

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 47 OF 104

A Paper Trail of Grace

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Chronicles 1-5
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 40-41
Gospels	Mark 14:51-15:20
General New Testament	2 Corinthians 1:1-2:4

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to convince a class of ordinary adults that they are known. The Chronicler wrote five chapters of names for people who had come home to rubble and felt forgotten. A psalmist in a pit discovered that God inclined and heard him, and then said the sentence the whole week turns on: I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me. Peter said he did not know the Man, and the Man knew him anyway and came looking for him afterward. And Paul told a congregation that had criticized him that their prayers had helped carry him through the worst week of his life.

Doctrinally, the readings give you several things to say clearly. The genealogies are the paper trail of a promise that runs to Christ and is fulfilled in Him, not in a future political nation (Matthew 1:12; Luke 1:32-33). Psalm 40:6-8 lands in Hebrews 10, where the Old Covenant sacrifices give way to the one offering of the body of Christ. Mark 14 and 15 require care about who is responsible for the death of Jesus, and the answer Scripture gives includes all of us (Acts 2:23; 4:27-28; Isaiah 53:5-6). And 2 Corinthians 1:22 gives you a chance to explain what the earnest of the Spirit is and is not.

Formationally, the thread is what we do with what we have been through. Paul says the comfort you received was never meant to stop with you. The psalmist says the rescue was public so that many would see it and trust. The Chronicler wrote down names so that a later generation would know the thread held. Ask your class this: name the hardest thing God has brought you through, then name one person now standing where you stood, and say what is keeping you from picking up the phone this week.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Corinthians 1:1-2:4. It is the warmest reading of the week and the one that will move people. Build the hour on verses 3 through 11, and give the last ten minutes to 1:23-2:4 and what it looks like to confront someone you love. Expect this lesson to open private conversations afterward.

Second session: Take up Mark 14:51-15:20. Give roughly half the time to the trial and the claim of 14:62, and half to Peter at the fire. Close with Barabbas, and let the class sit with the fact that a guilty man walked out that morning because Jesus took his cross.

The other two readings: First Chronicles 1-5 and Psalms 40 and 41 carry the extended questions. Spend five minutes at the start of one session explaining why Chronicles opens with genealogies and who first read them, because that alone will change how the class reads the next several weeks. Point out that Psalm 41:9 is the verse Jesus quoted about Judas, and let them find it for themselves.

The Book of Names

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Do not apologize for these chapters, and do not ask the class to endure them. Explain them, and they will open. Chronicles was written after the exile, for people who had come back to a broken city with a small temple, no king, no army, and every reason to wonder whether they were still the people God had promised something to. The Chronicler answers by reaching all the way back to Adam and then walking the line forward, name by name, through the flood, the patriarchs, the tribes, the kings, the catastrophe, and out the other side. The message of the list is the existence of the list. The thread never broke.

Notice where he starts and where he lingers. He starts at Adam, not Abraham, which means Israel's story is set inside the story of the whole human race. He gives Esau and Edom their space and then moves on. But when he reaches Judah he slows down for two full chapters, because Judah is where the promise runs, and the line lands on Jesse and then on David with his brothers named in order. Chapter 3 then carries David's house through Solomon, through the whole line of kings, through Jeconiah who was carried to Babylon, and on to Zerubbabel and his children. A reader in Jerusalem could find his own grandfather in that chapter.

The other thing to teach is the commentary hidden in the lists. The Chronicler occasionally stops and tells you something, and every time he does, it is theological. Er was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and He killed him. Achar troubled Israel. Jabez was more honorable than his brothers, and he prayed, and God granted it. The eastern tribes won a war because they cried out to God and trusted Him, and later lost everything because they played the harlot after the gods of the people God had destroyed before them. A genealogy with sermons in it is exactly what a discouraged people needed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- First and Second Chronicles were compiled after the return from Babylon, most likely in the fifth century B.C., for the restored community in Judah.
- Chronicles covers much of the same history as Samuel and Kings but from a different angle: it is written from the perspective of the temple, the priesthood, and the line of David, and it focuses on Judah rather than the northern kingdom.
- The genealogies establish tribal identity, priestly and Levitical service, land claims, and above all the continuity of David's line, all of which mattered urgently to people re-establishing a nation.
- Names are sometimes spelled differently here than in Genesis, Samuel, or Kings, and parallel lists occasionally serve different purposes. These are ordinary features of ancient records and are not worth an hour of class time.
- Matthew 1 and Luke 3 pick up this same line and carry it to Christ, which means these chapters are part of the paper trail for the promise made in Genesis 12:3 and 2 Samuel 7:12–13.
- Chapter 5 records the fate of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, the tribes east of the Jordan, who were taken by Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *God gave His people nine chapters of names, and these five are the beginning of them. Consider who first read this book, families who had come home from Babylon to a ruined city, and discuss what a list of names would have done for people trying to believe they were still the people of the promise.*

Picture the first readers. They are a small community in a city with broken walls, under Persian administration, with a temple that made the old men weep when they saw it (Ezra 3:12). They have no king. Their neighbors treat them as a remnant, and some of them have begun to suspect the neighbors are right. Into that, a book arrives that

begins with Adam and does not stop until it reaches their own fathers. Every name is a link, and none of the links is missing.

