

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 50 OF 104

Building for Another Generation

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	1 Chronicles 20–29
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 47–48
Gospels	Luke 1:39–66
General New Testament	2 Corinthians 5:11–7:16

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from admiring God's work to joining it. Every reading has someone handing something on: David to Solomon, the singers of Psalm 48 to the next generation, Elizabeth and Zacharias to a son who will prepare the way, and Paul to a church he will not always be able to visit. Ask your people what they are preparing for someone who comes after them, and whether anyone would know it if they stopped.

Doctrinally, three things are at stake. First, authority in worship: David did not design the temple, he received the pattern, and that principle governs the church today. Second, the reign of Christ: Psalm 47 pictures a King already seated, and Acts 2:33–36 tells us when He sat down. Third, how a person comes to be in Christ, since the new creation of 2 Corinthians 5:17 belongs to those baptized into Him (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). Handle all three plainly and without heat.

Formationally, the thread is open hands. David gives away his private treasure and says it was all God's anyway. Mary says let it be to me according to your word. Zacharias gives up the family name for the name God chose. Paul gives away his comfort, his reputation, and his safety, and calls it being an ambassador. Ask the class this: name the one thing you are holding most tightly right now, and say out loud what it would mean to hold it the way David held that gold.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 2 Corinthians 5:11–7:16 first. It carries the week's heaviest doctrine and its warmest appeal, and 5:17–21 will preach. Give the hour to the ministry of reconciliation, tie the new creation to Romans 6:3–4, and close with godly sorrow in 7:10.

Second session: Take up 1 Chronicles 20–29 second. It is long, so choose three landing places: the threshing floor in chapter 21, the charge to Solomon in 28:9–10 and 20, and David's prayer in 29:10–16. Deal honestly with the temple instruments if the class raises it.

The other two readings: Psalm 47 and 48 and Luke 1:39–66 fit the extended questions well and reward a short read aloud. Encourage families to read Mary's song together at home, and suggest that the Psalm 48 assignment, telling the next generation one specific thing God has done, be attempted before Sunday.

David Prepares the Temple

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The Chronicler is not retelling David's life to fill in the record; he is retelling it to explain where Israel's worship came from. That is why Bathsheba and Absalom are absent and why ten chapters go to building materials, priestly courses, and choir assignments. His readers are people who came home from Babylon to a modest temple and needed to know that the worship they were reassembling had a divine pedigree. Every name and number in these chapters says the same thing: this was not invented, it was given.

The census in chapter 21 is the dark hinge. David counts his fighting men, Joab objects, the plague falls, and the angel's sword stops over a threshing floor on Mount Moriah. David buys the floor at full price, builds an altar, and God answers with fire. From that moment David says, in effect, this is the place. Sin, judgment, mercy, and a purchased altar stand at the exact spot where the temple will rise. Do not hurry past that.

Chapters 28 and 29 are David's farewell, and they are some of the warmest pages in the Old Testament. He hands Solomon a written pattern, tells him to know the God of his father and serve Him with a loyal heart and a willing mind, and then prays a prayer that gives credit for every ounce of gold back to God. An old king ends his life with open hands. That is the note to leave your class on.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after the exile, most likely in Ezra's era, to a community rebuilding temple worship in a small and discouraging city.
- The Chronicler's selection is deliberate: he covers the temple, the priesthood, and the Davidic line, and omits much of the court intrigue that 2 Samuel records.
- Mount Moriah, named in 2 Chronicles 3:1 as the site, connects the threshing floor to Genesis 22 and to a long history of God providing at that place.
- David reigned about forty years and died around 970 BC; Solomon's accession is described here twice, in 23:1 and again in detail in 29:22–25.
- The organization of Levites, singers, and gatekeepers belongs to the Old Covenant order of worship, which Christ fulfilled and took away (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). Draw the timeless principle of reverent order, not the specific practice.
- Redemptive history: David's son builds a house of stone, but the greater Son of David builds a house of living people (2 Samuel 7:12–14; Hebrews 3:6; 1 Peter 2:5).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *David insists on paying full price for Ornan's threshing floor and says he will not offer to God something that cost him nothing (21:24). Where are we tempted to offer God the leftover hour, the leftover dollar, the leftover energy, and call it worship?*

Ornan offers the floor, the oxen, and the wood for free, and he means it kindly. David refuses because he understands something about worship that we lose easily: an offering that costs the giver nothing says something false about the worth of the One receiving it. Malachi 1:8 makes the same point from the other direction, where Israel brings the blind and lame animal it would never hand a governor.

