

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 52 OF 104

Hearts Laid Bare

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	2 Chronicles 10–20
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 51–52
Gospels	Luke 2:22–52
General New Testament	2 Corinthians 10–11

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

One year in, take a few minutes at the start of a session to mark it. Your class has read from Genesis through the divided kingdom, all of the Psalms they have covered, half of Luke, and a shelf of letters. Some have missed weeks and quietly given up. Say plainly that the second year starts now and that anyone can begin again this Sunday. Then aim the week itself at the interior life, because that is where all four readings land: what is actually in a person, as opposed to what he shows.

Doctrinally, three points want care. First, Asa shows that a strong beginning is no guarantee of a faithful ending, which is the plain teaching of Hebrews 3:12–14 and Galatians 5:4 and the answer to once saved, always saved. Second, Psalm 51:5 is poetic confession of personal sinfulness, not a proof of inherited guilt; children are not born condemned (Ezekiel 18:20; Matthew 19:14). Third, 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 concerns arguments overthrown by the word, not techniques for confronting demons.

Formationally, the thread is what happens when the outside is stripped away. Rehoboam had the title and not the wisdom. Asa had the record and not the reliance. David had the crown and nothing left but mercy. Simeon had nothing but a promise and recognized the Savior on sight. Paul had scars and called them his credentials. Ask your class this: if everything you use to feel good about yourself were removed tomorrow, your position, your reputation, your competence, what would be left, and would it be enough to build a life on?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Psalm 51 and 52 first, and mark the halfway point at the start of the hour. Psalm 51 is short enough to read aloud in full and deep enough to fill the time. Settle verse 5 carefully, then spend most of the hour on verses 10 through 17.

Second session: Take up 2 Chronicles 10–20 second, built around three scenes: Rehoboam choosing his advisers in chapter 10, Asa's rise and collapse in chapters 14 through 16, and Jehoshaphat's prayer in chapter 20. Asa is the heart of it, and the honest warning there will do more good than the victory story.

The other two readings: Luke 2:22–52 and 2 Corinthians 10–11 carry the extended questions well. Point the class to Simeon's warning in 2:34–35 and to Paul's list in 11:23–28, and suggest they read those two passages back to back and ask what each one costs.

A Kingdom Torn in Two

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The kingdom splits in a single scene, and the Chronicler makes sure you see both layers of it. On the surface, a young king surrounded by young advisers decides that intimidation is leadership: my little finger shall be thicker than my father's waist. Underneath, 10:15 says the turn of events was from God, fulfilling the word spoken to Jeroboam. Human folly and divine purpose run in the same channel without either being canceled. Rehoboam is not a puppet, and God is not surprised.

Asa is the long case study of the reading, and one of the most sobering figures in the Old Testament. For thirty five years he is exemplary: idols broken, groves cut down, an army outnumbered two to one, a prayer in 14:11 that ranks with any in Scripture, a covenant renewal in chapter 15, the courage to depose his own grandmother. Then Baasha builds a fort on his border, and instead of praying, Asa empties the temple treasury to hire Syria. When Hanani rebukes him, he jails the seer. Three years later his feet are diseased, and he seeks physicians and not the Lord.

Jehoshaphat is the counterweight, though not a simple one. He does what almost no king thought to do, sending a teaching circuit through the country with the book of the Law, and he reforms the courts with the reminder that judges judge for the Lord and not for man. He also marries his son into Ahab's family and nearly dies for it. The reading ends at his best moment: an invading army, a national assembly, a public prayer that recites God's promises back to Him, a word through a Levite, and singers sent out ahead of the soldiers.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The division occurred about 931 BC. Chronicles follows the southern kingdom of Judah and the line of David, mentioning the north only when it touches Judah.
- Jeroboam set up golden calves at Bethel and Dan and installed a non Levitical priesthood, which is why 11:13-16 records priests and faithful Israelites migrating south.
- The Chronicler writes for returned exiles and repeatedly highlights a pattern: seeking the Lord brings blessing, forsaking Him brings trouble, and humbling brings relief (12:6-7; 15:2).
- Shishak is Sheshonq I of Egypt, and his campaign into Palestine is recorded on the wall of a temple at Karnak.
- Genre is theological history. The speeches of prophets like Shemaiah, Azariah, Hanani, and Jahaziel carry the Chronicler's message and are worth reading aloud.
- This is Old Covenant national history. God dealt with Israel as a nation under a covenant with material blessings and curses (Deuteronomy 28). Do not transfer those national terms to modern countries or to individual Christians.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Rehoboam asks the old men and then asks his friends, and takes the answer he liked better (10:6-11). Where in your life do you keep shopping for counsel until somebody tells you what you had already decided to do?*

Rehoboam did consult the elders who had stood before his father, and their counsel was excellent: speak good words to them and they will be your servants forever. Then he consulted the men he grew up with, who told him what a young man wants to hear, that strength means never bending. The tragedy is that he had the right answer in hand and went looking for a second opinion. Proverbs 12:15 says the way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who heeds counsel is wise.