That is what a genealogy does for people who are afraid they have been dropped. It says God has been keeping records for two thousand years, through slavery, wilderness, judges, civil war, apostasy, siege, and deportation, and He has your family in them. Then bring it to your class. Every Christian eventually has a season of feeling anonymous, useful to no one and noticed by nobody. Psalm 40:17 says it exactly: I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinks upon me. Ask who in the room has been feeling like a name nobody would miss, and then read them 1 Chronicles 4:9.

Question 2. *Jabez prays in 4:9–10 and God grants what he asked. Read the prayer closely, notice what he actually requests and what he does not, and talk about the difference between this prayer and the way it is often sold as a formula for getting more.*

Read the prayer as it stands. Jabez called on the God of Israel and asked four things: that God would bless him indeed, that He would enlarge his territory, that His hand would be with him, and that He would keep him from evil so that it would not cause him pain. He was named for pain, because his mother bore him in sorrow, and he is asking God not to let his life become what his name says. The Chronicler adds that God granted what he requested. It is a genuine prayer, honestly answered, and it is in the Bible for our instruction.

Now say plainly what it is not. It is not a formula, it is not a technique, and it does not promise anyone material increase for repeating the words. The request for enlarged territory came from a man in an agricultural society where land was livelihood, and the prayer is framed at both ends by God Himself: that Your hand would be with me, and that You would keep me from evil. Compare James 4:3, which says we ask and do not receive because we ask amiss, to spend it on our pleasures. Ask the class an honest question: if God answered your prayers of the last month exactly as prayed, what kind of person would that make you?

Question 3. *In 5:18–22 the eastern tribes cry out to God in battle and are helped, because they put their trust in Him. In 5:25–26 the same tribes are carried away by Assyria, and the reason is stated just as plainly. What do those two paragraphs, sitting in the same chapter, teach about the difference between a people God helps and a people God hands over?*

Set the two paragraphs side by side and read them aloud. First, 5:18–22: forty-four thousand fighting men, skilled in war, who made war with the Hagarites and were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, because they cried out to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them, because they put their trust in Him. Then 5:25–26: they were unfaithful to the God of their fathers and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples whom God had destroyed before them, so the God of Israel stirred up the spirit of Pul king of Assyria, and he carried them away.

The same tribes, the same land, two opposite outcomes, and in both cases the writer tells you the reason in plain words. Do not let the class draw a national or political application; Israel stood in a covenant that has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ. Draw the personal one instead. Skill, numbers, and experience were present in both paragraphs. The variable was whether these men were leaning on God or on themselves. Ask each person where he is currently operating on competence he genuinely has and prayers he has genuinely stopped praying.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the line from Judah to David in 2:3–15. Then find the same names in Ruth 4:18–22 and Matthew 1:3–6, and write down what it means that three different books preserve the identical sequence.*

Judah fathered Perez by Tamar, and the line runs Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salma, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, and then Jesse's sons with David named seventh. Ruth 4:18–22 gives the identical sequence from Perez to David, and Matthew 1:3–6 gives it again, adding the names of the women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah. Three books, written centuries apart for different purposes, preserving the same chain. God did not merely make a promise about Judah; He kept a record, and He let three different writers in three different eras publish it.

2. *First Chronicles 2:7 calls Achar “the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the accursed thing.” Read Joshua 7 and then read that verse again. Describe what it is like to have one sentence in the record and that be the sentence.*

Joshua 7 records that Achan took a Babylonian garment, silver, and a wedge of gold from Jericho when everything was devoted to destruction, that thirty-six men died at Ai because of it, and that Israel could not stand before its enemies until it was dealt with. In Chronicles, centuries later, the man appears in a list of Judah's sons with a single clause attached: the troubler of Israel, who transgressed in the accursed thing. Answers about the effect of that will vary, and the sober reflection is worth a minute of quiet. Most of us will be summarized in a sentence by someone. It is worth asking, while there is still time, what the sentence is currently shaping up to be.

3. *Go through chapter 1 and list every name whose story you already know. Beside each one, write the book and chapter where you met him, and notice how much of Genesis is compressed into a single page here.*

The chapter compresses Genesis 5, 10, 11, 25, and 36 into roughly fifty verses: Adam, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Ham, Japheth, Nimrod, Eber, Peleg, Abram who is Abraham, Ishmael and his twelve sons, Isaac, Esau, the chiefs of Edom, and the kings who reigned in Edom before any king reigned over Israel. Seeing how much history fits on one page is itself the lesson. The Chronicler is not retelling the stories; he is showing that they all belong to one continuous account with one author behind it.