Turn this toward the ordinary. Most of us do not withhold from God dramatically; we simply give Him the tired end of everything. The last twenty minutes of the evening for prayer. The check written after every other obligation. The class preparation done in the car. Ask the class to name one specific place where God currently receives their leftovers, and then leave the room quiet long enough for the question to land.

Question 2. *God tells David plainly that he will not be the one to build the house (22:7–8), and David spends the rest of his life preparing materials for it anyway. How do you keep working faithfully on something you already know you will not live to see finished?*

The reason given in 22:8 and 28:3 is that David was a man of war who had shed much blood. There is no hint of rejection in it. God still lets him gather a hundred thousand talents of gold, draw the plans, organize the personnel, and charge the builder. David's response to a closed door is not sulking but preparation. He pours his last years into making his successor's obedience easier.

This is one of the most practical questions you will ask all year, because most faithful people are working on something they will not finish. Parents raising children whose real character will show up in twenty years. Teachers planting verses in six year olds. Members giving toward a work that will outlast them. Ask who in the class is currently discouraged by a slow work, and remind them from 1 Corinthians 3:6–9 that God assigns the planting and the watering, and He gives the increase.

Question 3. *Read David's prayer in 29:10–16 out loud. He says that everything given came from God's hand in the first place. If a congregation actually believed that sentence, how would its giving, its budgeting, and its arguments about money change?*

David's prayer in 29:11–14 is a theology of ownership in miniature. Greatness, power, glory, victory, and majesty belong to God; the kingdom is His; riches and honor come from Him; and the astonishing line is verse 14, where David asks who he is that he should be able to offer anything, since all of it came from God's hand and they have only given Him back His own. Generosity, on this view, is not a transfer of our property to God. It is a return.

Press the practical edge. Congregations argue about money the way people argue about their own possessions. If the treasury, the building, the paycheck, and the retirement account are all on loan, then the questions change from what can we afford to what does the Owner want done. Ask the class what one financial decision in their own household would look different if they genuinely prayed verse 14 first.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the groups David organizes in chapters 23 through 27: Levites, priests by division, singers, gatekeepers, treasurers, officers, and the army. Why would the Chronicler give so much space to order in the worship of God?*

The lists include twenty four courses of priests, Levites appointed to service and to song, four thousand gatekeepers, treasurers over the dedicated things, officers and judges, and monthly divisions of the army. The Chronicler's readers were rebuilding worship from scratch, and he is showing them that the God who gave the pattern also gave the arrangement. The principle carries forward: God cares how He is approached, and order in worship is not a human preference but a reflection of His character (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

2. *Compare 1 Chronicles 21:1 with 2 Samuel 24:1, and then read James 1:13–14. How do you hold both statements together without making God the author of David's sin?*

2 Samuel says the anger of the Lord moved David, and 1 Chronicles says Satan stood up against Israel and moved David. The two are not in conflict once you see the Bible's ordinary way of speaking. God, in His anger, permitted the tempter to do what the tempter already wished to do, and David chose the sin freely. James 1:13–14 settles the moral question: God tempts no one, and each man is drawn away by his own desire. Compare Job 1 and 2, where Satan acts only within limits God sets.

3. *Trace the charge David gives Solomon in 22:11–13, 28:9–10, and 28:20. What words and ideas keep coming back, and what is the one thing a father most wants his son to know?*

The repeated notes are be strong and of good courage, do not fear or be dismayed, keep the law of the Lord, and the Lord your God is with you and will not fail you. Underneath them all sits 28:9, know the God of your father and serve Him with a loyal heart and a willing mind. David wants Solomon to know God personally, not merely to inherit a project. Solomon's later drift shows how much that charge was needed.

