly kills him. The psalm's way out is not forgetting and not pretending it did not happen; it is verse 18, telling God about it in the great assembly and giving thanks anyway. Point out that David keeps praying, keeps worshiping, and keeps the case open before God rather than closing it himself.

Question 3. *Psalm 36 hangs two pictures on the same wall: verses 1 through 4, and verses 5 through 9. Compare the size of each world. Which of the two do your thoughts actually live in on a hard day, and what changes that?*

Verses 1 through 4 are a small, airless room. Everything happens inside one man's head and on one man's bed. Transgression speaks in his heart, he flatters himself in his own eyes, his words are wickedness and deceit, he has ceased to be wise and to do good, and he sets himself in a way that is not good. Four verses, and God appears in them only once, as the one this man does not fear. That is what a life curved in on itself looks like from the inside.

Then verse 5 opens the sky. Mercy to the heavens, faithfulness to the clouds, righteousness like the great mountains, judgments like the deep, and then, of all things, hospitality: men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings, they are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. Ask the class which of the two worlds their thoughts occupied last Tuesday at four in the afternoon. The honest answer for most of us is the small room. The cure the psalm offers is not trying harder but looking up: “In Your light we see light.”

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out David's requests in 35:1–8 and notice who is being asked to act in every single one of them. Then state what that fact alone teaches about the difference between prayer and plotting.*

The requests are for God to plead his cause, fight those who fight him, take hold of shield and buckler, stand up for his help, draw out the spear, say to his soul “I am your salvation,” put his attackers to shame, drive them like chaff before the wind, let the angel of the Lord pursue them, and let the net they hid catch them. Every one of them is addressed to God. David asks the Judge to act; he does not reach for a weapon. That single observation is the difference between prayer and plotting, and it is worth writing on the board.

2. *Romans 3:10–18 strings together several Old Testament passages and ends with Psalm 36:1, “There is no fear of God before their eyes.” Read Paul's argument and describe how he is using it and what he concludes in Romans 3:23.*

Paul is building a case in Romans 3 that both Jew and Gentile are under sin, and he supports it with a chain of Old Testament quotations from Psalms and Isaiah, ending with Psalm 36:1. His conclusion is stated in Romans 3:19–23: every mouth is stopped, all the world is accountable to God, and all have sinned and fall short of His glory. Note carefully what he does not conclude. He does not say that human beings are born guilty or are incapable of responding; he says that all have sinned, which is a statement about what people have done.

3. Trace the images in 36:5–9: heavens, clouds, mountains, the great deep, the shadow of wings, a house, a river, a fountain, light. List them in order and describe the movement from the largest picture to the most personal one.

The movement is deliberate: mercy in the heavens, faithfulness up to the clouds, righteousness like the great mountains, judgments like the great deep. Then it turns and comes down to where a person actually lives: the shadow of Your wings, the fullness of Your house, the river of Your pleasures, the fountain of life, and finally light in which we see light. The psalm starts at the size of the sky and ends at a table and a drink of water. God's greatness and His nearness are the same fact described from two distances.

4. Psalm 35:13–14 says David fasted and bowed down in mourning for the very people who turned on him, behaving as though he grieved for a friend or a brother. Compare Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27–28, and write down what the two passages share.

David prayed and fasted for his enemies while they were sick and grieved as if for a brother. Jesus says to love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. What the passages share is that love is an action taken toward a person who has not earned it and may never reciprocate. Both assume you will still feel the injury. Neither waits for the feeling to change before the praying begins.

5. Name one person who has genuinely wronged you. Pray for that person by name every day this week, and do one concrete good thing for him or her that costs you something before Sunday.