4. *Read 3:17–24, the royal line continuing after the exile through Jeconiah and Zerubbabel. Explain what those verses proved to a family reading them in a half-rebuilt Jerusalem, and what they still prove when you read Matthew 1:12.*

It proved that the exile had not ended the line of David. Jeconiah went to Babylon a prisoner, and here are his sons and grandsons, including Zerubbabel, who led the return and laid the temple foundation (Ezra 3:8–10; Haggai 2:23), and generations after him. For a family in a half-rebuilt Jerusalem, that list said the promise of 2 Samuel 7:12–13 was still in force. Matthew 1:12 picks up the identical names, Jeconiah, Shealtiel, Zerubbabel, and carries them to Joseph, the husband of Mary. The line that survived Babylon arrives at Christ, and there it finds its fulfillment, in a reign that Luke 1:33 says will have no end.

5. *Write down the names of the people who actually handed you the faith: the parent, the grandmother, the preacher, the neighbor, the friend who would not give up. Then write to one of them this week and tell that person specifically what he or she did.*

Answers will vary, and this assignment does more good than almost any other in the quarter. Look for actual names rather than a category, and for specificity in the thank-you: not “you were a good influence,” but the Wednesday night rides, the Bible given at a graduation, the conversation in a hospital parking lot. Some in your class will discover that the person they should thank has died, which is worth saying out loud as a reason not to wait on the ones who have not.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jabez is not a formula. Reject any teaching that turns 4:9–10 into a technique for prosperity or expanded influence. It is a real prayer by a real man, bracketed by requests for God's presence and for protection from evil, and answered by God's own choice.
- Minor differences in spelling and in parallel lists are ordinary features of ancient records. Acknowledge them briefly if asked and move on; the class hour is better spent on why the lists exist than on how they were compiled.
- Do not allegorize names or hunt for hidden meanings in them. Where Scripture itself attaches meaning to a name, as with Jabez, follow it; otherwise let a name be a name.
- Resist drawing a direct line from Israel's national fortunes in chapter 5 to any modern nation. Israel stood in a covenant that has been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8:13). What transfers is God's character, not a nation's covenant status.

He Inclined and Heard Me

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 40 begins after the rescue, which is why the first three verses are so vivid. He waited patiently, which in Hebrew is emphatic, waiting he waited. Then God inclined to him and heard his cry, brought him up out of a horrible pit and out of the miry clay, set his feet upon a rock, established his steps, and put a new song in his mouth. Verse 3 adds the reason it is worth telling: many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord. The point of a testimony in this psalm is not the testifier.

Then verses 6 through 8, which are among the most important verses in the Psalter. Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require. Then I said, Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart. The writer of Hebrews takes these words, in the Greek form he was quoting, and puts them in the mouth of Christ entering the world, showing that the Old Covenant sacrifices were always pointing to a body and a will, not to the blood of animals.

Psalm 41 is quieter and more painful. It opens with a beatitude for the person who considers the poor, and then the writer is himself flat on his back, aware of his own sin, listening to visitors who say kind things in the room and go outside to whisper. Then verse 9: even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me. In John 13:18, with Judas at the table, Jesus quotes that verse and says it is about to be fulfilled. Whatever else your class takes away, let them see that the Lord walked into betrayal with a psalm already in His mouth.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms carry Davidic headings and are addressed to the chief musician; Psalm 41 closes Book One of the Psalter with the doxology of 41:13.
- Psalm 40 combines thanksgiving for deliverance (verses 1 through 10) with lament and petition (verses 11 through 17); verses 13 through 17 appear again, nearly word for word, as Psalm 70.
- Hebrews 10:5–10 quotes Psalm 40:6–8 from the Greek Old Testament, where “My ears You have opened” appears as “a body You have prepared for Me.” The sense is the same: what God wanted was a whole life yielded to Him, not an animal.
- Psalm 41:9 is quoted by Jesus in John 13:18 concerning Judas. Note that Jesus stops the quotation before the words about repaying, which the Sinless One could not have prayed.
- “Considering the poor” in 41:1 translates a verb meaning to look at attentively, to give thought to, rather than merely to hand over money.
- Bringing a person food and sitting with the sick were ordinary duties of neighbors and friends in Israel, which is what makes the whispering visitors of 41:5–6 so bitter.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 40:1–3 moves from a pit, to a rock, to a new song, to many who see it and trust in the Lord. Walk through that sequence and discuss why God so often makes a rescued person’s testimony the means of somebody else’s faith.*

The sequence is worth mapping on a board because every step belongs to God except the first. He waited. God inclined, heard, brought up, set, established, and put a new song in his mouth. Notice the pit: it is a horrible pit and miry clay, which is to say there is nothing to push off from and nothing to hold. A man in mud cannot save

himself by effort, because effort is what sinks him. Then a rock under the feet and steps that hold. Whatever the original crisis was, the writer is describing being handled by Someone stronger.

Then verse 3 turns outward: many will see it and fear, and will trust in the Lord. God rescues in public. The new song is sung where people can hear it, and the result is that somebody else decides God can be trusted. Ask the class what they have been rescued from that they have never told anyone about. Some will have good reasons for privacy, and those should be respected. But many are simply embarrassed about the pit, and the psalm says the pit is part of the testimony. The people most likely to trust God because of you are the ones who know where you were.