4. *1 Chronicles 28:19 says the pattern for the house came from the Lord's own hand in writing. Read Exodus 25:40 and Hebrews 8:5 alongside it. Why does it matter that the shape of worship was given by God rather than designed by the worshippers?*

Because worship that God accepts is worship God authorized. Moses was warned to make everything according to the pattern shown on the mountain, and Hebrews 8:5 says the earthly sanctuary was a copy and shadow of heavenly things. David did not sketch the temple; he received it. The same principle governs the church today, where we look for New Testament authority for what we do rather than for what pleases us (Colossians 3:17; 2 John 9).

5. *In 29:3 David gives his own personal treasure over and above everything already set aside. Name one specific thing you will give this week that goes beyond what you normally give, and then give it before the week ends.*

Answers will vary. Listen for the difference between a warm intention and a decided act. David had already set aside the national treasury before he touched his own; the gift that counts here is the one that came out of his personal store. Encourage one concrete, dated, this week action rather than a resolution about giving more in general.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Instrumental music: 1 Chronicles 23:5 and 25:1–7 place instruments squarely in temple worship by David's arrangement. Handle this honestly. Those instruments belonged to the Old Covenant order of sacrifice and priesthood, which was fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 10:1–10). What the New Testament authorizes for the church is singing and making melody in the heart (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Teach it plainly and without heat.
- The census: do not let the class stall on whether counting people was inherently wrong. Exodus 30:12 and Numbers 1 show God commanding censuses. The sin lay in David's motive, a reliance on numbers and military strength, which even Joab could see (21:3).
- Satan in 21:1: state clearly that God does not tempt anyone to sin (James 1:13). Scripture often speaks of God doing what He permits.
- Do not turn the temple preparations into an argument about church buildings or fundraising campaigns. The church is the house of God (1 Timothy 3:15), and its building materials are people (1 Peter 2:5).

The King and His City

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These are enthronement and Zion psalms, and they belong together. Psalm 47 looks outward: God is King not merely of Israel but of all the earth, and the nations are summoned to applaud a reign they did not choose. Psalm 48 looks inward: here is the city where this King is known, and here is what it feels like to stand safe inside it while the kings of the earth look on and lose their nerve. Sovereignty in one psalm, refuge in the other.

Psalm 47:5, God has gone up with a shout, likely accompanied the ark being carried up to the sanctuary, a moment when Israel saw the invisible King take His seat. The New Testament writers heard something larger in it. When Christ ascended and sat down at the right hand of God, the psalm found its full voice, and Peter said so on Pentecost (Acts 2:33–36). Do not force every line into a prediction, but do let your class hear the echo.

The closing instruction of Psalm 48 is worth the whole hour. Walk the walls. Count the towers. Look at what God has preserved, and then tell the generation coming behind you. Faith is handed on by people who take the trouble to point at specific evidence and say, this is our God. Ask your class when they last did that out loud with a child, a grandchild, or a new convert.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Both psalms are attributed to the sons of Korah, a family of Levitical singers descended from the Korah of Numbers 16, a mercy worth noticing.
- Genre: Psalm 47 is an enthronement hymn; Psalm 48 is a song of Zion. Neither is a lament, so the mood throughout is confident public praise.
- Zion is the temple hill in Jerusalem, and in these psalms it stands for the place where God has chosen to make His name known.
- Psalm 48:4–7 probably recalls a specific deliverance, such as the collapse of Sennacherib's siege in 2 Kings 19, though the psalm does not name it.
- In the New Testament, Mount Zion becomes a name for the church, the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22–23; Galatians 4:26), which is where the teacher should land.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 47 begins by calling all peoples, not only Israel, to praise God. How does that widen what an Israelite singer would have assumed about God, and where do you see the same widening finished in the New Testament?*

Psalm 47:1 addresses all you peoples, and verse 8 says God reigns over the nations. For a nation surrounded by neighbors who each had their own local deity, this is a large claim. Israel's God is not one tribal god among many; He holds the whole board. Verse 9 goes further and pictures foreign princes assembling as the people of the God of Abraham, which is an astonishing line in the Old Testament.