Answers will vary. Listen for a real name rather than a category, and for an act that the other person will actually notice. Watch also for the two failure modes: the person who cannot name anyone because he has decided he is above being hurt, and the person who names five and wants to talk about all of them. One name, one week, one concrete kindness. Follow up next class and ask what happened, because this is the assignment most likely to change someone.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Handle the imprecations honestly rather than apologizing for them. These are appeals to God's justice by a man under attack, not models for personal vengeance. Point out that every request is addressed to God, and pair the psalm with Romans 12:19–21 and 1 Peter 2:23.
- David's protests of innocence (35:7, 19) concern this accusation, not his whole life. He is not claiming sinlessness; Psalm 51 is in the same book. Do not let the class stumble over that.
- Psalm 36:1–4 describes a man who has chosen this course, not the condition every human being is born in. It gives no support to total depravity or inherited guilt. Each person becomes guilty when he himself sins (Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 18:3).
- Psalm 35:19 is claimed by Jesus in John 15:25. Point that out, but do not turn the whole psalm into a messianic prophecy; its first meaning is David's own situation.

The God of the Living

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This reading is a series of questions, and Jesus wins every exchange. The Sadducees, who rejected the resurrection and accepted only the books of Moses, bring an absurd case about a woman married seven times under levirate law. Jesus answers on both fronts at once. First, they misunderstand the resurrection state, which is not simply this life continued. Second, and devastatingly, He proves the resurrection from Moses himself: at the bush God says, “I am the God of Abraham,” not “I was.” God is not the God of the dead but of the living. The Sadducees do not ask another question.

Then the tone changes. A scribe asks which commandment is first, not to trap Him but because he wants to know, and Jesus gives the two that carry everything: love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. The scribe repeats it back with approval, adding that this is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. Jesus tells him he is not far from the kingdom of God. Notice both halves of that sentence, the warmth and the distance.

The chapter closes with contrast. Beware the scribes who love long robes, best seats, and long prayers, and who devour widows’ houses. Then Jesus sits across from the treasury and watches the rich put in much and a poor widow put in two mites, and He says she put in more than all of them. As they leave, a disciple points out the stonework, and Jesus says not one stone will be left on another. Chapter 13 begins the discourse that runs through next week’s reading; this portion covers the warnings about deception, persecution, and endurance that come before the crisis.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Sadducees were the priestly, aristocratic party. They accepted the authority of the books of Moses, rejected the resurrection, angels, and spirits (Acts 23:8), and cooperated closely with Rome.
- The levirate law behind their question is Deuteronomy 25:5–10, which provided an heir for a man who died childless. Their scenario was meant to make the resurrection look ridiculous.
- Mark 12:29–30 quotes the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4–5, recited twice daily by devout Jews; 12:31 quotes Leviticus 19:18.
- A mite was the smallest coin in circulation; Mark explains for his Roman readers that two of them made a quadrans, a fraction of a day’s wage.
- Herod’s temple complex was still under construction and was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Its destruction under Titus in A.D. 70 is what Jesus announces in 13:1–2.
- Mark 13:1–13 opens the Olivet Discourse, which Matthew records at greater length in Matthew 24 and 25 (weeks 24 and 25 of this program). The rest of Mark’s account is next week’s reading.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus tells the Sadducees they are mistaken because they know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God (12:24). Discuss the two different ways that sentence describes of going wrong, and give an example of each that you have actually seen.*

The two errors are different and both are fatal. Not knowing the Scriptures is a failure of information: the Sadducees had cut their Bible down to what they preferred and then reasoned confidently from the truncated version. Not knowing the power of God is a failure of imagination about God Himself: they assumed that whatever the resurrection is, it must be a continuation of present arrangements, so they built a puzzle out of marriage. Jesus answers both, and He answers the first one from the very books they accepted.

Ask for real examples, because your class has seen both. The first error looks like a person who has strong convictions built on three favorite verses and has never read the book they sit in. The second looks like a believer who accepts the Bible completely and still quietly assumes God cannot fix a particular situation, cannot forgive a particular sin, or cannot raise a body that has been in the ground for sixty years. Both are being corrected by the same sentence.