Press this into how decisions actually get made. We ask the friend who will agree, read the article that confirms us, and find the preacher who takes our side. Ask the class to name a specific decision, recent or pending, where they

already know what the wise person in their life would say and have been avoiding the conversation. Then ask them to have it this week.

Question 2. *Asa smashed the idols, removed his own grandmother from her position, and led the nation back to God, and then in his old age he bought Syria's help and imprisoned the prophet who rebuked him (16:1–12). What does that ending say to a Christian who assumes that a strong beginning guarantees a safe finish?*

Asa's record is the clearest Old Testament refutation of the idea that a good start settles the matter. Nothing in chapters 14 and 15 is fake. He genuinely tore down the high places, genuinely trusted God against a million man army, genuinely led a covenant renewal. And yet at the end he trusts silver over prayer, jails a prophet, oppresses some of the people, and refuses God even when his body is failing. 2 Chronicles 16:9 says his eyes run throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him, and then adds, in this you have done foolishly.

This is the place to teach plainly that a Christian can fall away. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren about an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God and says we are made partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end. Hebrews 10:26–31, 2 Peter 2:20–22, and Galatians 5:4 say the same in different words. Do this without scaring the faithful: the point is not insecurity but attentiveness. Ask each person to name the one area where he has quietly stopped depending on God because he has gotten good at handling it himself.

Question 3. *Jehoshaphat stands before the assembly and says he has no might against this great company and does not know what to do, but his eyes are on God (20:12). When was the last time you prayed a sentence that honest, and what keeps most of us from praying that way?*

Jehoshaphat's prayer is a model worth outlining on the board. He recites who God is and what He has done (20:6–7), he reminds God of His own promise regarding this house (20:8–9), he lays out the specific problem without exaggeration or minimizing (20:10–11), and then he ends with the sentence that makes the whole thing work: we have no might, we do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You. Then the whole nation stands there, children included, and waits.

What keeps us from praying that way is usually the same thing that keeps a man from asking directions. Admitting we do not know what to do feels like failure, especially for people others depend on. But the prayer that gets answered in chapter 20 is not a strategy. It is an admission. Ask the class where they are currently pretending to have a plan, and whether anyone besides God needs to hear that admission too.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace what Rehoboam does in 11:1–4 after the kingdom splits, and then in 12:1–12. Where does he obey, where does he forsake the law, and what finally brings him to say the Lord is righteous?*

In 11:1–4 Rehoboam assembles 180,000 men to retake the north and then obeys the word of Shemaiah and goes home, which is genuine obedience at real cost. But 12:1 says that when his kingdom was established and he was strong, he forsook the law of the Lord, and all Israel with him. Shishak then strips the temple of Solomon's gold shields, and Rehoboam replaces them with bronze. When the prophet comes, the leaders humble themselves and say, the Lord is righteous. Strength, not weakness, was the thing that undid him.

2. *List every reform Asa carries out in chapters 14 and 15, and then list what he does in chapter 16. Put the two lists side by side and write one sentence about what changed.*

Asa removed foreign altars, high places, sacred pillars, and wooden images; commanded Judah to seek God and keep the Law; built and fortified cities; called on God against Zerah's army; put away abominable idols from Judah, Benjamin, and the captured cities; restored the altar; gathered the nation for a covenant renewal with an oath; removed his grandmother Maachah for her idol; and brought silver and gold into the house of God. In chapter 16 he takes silver and gold out of the house of God to hire Ben Hadad, rejects the prophet, imprisons him, oppresses some of the people, and in disease seeks physicians and not the Lord. The change is not in his doctrine but in where he turns first when he is afraid.

3. In 17:7–9 Jehoshaphat sends princes, Levites, and priests through the cities of Judah with the book of the Law. Read Nehemiah 8:1–8 and describe what a teaching program does for a nation, and what it would do for a congregation.

Jehoshaphat's teachers went through all the cities of Judah with the book of the Law, and the result in 17:10 is that the fear of the Lord fell on the surrounding kingdoms. Nehemiah 8 shows the same method: the book opened publicly, read distinctly, with the sense given so the people understood. A people cannot obey what it has never heard explained. For a congregation, this is an argument for serious, systematic teaching rather than a diet of familiar favorites, and for equipping more teachers than the pulpit alone.