Question 2. *In 40:6–8 the psalmist says that sacrifice and offering were not what God desired, but an opened ear and a heart delighting in His law. Read Hebrews 10:5–10, where these verses are placed in the mouth of Christ. How should that change the way you hear the words “I delight to do Your will, O my God”?*

Take the Old Testament sense first. The psalmist is not abolishing sacrifice; David offered plenty of them. He is saying what 1 Samuel 15:22 says, that to obey is better than sacrifice, and what Micah 6:6–8 and Isaiah 1:11–17 say at greater length. God never wanted the animals for their own sake. He wanted an opened ear, a person who listens and then goes, and a heart in which the law lives rather than a ritual that substitutes for it.

Then read Hebrews 10:5–10, where these words are on the lips of Christ coming into the world. A body You have prepared for Me. Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God. The writer draws the conclusion: He takes away the first that He may establish the second, and by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. So the sentence “I delight to do Your will” is not primarily a resolution for us to make; it is a description of the One who made it perfectly and whose obedience saves us. Then, and only then, it becomes ours. Ask the class what an opened ear would mean this week in one specific place where they already know what God has said.

Question 3. *Psalm 41:9 speaks of a familiar friend who ate his bread and lifted up his heel against him, and Jesus quotes it about Judas in John 13:18. Talk about what it means that the Lord had a psalm ready for that particular wound, and what that offers to someone in the room who has been betrayed by a friend.*

Start with the wound itself, because the psalm does. Not an enemy, which a man can brace for. A familiar friend, one he trusted, one who ate his bread, which in that culture meant a guest received into the house under the protection of hospitality. Lifting up the heel is the image of a kick delivered by someone standing close enough to be trusted. Everyone in your class over forty knows what this feels like, and most of them have never heard it named from a pulpit.

Then the astonishing thing. In John 13:18, at the table, with Judas still in the room, Jesus quotes this verse and says the Scripture must be fulfilled. He had this psalm ready. The betrayal did not catch Him without words for it. What that offers a wounded person is not an explanation, which nobody has, but company: the Lord you are praying to has been where you are, and He put the sentence in the Bible so you would know. Note also, gently, where Jesus stops the quotation. He does not go on to verse 10 about repaying them. What He does instead is wash the man’s feet.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the verbs of 40:1–3 in order: waited, inclined, heard, brought up, set, established, put. List them, note who does each one, and write a sentence about what the psalmist himself contributed.*

The verbs are: I waited patiently, and then He inclined to me, He heard my cry, He brought me up out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, He set my feet upon a rock, He established my steps, He put a new song in my mouth. The psalmist contributes one thing, and it is not a work: he waited and he cried. Everything else in the rescue is God’s doing. That is worth saying carefully in class, because it is the opposite of both extremes, the person who thinks he must climb out himself and the person who thinks he need not even call.

2. Compare Psalm 40:6–8 with 1 Samuel 15:22 and Hebrews 10:5–10. Write down what all three say about the relationship between obedience and offering, and how the writer of Hebrews applies it to the sacrifice of Christ.

First Samuel 15:22 says to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams, spoken to a king who had kept the best animals and called it worship. Psalm 40:6–8 says God did not desire sacrifice and offering but an opened ear, and then a man who says, “Behold, I come.” Hebrews 10:5–10 puts those words in the mouth of Christ and concludes that God takes away the first covenant’s sacrifices in order to establish the second, and that by the will of God we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. The animals were never the point; a yielded life was, and only one Man ever offered it perfectly.

3. Psalm 40:12 follows the praise with a confession that his own iniquities have overtaken him and are more than the hairs of his head. Describe what it does to the credibility of the psalm that praise and confession sit two verses apart.

It makes the psalm believable. A song of deliverance that never mentions the singer’s own failure sounds like a man performing. Here the same voice that just described the rock under his feet says that innumerable evils have surrounded him, that his own iniquities have overtaken him so that he is not able to look up, and that they are more than the hairs of his head. Rescue and repentance are not stages of life that a person graduates between. They sit two verses apart, which is about how they sit in an actual week.

4. Read Psalm 41:1–3 with Proverbs 19:17 and Matthew 25:40. Note what each passage says God does in response to the care of the poor, and to whom the kindness is finally reckoned.

Psalm 41:1–3 says the Lord will deliver, preserve, keep alive, bless, and sustain the one who considers the poor. Proverbs 19:17 says that he who has pity on the poor lends to the Lord, and He will pay back what he has given. Matthew 25:40 says that whatever was done to the least of these His brethren was done to Him. In all three, God treats care for the poor as personal business, transacted with Him rather than merely with the recipient. Note that Proverbs and Psalms speak in the general manner of Hebrew wisdom, so verses 1 through 3 are not a guarantee of health in exchange for charity.

5. Psalm 41:1 says, “Blessed is he who considers the poor.” The word means to pay careful attention to a person, not merely to donate. Pick one specific person in need whom you have never actually considered, learn something real about that person’s situation this week, and act on what you learn.