That widening is completed in the gospel. Genesis 22:18 promised that in Abraham's Seed all nations would be blessed, and Galatians 3:8 says the Scripture preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham in exactly those words. The gathering of the nations is not a future political event; it is what happens every time a Gentile is baptized into Christ and becomes Abraham's offspring (Galatians 3:26–29). Guard the class against reading these psalms as promises about modern national politics.

Question 2. *Psalm 48:12–13 says to walk about Zion, count her towers, and mark her ramparts so that the next generation can be told. What would it look like, practically, for you to show a child or a younger Christian the evidence that God has kept His promises?*

The command is physical and specific. Do not merely feel grateful; walk the perimeter, count the towers, look at the ramparts, and then tell it. Israel's faith was transmitted by parents who pointed at things: stones in the Jordan, a lamb on the table, walls that should not still be standing. Deuteronomy 6:6–9 assumes the same method, teaching that happens while walking, sitting, lying down, and getting up.

Make this concrete in the room. Ask each person to think of one thing in their own history that only God accounts for: a marriage that should have failed, a sobriety, a provision that arrived the week it was needed, a congregation that survived a hard season. Then ask who they will tell, by name, before next Sunday. Children rarely inherit faith from a general impression that God is good. They inherit it from stories with details.

Question 3. *Both psalms describe security that comes from God's presence rather than from the strength of the walls (48:3, 8). How do we tell the difference between trusting God and simply trusting the structures we have built for ourselves?*

Psalm 48 describes real fortifications, and it also says in verse 3 that God is known in her palaces as a refuge. The city's safety was never in the masonry; it was in the resident. Israel later got this badly wrong. Jeremiah 7:4 records people chanting the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, as if the building itself guaranteed protection, and God tore the illusion down.

The modern version is close to home. We can trust the church building, the eldership, the schedule, the size of the savings account, and the reputation of the congregation, and call all of it trusting God. A useful diagnostic question for the class: if the structure you lean on were removed tomorrow, would your faith be shaken or only your comfort? Answering honestly usually shows a person where his confidence actually lives.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every title given to God in Psalm 47. What picture of Him do those titles build together?*

The psalm calls Him the Lord Most High, a great King over all the earth, our King, King of all the earth, and God who sits on His holy throne, and it names Him the God of Abraham and the shield of the earth. Put together, the titles describe a God whose authority is universal and personal at once: high over every nation and yet ours, covenanted to a particular family and open to all.

2. *Psalm 47:5 says God has gone up with a shout, with the sound of a trumpet. Read Acts 1:9–11 and Ephesians 4:8–10, and describe how the ascension of Christ answers this psalm.*

The psalm pictures God ascending to His throne with shouting and trumpet. Acts 1:9–11 records the literal ascension of Christ, and Ephesians 4:8–10 applies ascension language to Him, saying He led captivity captive and gave gifts to men. Peter ties the enthronement to the reign that began then: exalted to the right hand of God, made both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:33–36). The King in Psalm 47 is seated now, not waiting to be crowned later.

3. *Psalm 47:9 speaks of the princes of the peoples gathering as the people of the God of Abraham. Compare Genesis 22:18 and Galatians 3:8, 26–29, and explain who those gathered peoples turn out to be.*

They turn out to be the Gentiles who come to God through Christ. Genesis 22:18 promised blessing to all nations in Abraham's Seed; Galatians 3:8 identifies that promise as the gospel preached in advance; and Galatians 3:26–29 says that those baptized into Christ have put on Christ and are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. The psalm was singing about the church before the church existed.

4. *Trace the movement of Psalm 48 from verse 1 to verse 14: what the city is, what the kings do, what the worshipers think about inside the temple, and what they are told to do as they leave.*

Verses 1 through 3 praise the city as beautiful and God as her refuge; verses 4 through 7 describe kings who assembled, saw, marveled, were troubled, and fled in pain; verses 8 through 11 have worshipers inside the temple thinking on God's lovingkindness and rejoicing in His judgments; verses 12 through 14 send them out to walk the walls, count the towers, and tell the next generation that this God is our God forever.