4. Read 2 Chronicles 18 alongside 1 Kings 22. Why does the Chronicler include Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab, and what does 19:2 say about befriending those who hate the Lord? Compare 2 Corinthians 6:14.

The Chronicler includes it because it nearly cost Jehoshaphat his life and because the rebuke in 19:2 states a permanent principle: should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Therefore the wrath of the Lord is upon you. Jehoshaphat was not converted to Ahab's idolatry, but he lent his name, his army, and his son to a house God had condemned. 2 Corinthians 6:14 forbids being unequally yoked with unbelievers for the same reason: a binding partnership pulls you in a direction you did not choose.

5. Jehoshaphat's response to terrifying news was to set himself to seek the Lord and to proclaim a fast (20:3). Name the situation that currently frightens you most, and set aside one specific, scheduled block of time this week to pray about it rather than to worry about it.

Answers will vary. Watch for the difference between intending to pray and scheduling it. Jehoshaphat proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah and gathered the people; the praying was an event with a time attached. Encourage a specific hour, a place, and if possible another believer who knows it is happening.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Asa's diseased feet and his failure to seek the Lord must not become a rule that illness indicates sin. John 9:1–3 forbids that conclusion. The text criticizes where Asa turned first, not the existence of physicians.
- 2 Chronicles 16:9 is often quoted as a general promise of success. Read the whole verse, including the rebuke attached to it, and keep it about loyalty of heart rather than about outcomes.
- The victory of chapter 20 is not a promise that God will remove every difficulty for those who pray. Israel was a nation under a covenant with national terms. The abiding truth is that God is worth trusting when we have no plan, not that singers in front of an army is a method.
- Do not use the divided kingdom to justify or explain denominational division. Jesus prayed for unity in John 17:20–21, and Paul forbids division in 1 Corinthians 1:10–13.

Create in Me a Clean Heart

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 51 is the clearest picture of repentance in the Bible, and the first thing to notice is what is missing. There is no explanation, no mention of Bathsheba's beauty, no reference to the pressure of kingship, no suggestion that Uriah was difficult. David had spent roughly a year constructing a story that let him live with himself, and Nathan's four words, you are the man, took the whole structure down. What is left is a man asking God to do surgery.

Watch the verbs he uses for what he needs: blot out, wash, cleanse, purge, create, renew, restore, uphold. Every one of them has God as the subject. David does not offer to make it up to God, because he knows he cannot. He asks to be made new, and the word in verse 10 for create is the word used in Genesis 1:1 for making something out of nothing. That is exactly what a guilty man needs and exactly what he cannot produce.

Psalm 52 gives you the other kind of man. Doeg watched David take bread and a sword at Nob and reported it to Saul, and when Saul's own men would not raise a hand against the priests, Doeg killed eighty five of them and then destroyed the town. The psalm calls him a mighty man boasting in evil, with a tongue like a sharp razor, who made God no part of his strength. Set against him is David, a green olive tree in the house of God, trusting in the mercy of God forever. The whole psalm is a study in what a person finally rests on.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The superscription of Psalm 51 ties it to Nathan's confrontation after Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12); Psalm 52 is tied to Doeg's report to Saul (1 Samuel 22).
- Genre: Psalm 51 is the best known of the penitential psalms; Psalm 52 is a wisdom psalm with a strong element of denunciation.
- Under the Law there was no sacrifice prescribed for deliberate adultery and murder (Numbers 15:30–31), which is part of why David appeals to mercy rather than to ritual in 51:16.
- Verse 11, do not take Your Holy Spirit from me, reflects the Spirit's special enabling of Israel's king, which David had watched God remove from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14). It is not a description of the Spirit's work in Christians today (Ephesians 1:13; Acts 2:38).
- The closing verses of Psalm 51 about Zion's walls and burnt offerings are probably a later liturgical addition for congregational use, and they show how the psalm came to serve the whole nation's repentance.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Read Psalm 51:3–4, where David says he has sinned against God and God only, even though he had wronged Bathsheba, Uriah, and the nation. In what sense is every sin first a sin against God, and why does seeing that change how a person repents?

David is not denying that he wronged people; 2 Samuel 12 spells out the human damage, and the child's death and Absalom's rebellion follow. He is saying that what makes sin sin is that it is against God. Joseph said the same thing in Genesis 39:9 when there was no one watching: how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God. Every commandment is His, so every violation is personal to Him.