Question 2. *The scribe in 12:28–34 gives a fine answer about loving God and neighbor, and Jesus tells him he is not far from the kingdom of God. Talk about what “not far” means, and about what a person in that position still lacks.*

“Not far from the kingdom” is one of the kindest and most sobering things Jesus ever said to an individual. The scribe had it right. He understood that loving God wholly and loving neighbor as self outranks the entire sacrificial apparatus, and he said it out loud in the temple courts where that was not a safe opinion. Jesus commends him sincerely. And then the sentence stops short, because near is not in.

What he still lacked is what the whole book of Mark has been driving at: he had not yet come to terms with the identity of the man he was talking to. The next paragraph is Jesus asking how the Messiah can be both David’s Son and David’s Lord. Right doctrine about love is not the same as surrender to Christ. Use this carefully in class. There are good, decent, church-attending people who are near, and near is a wonderful place to be and a terrible place to stay. Acts 26:28 has Agrippa almost persuaded. Almost is the saddest word in the New Testament.

Question 3. *Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched how people gave (12:41–44). What did He see in the widow that the accountants could not see, and how would it change your week to live as though He is still sitting there?*

He saw the whole balance sheet, not the deposit. The rich put in much, and Jesus does not say a word against them; He simply notes that they gave out of their abundance. The widow put in two mites, which was everything she had, her whole livelihood. By every measure a treasurer would use, the offering was negligible. By the measure Jesus uses, it was the largest gift of the day. God has never counted totals; He counts what is left afterward (2 Corinthians 8:12).

Then bring the class to the sentence that frames the scene: Jesus sat down opposite the treasury and watched. He is still watching, not as an auditor looking for errors but as the One who knows the whole picture of every life in the room. That should terrify the person who gives for appearance and comfort the person who gives what looks like nothing. Ask each person what he would do differently this week if he genuinely believed Christ was sitting across from his checkbook, his calendar, and his phone.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the argument Jesus makes from Exodus 3:6 in Mark 12:26–27. Pay attention to the verb tense, and state in your own words why “I am the God of Abraham” proves that Abraham is not finished.*

Jesus quotes God at the burning bush: “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Abraham had been dead for centuries when Moses heard that, and yet God speaks in the present tense. Then Jesus draws the conclusion: He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living. God does not describe Himself as the God of people who have ceased to exist. The covenant relationship He named at the bush was still in force, which means those men were still in existence and their story was not finished. The argument rests on a single verb, which tells you something about how precisely Jesus read His Bible.

2. *List the four things in 12:30 with which we are told to love God. For each one, name a specific place in an ordinary week where that particular love is contested.*

Heart, soul, mind, and strength. The heart is the seat of affection and will, contested wherever we want something more than we want God. The soul is the whole self, contested when we hold back one compartment. The mind is contested in what we read, watch, argue about, and rehearse while driving. Strength is contested in the calendar and the body: what our energy actually goes to when we are tired. Answers about specific places will vary, and the specifics are the point. The command is not for a general fondness; it is for everything.

3. *Jesus quotes Psalm 110:1 in 12:35–37. Read that psalm, then read Acts 2:34–36, and write down what Peter says happened to the promise on the day of Pentecost.*

Psalm 110:1 records the Lord saying to David's Lord, "Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool." Jesus uses it to show that Messiah is more than David's descendant; David calls Him Lord. In Acts 2:34–36 Peter quotes the same verse on the day of Pentecost and says that David is not the one who ascended, but that God has made this Jesus, whom they crucified, both Lord and Christ. The enthronement described in the psalm happened at the resurrection and ascension. Christ is reigning now, and the kingdom is not waiting for a future earthly throne.