5. *Psalm 48:14 says this God will be our guide even to death. Name one decision you are currently facing where you have been consulting everyone except Him, and put that decision into a specific prayer this week.*

Answers will vary. Watch for the person who names a decision but keeps it general. Push gently toward specificity: which decision, by when, and what would it look like to actually ask God rather than merely to mention the matter to Him. The psalm promises a guide, and a guide is only useful to someone willing to be led.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Zion: do not read these psalms as promises to a modern political state. The New Testament identifies Mount Zion with the church, the city of the living God (Hebrews 12:22-23). Teach the church as the fulfillment, kindly but plainly.
- Psalm 47:5 is not a formal prophecy of the ascension in the way Psalm 110:1 is. Let the class hear the echo and the New Testament use of the language without overstating the claim.
- These are confident psalms, and a class member walking through real trouble may hear them as a promise that God's people never suffer loss. Be ready to point to the laments already read this year and to Psalm 46:1, help in trouble, not exemption from it.

Mary's Song and John's Birth

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke has just given us two annunciations, one to an old priest in the temple and one to a young girl in an obscure town. Now he brings the two households together, and the meeting is the quiet center of the chapter. Elizabeth, who is six months along, feels her child move at the sound of Mary's greeting, and the Holy Spirit gives her words she could not have known on her own: blessed are you among women, and why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me.

Mary's song, often called the Magnificat, is saturated with Old Testament language, especially Hannah's prayer in 1 Samuel 2. It is not a soft nativity poem. It sings about a God who scatters the proud, pulls rulers off thrones, fills the hungry, and sends the rich away empty, and it grounds all of it in the mercy He promised to Abraham. A girl with no standing understands that the arrival of this child means a rearrangement of the world.

Then comes the birth and naming of John. The neighbors assume the boy will be a second Zacharias, and both parents insist otherwise. When the father writes His name is John, his tongue is loosed and he blesses God, and fear settles over the whole hill country with the question that hangs over the rest of the chapter: what kind of child will this be? Luke leaves it hanging on purpose.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke writes an orderly account to Theophilus from eyewitness testimony (1:1–4); the details of Mary's inner life in this chapter suggest he had access to her memory or to those who held it.
- The hill country of Judah is roughly eighty miles south of Nazareth, a hard trip for a young woman traveling alone or with a small party.
- Naming a son for his father or a relative was the expected custom, which is why the neighbors object in 1:59–61.
- John is the last prophet of the old order, born under the Law, sent to prepare a people for the Lord (1:16–17; Luke 16:16; Matthew 11:11–13).
- The fillings of the Holy Spirit in this chapter are the direct, miraculous work of God in an age of revelation, opening a period of prophecy after four hundred silent years.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Elizabeth blesses Mary specifically because she believed what the Lord told her (1:45), which stands in sharp contrast to Zacharias in 1:18–20. What made belief possible for one and difficult for the other, and which of the two are you more like this year?*

The contrast is drawn by Luke himself. Zacharias, a priest standing in the holy place, asks how shall I know this, and asks for evidence. Mary, a village girl, asks how will this be, and asks for a mechanism, then submits: let it be to me according to your word. The difference is not information. Zacharias knew more Scripture than she did. The difference is posture. One wanted proof before trust; the other wanted understanding inside trust.

Take the second half of the question seriously in the room. Long time members of the church often drift into a quiet Zacharias posture: still faithful in attendance, still serving, but no longer expecting God to do anything. Ask where someone has stopped praying about something because they have decided in advance it will not happen. Then read 1:45 again over them.

Question 2. *Work through Mary's song in 1:46–55 and list what she says God has done. Why would a poor teenage girl from an unimportant town sing about thrones being emptied and the hungry being filled?*

Mary's list is worth writing on the board: God has regarded her lowly state, done great things for her, shown mercy to those who fear Him, shown strength with His arm, scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

put down the mighty from their thrones, exalted the lowly, filled the hungry with good things, sent the rich away empty, and helped Israel in remembrance of His mercy to Abraham. Note that most of the verbs are past tense. She sings about the reversal as already accomplished because God has said it.

She sings this because she has understood who her son is. If God has finally moved to keep the promise to Abraham, then every arrangement built on human pride is already temporary. Be careful here in two directions: this is not a program of political revolution, and it is not merely a spiritual metaphor with no bearing on real life. It is the announcement that God notices the overlooked and resists the self important, and James 4:6 says exactly that to Christians.