Answers will vary, and the word “consider” is the assignment. Most benevolence in a congregation is transactional and anonymous, which is better than nothing and is not what this verse describes. Listen for someone who actually learned something: what the person’s week is like, what is really needed, what the obstacle actually is. Then look for an action fitted to what was learned rather than a generic gift. Follow up the next week, because this is the kind of assignment that quietly turns into a relationship.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- When you reach Psalm 40:6 and Hebrews 10:5, a class member may notice that the wording differs. Handle it honestly: Hebrews quotes the Greek Old Testament, which renders the Hebrew idiom of an opened ear as a prepared body. The meaning is unchanged, and the Spirit who inspired both verses is free to use either. Do not dodge the question.
- Psalm 41:10 asks God to raise him up that he may repay them. Teach it the way you have taught the other imprecations: an appeal to God for justice under the Old Covenant, not a model for Christian conduct (Romans 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23). Note that Jesus quotes verse 9 and does not go on to verse 10.
- Do not turn Psalm 41:1–3 into a formula promising health or protection in exchange for generosity. Hebrew wisdom states general principles, not contracts.
- Psalm 40:12, “my iniquities have overtaken me,” is the honest confession of a believer, not evidence of a nature inherited at birth. Each person becomes guilty when he himself sins (Ezekiel 18:20).

Before the Councils of Men

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Mark tells the trial the way an eyewitness would, with details that serve no literary purpose except that they happened. A young man in a linen cloth who is grabbed and escapes naked. Servants and officers warming themselves at a fire in a courtyard. Witnesses who come forward and do not agree, including some who garble what Jesus had said about the temple. The high priest standing up in the middle and demanding an answer. The whole proceeding is irregular by Israel's own law: a night session, witnesses whose testimony does not agree, a verdict reached before the evidence, and finally a conviction based on the defendant's own words when no witness could be found.

Then the moment everything turns on. Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven. He had refused to answer the charges, and He would not refuse this. The high priest tears his clothes, calls it blasphemy, and the council condemns Him. Then the spitting, the blindfold, the fists, and the taunt, Prophecy. Mark places Peter's denials immediately after, so the reader sees courage and collapse in the same building at the same hour.

Morning brings the transfer to Pilate, because the council could not carry out an execution. Pilate asks the only question a Roman governor would care about, whether this man claims to be a king, and Jesus gives him an answer and then says nothing more, so that Pilate marveled. Then the custom of releasing a prisoner, a name shouted from the crowd, and a governor who knew better. Mark says flatly that Pilate knew the chief priests had handed Him over out of envy, and that he released Barabbas and delivered Jesus to be crucified because he wanted to gratify the crowd. The scourging and the mock coronation follow, performed by professionals who had done it before.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Sanhedrin was the Jewish ruling council of seventy-one members under the high priest. Under Roman rule it could try cases but could not execute (John 18:31), which is why Jesus is taken to Pilate.
- Caiaphas was high priest from roughly A.D. 18 to 36, appointed and kept in office by Rome; his father-in-law Annas had held the position before him (John 18:13).
- Pontius Pilate governed Judea from A.D. 26 to 36. Roman sources and Josephus describe a man capable of both brutality and political calculation, which fits Mark's account precisely.
- Roman scourging used a whip with leather thongs weighted with bone or metal. It was a separate punishment from crucifixion and frequently crippled or killed.
- "The Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven" is drawn from Daniel 7:13–14, where one like the Son of Man is given dominion, glory, and a kingdom that will not pass away, and "at the right hand of the Power" from Psalm 110:1.
- Barabbas had committed murder in an insurrection (15:7), which makes the exchange in the text a literal substitution: the guilty man goes free and the innocent man dies in his place.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus says nothing while the false witnesses contradict each other, and then answers the high priest's direct question with, "I am" (14:60–62). Discuss why He was silent through everything else and why He would not be silent about that, and what it cost Him to answer.*

He was silent about the charges because the charges were not the point and the witnesses were destroying themselves without His help. Isaiah 53:7 had said it: He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth. A defense would have been beside the point in a court that had already decided. But when the high priest asked the one true question, silence would have been a lie. Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? I am. And then He goes further than He was asked, quoting Daniel and the psalm, telling the men judging Him that they will see Him seated at God's right hand.

What it cost Him was everything, and He knew it as He said it. That answer was the legal basis for the verdict. Press the class here: there are things a Christian may let pass, and there are questions that cannot be answered with silence without denying the Lord. Most of us have the categories reversed, defending our reputation fiercely and going quiet about Christ. Ask which question, in their actual life, they have been letting go unanswered, and what it would cost to answer it plainly.

Question 2. *Peter follows at a distance, sits down with the servants, warms himself at the fire, and denies three times before the rooster finishes (14:54, 66–72). Trace how he got from the boast in 14:29 to the curse in 14:71, and name the places where a Christian today makes that same slow walk.*

Lay out the steps and the slope becomes visible. First the boast: even if all are made to stumble, yet I will not. Then sleeping when he was told to watch and pray. Then swinging a sword, which was courage in the wrong currency. Then following at a distance, which is the detail Mark wants us to see. Then sitting down with the servants and warming himself at their fire, comfortable among people who had just arrested his Lord. Then a servant girl, a denial, a second denial, and finally cursing and swearing that he did not know the Man. The rooster, the remembering, and the weeping.