4. *Notice the order of 12:38–40 and 12:41–44: scribes who devour widows' houses, and then a widow giving everything she had. Describe what Mark is doing by placing those two paragraphs side by side.*

Mark places a warning about religious men who consume widows' property immediately before a scene in which a widow gives her last two coins to the same temple system. The juxtaposition is deliberate and uncomfortable. It honors the widow's devotion without pretending that the institution receiving her gift was innocent. Mark is showing the reader what real religion and counterfeit religion look like standing ten feet apart, and he is doing it in the last week of Jesus' life, on the way out of a temple that is about to come down.

5. *In 13:9–13 Jesus warns that following Him will cost His disciples standing, family, and safety. Name the place where fear of what people will say has kept you quiet, and have one specific conversation this week that you have been avoiding.*

Answers will vary, and this is the question to press. Listen for the specific relationship or setting where silence has become a habit: a coworker, an adult child, a neighbor, a family member who has drifted. Jesus does not promise the conversation will go well; He promises that the gospel must first be published among all nations and that the one who endures to the end will be saved. Ask for a name and a day. Then ask the following week how it went, and be ready to encourage someone whose conversation did not go the way he hoped.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- In 12:25 Jesus says that in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels in heaven. He is answering a question about marital arrangements, not saying that we become angels or that we will not know one another. Teach what the verse says and resist speculation about the details of the resurrection state; 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 John 3:2 mark the limits of what we are told.
- Do not let "not far from the kingdom of God" become a teaching that sincerity and good ethics are enough. The New Testament is specific about entering: hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27).
- Mark 13:1–13 must be handled the way Matthew 24 was handled in week 24: primarily as the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, with the local, urgent instructions and the plain statement in Matthew 24:34 as the anchors. There is no premillennial framework here, no secret rapture, no seven-year tribulation, and no earthly reign from Jerusalem. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).
- Mark 13:11, "do not worry beforehand what you will speak," is a promise to apostles and inspired men standing before courts under persecution, and it rests on the Spirit's direct guidance (John 14:26; 16:13). It is not a license for a modern teacher to skip preparation.

Order in the Assembly

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Corinth had a status problem, and it had attached itself to spiritual gifts. Chapter 12 told them the gifts came from one Spirit and were distributed for the profit of all. Chapter 13 told them that without love the most spectacular gift is noise. Now chapter 14 gets practical, and Paul's whole argument runs on one word: edification. Pursue love, desire spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy, because the one who prophesies speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and comfort, while the one who speaks in a tongue, with no interpreter, edifies himself alone.

The illustrations are homely and devastating. A flute or harp that does not make distinct sounds; a bugle that gives an uncertain call, so that nobody prepares for battle; speaking into the air; two people who are foreigners to each other. Paul is not belittling the gift, which was genuine and given by God. He is insisting that a gift given for the church must be used in a way the church can actually receive. Then the punch line in verse 19: in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

The last section is about order, and it is regulatory rather than suggestive. Two or three at most, in turn, and one interprets. If there is no interpreter, keep silent. Prophets speak two or three, and the others judge, and the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets, because God is not the author of confusion but of peace. Women are to keep silent in the assemblies. And then verse 37, which settles the authority question for the entire chapter: if anyone thinks himself a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- First Corinthians was written by Paul from Ephesus around A.D. 55 to a congregation he had established, divided over leaders, tolerant of immorality, careless at the Lord's table, and competitive about spiritual gifts.
- The miraculous gifts were real and were conferred through the laying on of the apostles' hands (Acts 8:14–18; 19:6; Romans 1:11), which is why they do not continue beyond that generation.
- Chapters 12, 13, and 14 form a single unit: the source and purpose of gifts, the supremacy of love, and the regulation of gifts in the assembly. Do not teach chapter 14 apart from that flow.
- "Prophecy" here means speaking by direct revelation from God for edification, exhortation, and comfort, not primarily prediction.
- The instructions in 14:26–40 describe the assembly of the whole church (14:23, 26), which is the setting Paul is regulating throughout the chapter.
- Paul closes the chapter by claiming the authority of the Lord for these instructions (14:37) and by summarizing the whole with 14:40, "Let all things be done decently and in order."