Question 3. *Zacharias had nine months of silence to think, and the first thing he does when he can write is obey the angel about the name (1:63). How does God sometimes use an enforced quiet to change a person, and have you ever experienced one?*

Zacharias lost his speech because he would not believe (1:20), and yet the discipline proved to be mercy. For nine months he could not explain, argue, teach, or lead a service. He could only listen and think. When the silence ends, he does not complain; he obeys about the name, and then 1:64 says he spoke, praising God. The man who came out of the quiet is not the man who went into it.

Enforced quiet takes many forms now: an illness, a lost job, a season of being sidelined from work we loved, a long night in a hospital chair. Hebrews 12:11 says no chastening seems joyful at the time but afterward yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness. Ask whether anyone in the class can look back on a forced stop and name what God did in it. Those testimonies preach better than anything you will say.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 1 Samuel 2:1–10 beside Luke 1:46–55. List the phrases and themes the two songs share, and note what Mary adds that Hannah could not have known.*

Both songs open with the soul rejoicing in the Lord, both speak of God's holiness, both describe the mighty brought low and the poor lifted up, both contrast the full with the hungry, and both end looking toward God's anointed king. What Mary adds is the note of fulfillment: the mercy spoken to Abraham and his seed is being kept now, in her, and the horn of salvation Hannah could only anticipate has a name and a due date.

2. *Elizabeth calls Mary the mother of my Lord (1:43). Compare Psalm 110:1 and Luke 20:41–44. What is being claimed about the child Mary is carrying?*

Elizabeth is confessing the deity and lordship of the child. Lord in this setting is no courtesy title; Psalm 110:1 has David calling his own descendant Lord, and Jesus uses that very verse in Luke 20:41–44 to press the question of how the Messiah can be both David's son and David's Lord. Elizabeth, filled with the Spirit, has been given the answer before the child is born.

3. *Count how many times the Holy Spirit is mentioned in Luke 1:15–67, and note what He does in each case. What is Luke establishing about this whole birth account?*

The Holy Spirit appears in 1:15 (John filled from his mother's womb), 1:35 (the Spirit coming upon Mary), 1:41 (Elizabeth filled), and 1:67 (Zacharias filled and prophesying). Luke is establishing that after four centuries without a prophetic voice, God has begun to speak again, and that every claim made about this child rests on divine revelation rather than on human enthusiasm.

4. *In 1:58 the neighbors and relatives rejoice with Elizabeth because the Lord had shown great mercy to her. Read Romans 12:15. Who in your congregation has received a blessing recently that you have not yet celebrated with them?*

Answers will vary. Romans 12:15 makes rejoicing with others a command, not a mood, and it is often harder than weeping with them, because another person's blessing can expose our own envy. Listen for honesty here, and steer the class toward one specific act: a call, a note, a meal, a word said in front of others.

5. *Mary's song begins with My soul magnifies the Lord. Write out, in your own words, four sentences about what God has actually done for you. Then find one person this week and say them out loud.*

Answers will vary. The point of the exercise is specificity. Mary does not say God is good in general; she names what He regarded, what He did, and what He remembered. Encourage plain sentences about actual events, and then press the second half of the question, because a private gratitude that never becomes speech is not what magnifying the Lord means.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Mary: the text calls her blessed among women and highly favored, and that is all. She is not sinless, not a mediator, and not to be prayed to. Jesus Himself redirects a woman who blesses His mother, saying rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it (Luke 11:27–28). Teach the honor the text gives her, and stop where the text stops.
- The filling of the Holy Spirit here is miraculous and revelatory, belonging to the period in which God was giving His word. Do not use these verses to support expectations of present day prophecy or new revelation (1 Corinthians 13:8–10; Jude 3).
- John being filled from his mother's womb (1:15) is a unique preparation for a unique office. It says nothing about the spiritual condition of infants generally, and it must not be pressed toward inherited guilt. Children are safe with God (Matthew 18:3; 19:14; Ezekiel 18:20).
- Mary's song is sometimes read as a manifesto for a political or economic program. Keep it where Luke puts it: God's settled opposition to human pride and His care for the overlooked, fulfilled in the reign of her Son.