Nobody makes that walk in one step. The fall happened at the distance and at the fire, not at the courtyard door. Ask the class where the modern equivalents are: the friendships where faith is never mentioned, the job where nobody knows, the conversation we laugh along with, the slow adjustment of vocabulary to the room. Then be sure to end where Mark ends, with a man weeping rather than a man finished. John 21 has Jesus asking him three times whether he loves Him, once for each denial. Peter fell and was restored, which is the hope for everybody in the room who has warmed his hands at the wrong fire.

Question 3. *Barabbas was a real man, guilty of murder in a rebellion, and he walked out free because Jesus took his place (15:6–15). Talk about what it would have been like to be Barabbas that morning, and about why Mark tells us that Pilate released Him "wanting to gratify the crowd."*

Imagine the morning from inside the cell. Barabbas is guilty; Mark says so plainly, a man who had committed murder in the rebellion. He is scheduled to die. He hears a crowd outside shouting, and then the door opens and he is told he is free, and if he asked why, the answer was that another man was taking his cross. He is the one person that day who could have said, with complete literalness, that Jesus of Nazareth died in his place. He is also, in that respect, every one of us.

Then deal with Pilate, because Mark is deliberate about his motive. He knew it was envy. He tried the custom, he tried the question, he asked what evil the man had done. And then the sentence that ends his part in it: so Pilate, wanting to gratify the crowd, released Barabbas to them. He did not decide against Jesus on the evidence. He decided against Him on the noise. Ask the class where a crowd currently sets their standard, and how much of what they call conviction is actually the desire to be well thought of by people whose names they will forget in ten years.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. List the points at which this trial violated Israel's own standards of justice. Read Deuteronomy 19:15–19 on witnesses and Exodus 23:1–2 on following a crowd, and note how many of the failures the text itself reports.

The text itself reports the failures. The session is held at night and hurried to a morning confirmation. The council sought testimony to put Him to death, which reverses the order of a trial. Many bore false witness, and their testimonies did not agree, which Deuteronomy 19:15 requires. Deuteronomy 19:16–19 says a false witness is to receive the penalty he sought to bring, and nothing of the kind happens here. The verdict is reached on the defendant's own statement after the prosecution collapsed. Exodus 23:1–2 forbids circulating a false report, joining hands with the wicked as a malicious witness, and following a crowd to do evil, and Pilate does precisely the last of those in 15:15. The men who killed Him were meticulous about ceremony and careless about justice, which is a combination worth naming in class.

2. Follow Peter from 14:29 through 14:72 and write down every step: the boast, the sleep, the sword, the distance, the fire, the first denial, the second, the curse, the rooster, the remembering, the weeping. Mark where you think the fall actually began.

The boast in 14:29 and 14:31, spoken more vehemently than the others. Sleeping three times when told to watch and pray. Drawing a sword. Following at a distance. Sitting with the servants and warming himself at the fire. The servant girl, and the first denial with a dodge: I neither know nor understand what you are saying. Moving out onto the porch. The second denial. The bystanders pressing him about his Galilean accent. The cursing and swearing. The second crowing. The remembering. And the weeping. Answers about where the fall began will vary, and the two most common are the sleep and the distance. Both are right, and both happened before anyone accused him of anything.

3. In 14:62 Jesus answers with words drawn from Daniel 7:13–14 and Psalm 110:1. Look up both passages and explain what claim the high priest heard, and why he tore his clothes.

Daniel 7:13–14 describes one like the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days, receiving dominion, glory, and a kingdom that all peoples should serve, an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. Psalm 110:1 has the Lord saying to David's Lord, "Sit at My right hand." By combining them Jesus claims to be the figure of Daniel 7 and the enthroned Lord of Psalm 110. The high priest tore his clothes because he understood exactly what had been claimed: not merely messiahship in some political sense, but a seat at God's right hand and a kingdom without end. He was right about the claim and wrong about the Man.

4. Compare Judas in Matthew 27:3–5 with Peter in Mark 14:72 and John 21:15–17. Read 2 Corinthians 7:10 and describe the difference between the two men's sorrow.

Judas felt remorse, returned the money, said he had sinned in betraying innocent blood, and went out and hanged himself. Peter wept, and then was met by the risen Lord on a beach and asked three times whether he loved Him, and was told three times to feed the sheep. Second Corinthians 7:10 names the difference: godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted, but the sorrow of the world produces death. Both men were genuinely sorry. One turned toward God and one turned away from everything. The difference is not the depth of the feeling but the direction of the turn.

5. Peter kept quiet because of who was standing around the fire. Name the fire you stand near, the setting where it costs something to be known as a Christian, and say one true thing there this week that you have been leaving unsaid.