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Trace the word *edify*, or *build up*, through this chapter (14:3, 4, 5, 12, 17, 26). Paul makes it the test for everything done in the assembly. How would applying that one test reorder our own preferences about what happens when the church comes together?

Edification is the load-bearing word. Paul uses it or its equivalent at least six times, and every practical instruction in the chapter is an application of it. Prophecy is preferred because it edifies the church. Tongues plus interpretation is acceptable because then the church receives edification. The purpose of an assembly, in Paul's

mind, is not primarily personal experience. Verse 26 sums it up: whenever you come together, whatever is brought, let all things be done for edification.

Applying that test honestly is uncomfortable in any congregation, including ours. It asks whether the way we sing, read, pray, preach, and observe the Supper is aimed at building others up or at satisfying our own preferences, and it cuts in more than one direction. It rebukes the person who wants the assembly to be a performance, and it equally rebukes the person who comes to consume and evaluate. Ask the class a hard question: if a visitor described our assembly, would the word “edifying” occur to him, and if not, why not?

Question 2. *In 14:6–19 Paul argues that a language nobody understands does the hearers no good, and he says he would rather speak five understandable words than ten thousand in a tongue. Discuss what this tells us about the actual purpose God gave the gift for, and about why so much modern practice looks nothing like it.*

Paul’s argument is entirely about communication. If I come speaking in tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you by revelation, knowledge, prophesying, or teaching? Lifeless instruments that make no distinction in sound tell you nothing. An uncertain trumpet prepares nobody for battle. Unless you utter words easy to understand, you will be speaking into the air. And the conclusion: five intelligible words are worth more than ten thousand unintelligible ones. This shows what the gift was for. It was never an ecstatic private experience; it was the God-given ability to speak real languages, as Acts 2:6–11 makes explicit, so that the message could cross barriers and be confirmed as from God.

Now teach the rest of it plainly and graciously, because your class lives in a world full of claims. The signs served to confirm the word (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4). The gifts came through apostolic hands (Acts 8:18; 19:6). And 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 says they would cease when that which is perfect, the completed revelation, had come. The written word is now complete (Jude 3; 2 Timothy 3:16–17). State that conviction clearly, show the verses, and do not let the hour become an argument about somebody’s relatives. Many sincere people have been taught otherwise, and sincerity deserves patience even where the teaching is wrong.

Question 3. *Paul concludes in 14:33–40 with instructions about order and about the silence of women in the assemblies, and he says in 14:37 that what he is writing is the commandment of the Lord. Read those verses alongside 1 Timothy 2:11–12 and discuss what is actually being regulated and what is not.*

Take verse 37 first, and the whole discussion becomes simpler. Paul anticipates that somebody will not like this and answers in advance: the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord. These are not Paul’s cultural preferences or a local accommodation to Corinth. Then read what is regulated. Speaking in a tongue without an interpreter: silence. A prophet who is speaking when a revelation comes to another: silence. Women in the assemblies: silence, with the reason given as submission to what the law says, and with instruction to be sought at home. Three different silences, all in service of order in the gathered assembly.

Paul makes the same point without the gifts in view in 1 Timothy 2:11–12, where the woman is to learn in quietness and is not permitted to teach or to have authority over the man, and the reason given is the order of creation rather than a first-century custom. So what is being regulated is the leading, teaching, and public speaking role in the assembly of the church. What is not being regulated is a woman’s worth, spiritual standing, intelligence, or usefulness. Read Acts 18:26, Titus 2:3–5, and 2 Timothy 1:5 aloud in the same class hour so that nobody leaves with a caricature. Say it plainly, say it kindly, and let the text bear the weight rather than your tone.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every reason Paul gives in this chapter that prophecy is more useful in the assembly than speaking in a tongue. Then state in one sentence the principle that all of them serve.*