Ambassadors of Reconciliation

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This is the theological heart of the letter. Paul has been defending a ministry that looks like failure, and here he explains what sustains it. Two motives are named: the fear of the Lord in 5:11, and the love of Christ that compels him in 5:14. Because One died for all, those who live must no longer live for themselves. That single sentence reorganizes a life. Everything after it, including the beatings and the sleeplessness of chapter 6, is simply what that reorganization costs.

The center is 5:17–21, and you should slow down there. A new creation. Old things passed away. God, not man, taking the initiative in reconciliation. A ministry and a message of reconciliation handed to ordinary people. Ambassadors who do not invent policy but deliver it. And then verse 21, the great exchange: He who knew no sin made sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. Read it aloud twice before anyone comments on it.

Chapter 6 turns pastoral and then blunt. Paul opens his heart wide, asks for the same in return, and in the middle of that appeal warns them not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers, piling up five rhetorical questions and a chain of Old Testament quotations. Chapter 7 then resolves the tension that has run through the whole letter: Titus has come back with good news, the severe letter produced not mere regret but repentance, and Paul is comforted.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul writes to Corinth around AD 56, after a painful visit and a severe letter, and after meeting Titus in Macedonia with a report on how the church responded (2:12–13; 7:5–7).
- An ambassador in the Roman world carried the authority of the one who sent him and had no license to alter the terms; the image is exact and worth explaining.
- The quotations in 6:16–18 come from Leviticus 26:12, Isaiah 52:11, and 2 Samuel 7:14, woven together to make a single point about a holy people belonging to God.
- The unequal yoke image comes from Deuteronomy 22:10, where an ox and a donkey are not to plow together because they pull differently.
- Second Corinthians 6:2 quotes Isaiah 49:8, and Paul applies the prophecy of the acceptable time to the present gospel age.
- This section sits in the middle of Paul's defense of his apostleship, which is why personal appeal and hard doctrine keep alternating.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Second Corinthians 5:17 says that if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation. According to Romans 6:3–4 and Galatians 3:26–27, how does a person get into Christ, and why does that question matter so much for what 5:17 promises?*

The promise of 5:17 is tied by the preposition to a location: in Christ. Everything Paul says here belongs to people who are in Him, and the New Testament is not vague about how a person gets there. Romans 6:3–4 says we were baptized into Christ Jesus, baptized into His death, buried with Him by baptism, and raised to walk in newness of life. Galatians 3:26–27 says all who were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. The newness of 5:17 and the newness of life in Romans 6:4 are the same newness.

This matters because 5:17 is frequently quoted as though the new creation happens at the moment of a private decision or a prayer. Teach the passage the way Paul teaches it: the love of Christ compels, a person believes,

repents, confesses, and is buried with Christ in baptism, and comes up a new creature. Do it warmly rather than argumentatively. Most people who quote the verse loosely have simply never been shown the connection between 5:17 and Romans 6.

Question 2. *Paul calls himself an ambassador and says God pleads through him, be reconciled to God (5:20). If that is the job description of every Christian who carries this message, what has to change about how you talk to the people at your work?*

An ambassador has no authority to negotiate new terms. He delivers what his King has already decided. That is enormously freeing for a nervous Christian, because the message is not his opinion and its reception is not his personal rejection. Notice too the tone Paul uses: we implore, we plead. This is not a summons served on an enemy; it is a plea from a man who knows what is at stake, which is why 5:11 mentions the terror of the Lord in the same breath.

Press the application into real places. Most Christians have decided, without ever saying so, that their workplace is off limits. Ask the class to name one specific person who would be genuinely surprised to learn they follow Christ, and to name the smallest true next step: a lunch, an honest answer to a question, an invitation. Ambassadors do not have to be eloquent. They have to be present and clear.

Question 3. *Second Corinthians 7:10 draws a line between godly sorrow and the sorrow of the world. Describe the difference in practical terms, and how you can tell which one you are actually feeling after you sin.*

Godly sorrow is grief over having sinned against God; worldly sorrow is grief over consequences. Judas felt remorse enough to throw the money down and hang himself; Peter wept bitterly and was restored. The difference is not the intensity of the feeling but its direction and its outcome. Paul says godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted, while the sorrow of the world produces death.