Answers will vary, and the question is meant to be concrete. Listen for the specific setting: the break room, the group chat, the extended family dinner, the professional circle where faith is assumed to be embarrassing. Then look for one true thing rather than a speech: an honest answer about Sunday, a refusal to laugh, an invitation, a plain sentence about why a decision was made. Peter did not fail because he lacked courage; he failed because he had not prepared for that particular fire.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Guard the class against any hint of hostility toward Jewish people. Scripture lays the responsibility on particular men in a particular week and, beyond them, on all of us: Acts 2:23 says He was delivered by the determined

counsel of God and taken by lawless hands, and Acts 4:27–28 names Herod, Pilate, Gentiles, and people of Israel together. Our sins put Him there (Isaiah 53:5–6).

- Mark 14:62, “I am,” is a direct claim to deity understood as such by the men who heard it. Do not let it be reduced to a claim of political messiahship.
- Peter’s denial and restoration teach that a Christian can fall grievously and be restored on repentance (Luke 22:31–32; John 21:15–17; 1 John 1:9). It also disproves the notion that a believer cannot fall at all. Hold both truths together.
- Do not dwell on the physical horrors of the scourging for their own sake. Mark reports it in a single clause. The Gospels are restrained about the suffering and emphatic about its meaning; teach it the same way.

The God of All Comfort

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Second Corinthians is the most personal letter Paul wrote, and it begins with the sentence that sets its tone: blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort. Notice what he does not bless God for. Not for a rescue, not for a resolved conflict, not for an easy road. For comfort in the middle of trouble. And then immediately he gives the reason: that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. Nothing God pours into a suffering Christian is meant to stop there.

Then he tells them something remarkable. In Asia he was burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life. He says he had the sentence of death in himself. This is the man who wrote Romans 8, and he is telling a congregation that had been criticizing him that he had reached the end of his own resources. He also tells them why: that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. And he credits their prayers, saying that many would give thanks on his behalf for the gift granted through the prayers of many.

The rest of the reading is Paul defending himself against a charge that sounds trivial and is not. He had said he would come, and he did not come, and his critics were using it to argue that his word could not be trusted, which meant his gospel could not be trusted either. His answer runs deeper than his itinerary: as God is faithful, our word to you was not yes and no, for all the promises of God in Him are yes and in Him amen. Then the real reason for the change of plans: I stayed away to spare you. And the confession that guts the accusation entirely: out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Second Corinthians was written by Paul, probably from Macedonia around A.D. 56, after a painful visit and a severe letter that had produced repentance in Corinth (2:1-4; 7:8-9).
- Paul was under sustained attack in Corinth from men who questioned his authority, his sincerity, his speaking ability, and his reliability. Most of the letter's emotion comes from that.
- The trouble in Asia (1:8) most likely occurred at or near Ephesus; Acts 19 records a riot there, and 1 Corinthians 15:32 speaks of fighting with beasts at Ephesus.
- Timothy is named as co-sender. He had been sent to Corinth earlier (1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10) and knew the situation firsthand.
- "Guarantee" or "earnest" in 1:22 is a commercial term for a down payment that pledges the rest; the Spirit given to Christians is God's pledge, not an unconditional guarantee that removes human responsibility (Ephesians 1:13-14; Hebrews 3:12-14).
- The letter is the fullest window in the New Testament into what apostolic ministry actually cost the men who did it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In 1:3-7 Paul says God comforts us in all our tribulation so that we may be able to comfort others with the comfort we ourselves received. Talk about how that changes the meaning of a hard season you have already been through, and name someone who is currently in the trouble you already know.*

Paul is describing an economy, and the class needs to see the shape of it. Comfort comes from God, passes through a suffering Christian, and arrives at somebody else in the same kind of trouble. That last phrase matters: with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted. Not general encouragement, but the specific, hard-won

kind that only someone who has been there can give. The bereaved parent, the man who has been unemployed for a year, the wife whose husband left, the person who sat in the same waiting room.

This reframes a hard season that a person may still be angry about. Paul does not say God causes every trouble in order to equip us; he says nothing God gives in trouble is wasted. Ask the class to name the season they would never choose again, and then ask who is in it right now. Somebody in your congregation is six months behind somebody else in the same grief, and the two of them have never spoken. The teacher who makes that introduction has done more good in five minutes than most lessons do in an hour.

Question 2. *Paul admits in 1:8–9 that he was burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that he despaired even of life, and that he had the sentence of death in himself. Why would an apostle write that down, and what does he say the purpose of it was?*

He wrote it down because the Corinthians needed to know that the man who preached the power of God had personally run out of strength. Burdened beyond measure. Above strength. So that we despaired even of life. That is not a figure of speech, and Paul is not embarrassed about it. Any teaching that treats despair as automatic evidence of weak faith has to explain this paragraph, and it cannot. There are godly people in your class quietly ashamed of a season like this, and they need to hear verse 8 read aloud.

Then give the stated purpose, which Paul supplies in verse 9: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. The end of self-reliance is not the end of hope; it is the beginning of a better one. Notice also verse 11, where he says the Corinthians were helping together in prayer. Paul, the apostle, tells a church that had been criticizing him that their prayers were part of his deliverance. Ask the class whether they actually believe their praying does anything, and then ask what their prayer life would look like if they did.