Prophecy speaks to men for edification, exhortation, and comfort (14:3); it edifies the church rather than only the speaker (14:4); the one who prophesies is greater than one who speaks in tongues unless he interprets (14:5); it conveys revelation, knowledge, and teaching that people can receive (14:6); it produces sounds that can be distinguished and acted on (14:7–8); it allows the hearer to say “Amen” with understanding (14:16); it teaches others

(14:19); and it convicts the outsider who walks in (14:24–25). The single principle behind all of it is that what happens in the assembly is for the good of the people in the room, not for the satisfaction of the speaker.

2. *Read 1 Corinthians 13:8–10 immediately before 14:1–5. Write down what Paul says would happen to tongues, prophecy, and knowledge, and identify from the text what event he says would bring that about.*

Paul says that prophecies will fail, tongues will cease, and knowledge will vanish away, because we know in part and prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect has come, that which is in part will be done away. The event that brings it about is the arrival of the complete, mature thing. The contrast in the context is partial revelation against complete revelation, which is why James 1:25 can speak of the perfect law of liberty and Jude 3 of the faith once for all delivered to the saints. The gifts were scaffolding for a building that is now finished.

3. *Paul quotes Isaiah 28:11–12 in 14:21 and then draws a conclusion in 14:22. Look up the original setting in Isaiah and explain how hearing a foreign language was a sign, and to whom.*

Isaiah was preaching to a people who mocked him, and he warned that since they would not listen to plain speech in their own language, God would speak to them with stammering lips and another tongue, meaning the speech of the Assyrian invaders. Hearing a foreign language in the streets would be the sign that judgment had arrived on unbelievers. Paul applies it: tongues are a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers. The gift authenticated the message to people outside, which is exactly what happened in Acts 2 when the crowd heard their own languages.

4. *In 14:23–25 an unbeliever walks into the assembly. Note carefully what the text says convicts him, what he learns about himself, and what he finally says out loud.*

The text says that if all prophesy and an unbeliever or uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all and convicted by all. The secrets of his heart are revealed, and so falling down on his face he will worship God and report that God is truly among you. What convicts him is intelligible, Spirit-given truth applied to his own life, not a display of the spectacular. Note the contrast Paul draws in verse 23: if the whole church speaks in tongues and outsiders come in, they will say you are out of your mind. The word understood converts; the word not understood repels.

5. *Verse 26 says, “Let all things be done for edification.” Identify one thing you want at the assembly mainly because you like it, and one specific thing you will do this Sunday aimed entirely at building up somebody else. Then do it.*

Answers will vary, and the first half of the question matters as much as the second. Most of us have preferences at the assembly that we have never examined as preferences: where we sit, who leads, how long things take, what style of singing we find moving. Naming one honestly is healthy. Then listen for a second answer that is concrete and other-directed: sitting with a visitor, learning a name, arriving early, taking a young man along, following up with someone who has been absent. Ask the following week who actually did it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Tongues and miraculous gifts: teach them as real languages, given through apostolic hands, for the confirmation of the word, and now ceased since revelation is complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3). Be firm on the text and gentle with people who have been taught otherwise.
- The role of women: 14:34–35 with 1 Timothy 2:11–12 restricts the public leading and teaching role in the assembly of the church, and Paul grounds it in creation rather than in Corinthian culture. Teach it plainly, do not soften it, and do not let it be heard as a statement about worth or ability. Show the class Acts 18:26, Titus 2:3–5, and 2 Timothy 1:5 in the same hour.
- Verse 39, “do not forbid to speak with tongues,” was written to a congregation that actually possessed the gift. It is not an instruction to a church today, and it does not reopen what 13:8–10 settles.
- Do not let 14:40 become a blank check. “Decently and in order” regulates how authorized things are done; it does not authorize whatever a congregation finds orderly. The authority question is answered in 14:37.

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