Give the class a practical test, and 7:11 supplies it. Godly sorrow shows up as diligence, as a willingness to clear the matter up, as indignation at the sin itself, as fear, as longing, as zeal, and as a readiness to make things right. If the sorrow produces only self pity, secrecy, and a determination not to get caught next time, it is the wrong kind. Ask the class which items in that list usually show up in them, and which usually do not.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the hardships Paul names in 6:4–10, and then list the paired contrasts in 6:8–10 (as unknown, yet well known, and the rest). What kind of life is he describing, and what holds it together?*

The hardships include tribulations, needs, distresses, stripes, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, and fastings, alongside the virtues of purity, knowledge, longsuffering, kindness, sincere love, and the power of God. The contrasts run from deceivers yet true, unknown yet well known, dying and behold we live, chastened yet not killed, sorrowful yet always rejoicing, poor yet making many rich, having nothing yet possessing all things. It is a life held together not by circumstances but by the reality of what is true in Christ underneath the appearances.

2. *Read 5:21 carefully. In what sense was Christ made sin for us, and in what sense did He never cease to be sinless? Compare Isaiah 53:6, Hebrews 4:15, and 1 Peter 2:22–24 before you answer.*

Christ was made sin in the sense that our guilt was laid on Him and He bore its penalty as our substitute; Isaiah 53:6 says the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and 1 Peter 2:24 says He bore our sins in His own body on the tree. He never became a sinner in character or conduct. Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in every point as we are, yet without sin, and 1 Peter 2:22 says He committed no sin. The exchange is legal and substitutionary, not a transfer of moral character.

3. *Trace the argument of 6:14–7:1. Note each question Paul asks, each Old Testament quotation he uses, and the conclusion he draws in 7:1. What exactly is he asking the Corinthians to separate from?*

Paul asks five questions: what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness, what communion has light with darkness, what accord has Christ with Belial, what part has a believer with an unbeliever, and what agreement has the temple of God with idols. He then quotes Leviticus 26:12, Isaiah 52:11, and 2 Samuel 7:14, and concludes in 7:1 that we should cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. He is

asking for separation from the idolatry and immorality of Corinthian life and from binding partnerships that pull a Christian against his own confession.

4. *Second Corinthians 7:11 lists seven things godly sorrow produced in the Corinthians. Write them out, and mark which ones were present the last time you repented of something.*

Diligence, clearing of yourselves, indignation, fear, vehement desire, zeal, and vindication. Answers will vary on the second half. Listen for the person who realizes his repentance usually stops at feeling bad, and encourage the step he has been skipping, which is most often the clearing of the matter with the person he wronged.

5. *Paul says now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation (6:2). Name one conversation about Christ you have been postponing, and set a specific day this week to have it.*

Answers will vary. The aim is a date, not a resolution. Isaiah 49:8 in the mouth of Paul makes urgency a matter of obedience, and most postponed conversations are postponed indefinitely. Ask for the day and, if the class is comfortable, ask someone to follow up next week.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Second Corinthians 5:17 is a favorite proof text for salvation by faith only. Keep it joined to how one enters Christ (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27). Teach it positively rather than as a rebuttal.
- Second Corinthians 5:19, God reconciling the world, is not universalism; verse 20 still pleads with people to be reconciled, which would be meaningless if all were already saved.
- Second Corinthians 6:14 needs careful handling. Paul is not forbidding all contact with unbelievers (1 Corinthians 5:9–10) but binding partnerships that compromise a Christian's loyalty, including marriage and any yoke that pulls against faith. Be pastoral about members already in mixed marriages; 1 Corinthians 7:12–14 tells them to stay and live faithfully.
- Second Corinthians 7:10: distinguish repentance from remorse without letting the class conclude that feelings do not matter. Godly sorrow is real sorrow; it simply does not stop at feeling.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Chronicles 1–9 • Psalm 49–50 • Luke 1:67–2:21 • 2 Corinthians 8–9

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