Question 3. *Paul explains in 1:23–2:4 that he stayed away to spare them, and that he wrote out of much affliction and anguish of heart, with many tears. Discuss what it looks like to confront someone you genuinely love, and why most of us either avoid it or do it badly.*

Paul is answering a charge of fickleness, and his answer tells us what real love does with a conflict. He did not come, and the reason was not indecision or cowardice. To spare you I did not come again to Corinth. He had already made one painful visit; another one would have been a confrontation nobody could recover from, so he wrote instead, and he says exactly what the writing cost him: out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

Most of us handle this badly in one of two directions. Some avoid entirely, calling it kindness when it is mostly fear, and let a person go on in something that is destroying him. Others confront readily and coldly, with no anguish and no tears, and call their bluntness honesty. Paul does neither. He delays, he chooses a different means, he is plain about the problem, and he is wrecked about it. Note also 1:24: not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy. Ask each person who in their life needs a hard conversation, and whether they love that person enough to grieve over having it.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Count how many times the words comfort, consolation, or comforted appear in 1:3–7. Then write out the chain Paul describes, beginning with God and ending with the person you are supposed to reach.*

The word group appears about ten times in five verses, depending on the translation. The chain runs: God is the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; He comforts us in all our tribulation; we are thereby able to comfort those who are in any trouble; we do it with the comfort with which we ourselves were comforted by God; and as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Paul then says that whether they are afflicted or comforted, it is for the Corinthians' consolation and salvation. The last link in the chain is always another person, which is precisely why the repetition is there.

2. Paul says in 1:11 that the Corinthians were helping together in prayer for him. Describe, from the verse, what he says their praying accomplished and what he expected to result from it.

He says they were helping together in prayer for him, and that as a result the gift granted to him through the prayers of many would produce thanks given by many on his behalf. So their praying is described as genuine help, actual participation in what God did, and as multiplying the thanksgiving afterward. Paul does not explain the mechanics, and neither should we. He simply treats intercession as work that accomplishes something, which is the same assumption behind James 5:16, Ephesians 6:18–19, and Colossians 4:2–3.

3. Read 1:20 with Galatians 3:16 and Acts 13:32–33. Write down what it means that all the promises of God are “Yes” in Christ, and name two specific Old Testament promises that find their answer in Him.

It means that everything God promised finds its answer in Christ rather than in some other arrangement. Galatians 3:16 says the promises were made to Abraham and his Seed, and that the Seed is Christ. Acts 13:32–33 says God has fulfilled the promise made to the fathers by raising up Jesus. Two examples among many: the promise that in Abraham’s seed all nations would be blessed (Genesis 22:18) is answered in the gospel going to every nation, and the promise of a son of David whose throne would be established forever (2 Samuel 7:12–13) is answered in the reign of Christ at God’s right hand (Acts 2:29–36). This is why we do not look for a future political fulfillment; the yes has already been spoken.

4. Work backward through 1:12–2:4 and list the accusations being made against Paul that he is answering. Then note how he defends himself, and what he refuses to claim in 1:24.

The accusations behind the text include that he was worldly and manipulative rather than sincere (1:12), that his letters said one thing and meant another (1:13), that he made plans lightly and could not be trusted to keep his word (1:17), that his yes and no meant nothing (1:18), and that he was heavy-handed with the congregation (1:24). He answers by appealing to his conscience and the testimony of his conduct, by grounding his reliability in God’s own faithfulness, by explaining the actual reason for the change of plans, and by telling them what writing the severe letter cost him. In 1:24 he refuses to claim dominion over their faith, calling himself a fellow worker for their joy.

5. Second Corinthians 1:4 says we comfort others with the comfort we received. Identify the hardest thing God has brought you through, find one person now in that same place, and go to that person this week rather than waiting to be asked.

Answers will vary and this assignment should be checked the following week. Listen for the specific: the diagnosis, the divorce, the bankruptcy, the wayward child, the year of depression, the funeral. Then help the person identify someone actually in it now, which may require a word from an elder or a deacon who knows the congregation. Note that the assignment is to go, not to offer. People in trouble rarely ask, and Paul’s model is a man who shows up with something he has already paid for.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- “The sufferings of Christ abound in us” (1:5) means that Christians share in the kind of suffering Christ endured and suffer for His sake (Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24). It does not mean that anything is lacking in His atoning sacrifice, which Hebrews 10:10–14 says was once for all.
- The “guarantee” or earnest of the Spirit (1:22) is a pledge, not an unconditional assurance that a Christian cannot fall away. Read it with Ephesians 1:13–14 and alongside Hebrews 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:4.
- Do not let 1:3–7 be heard as a promise that God will remove the trouble. The passage promises comfort in tribulation, not exemption from it, and Paul’s own account in 1:8–9 makes that plain.
- Paul’s despair in 1:8 should be handled pastorally. Some in your class carry shame about a dark season. Say clearly that an inspired apostle wrote these words, and be ready to encourage a brother privately afterward.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: 1 Chronicles 6–11 · Psalm 42–44 · Mark 15:21–16:20 · 2 Corinthians 2:5–3:18

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com