This changes repentance in a specific way. If sin is only harm done to people, then repentance is damage control, and once the other person is appeased the matter is closed. If sin is first against God, then no amount of smoothing things over touches the real problem, and the only relief is mercy. Ask the class to think of a sin they apologized for without ever taking it to God, and let that sit.

Question 2. *David asks for a clean heart, a steadfast spirit, restored joy, and a willing spirit (51:10–12). Notice what he does not ask for. Why is it significant that he never asks to keep his throne, his reputation, or the consequences at bay?*

The requests are internal: a clean heart, a steadfast spirit, God's presence, the joy of salvation, a willing spirit. He does not ask to be spared the sword that Nathan said would not depart from his house. He does not ask for his reputation. He does not ask God to keep the story quiet, though the superscription guarantees that every generation will know. He wants God back, and he is willing to live with the wreckage.

Contrast this with how we usually pray after failure. We want the consequence lifted, the secret kept, the relationship restored to looking normal. Those are human and understandable, but a man who only wants the consequences removed has not yet repented of anything. Ask the class what they would be willing to lose in order to be right with God, and give the question room.

Question 3. *Psalm 52 describes a man who loved evil more than good and trusted in the abundance of his riches. Set that beside the picture of the olive tree in 52:8. What actually makes the difference between the two lives, and which picture would people who know you best say fits you?*

The contrast is drawn in terms of what each man trusted. Doeg did not trust God but made riches his strength and strengthened himself in his wickedness. David pictures himself as an olive tree, which is not an impressive image of power but of rootedness and long fruitfulness, and he says explicitly, I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. One man was strong and temporary; the other was planted. Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5–8 draw the same picture.

The last part of the question is the one that will do the work. Ask the class not to evaluate themselves but to guess what their spouse, their children, or the people at their job would say they actually rely on. Most of us have a public theology and a practical one, and the people who live with us know the difference.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12 to get the setting, then list every request David makes in Psalm 51. Which of them concern the record of his sin and which concern the state of his heart?*

David asks God to have mercy, blot out his transgressions, wash him thoroughly, cleanse him, purge him with hyssop, wash him whiter than snow, let him hear joy and gladness, hide His face from his sins, blot out all his iniquities, create in him a clean heart, renew a steadfast spirit, not cast him away, not take the Holy Spirit from him, restore the joy of salvation, uphold him, and deliver him from bloodguiltiness. Roughly half concern the record, the guilt that must be removed; the other half concern the heart, the man who must be remade. Real repentance wants both.

2. *Psalm 51:16–17 says God does not delight in sacrifice but in a broken and contrite heart. Compare 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, and Hebrews 10:4–10. Is God against sacrifice, and if not, what is He after?*

God is not against sacrifice; He commanded it. 1 Samuel 15:22 says to obey is better than sacrifice, and Hosea 6:6 says He desires mercy and not sacrifice, both of which are Hebrew ways of stating a priority rather than a rejection. Hebrews 10:4 says it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins, and 10:5–10 shows Christ coming to do God's will, which is the offering that actually works. What God is after is the person, not the animal.

3. *In 51:12–13 David ties restored joy to teaching transgressors. Trace that connection. Why is a person who has been forgiven often the best teacher of the person who has not yet repented?*

A forgiven person teaches transgressors differently. He has no superiority left, he knows the arguments a guilty man uses because he used them, and he has evidence that mercy is real. Galatians 6:1 says the spiritual should restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering himself. Notice also the order in the psalm: joy first, then teaching. A joyless, grim forgiveness produces a joyless, grim teacher, and nobody follows that anywhere.

4. *Read 1 Samuel 21:1–9 and 22:6–23 for the background of Psalm 52. List what Doeg did, and then note how Psalm 52:1–7 describes both his tongue and his end.*

Doeg the Edomite was present when Ahimelech gave David bread and Goliath's sword; he reported it to Saul in a way that made an innocent priest look like a conspirator; and when Saul's footmen refused, Doeg killed eighty five

priests and then struck the town of Nob, men, women, children, and livestock. The psalm calls his tongue a sharp razor working deceitfully, says he loved devouring words, and declares that God will break him down, pluck him out of his dwelling, and uproot him from the land of the living.

5. David says a broken and contrite heart God will not despise. Name one sin you have been managing rather than confessing, and this week take the specific step you have been avoiding, whether that is confession to God alone, a conversation with the person you wronged, or asking a brother to help you carry it.

Answers will vary, and this question should not be answered aloud in a mixed class. Look for the difference between admitting a general sinfulness and dealing with a particular sin. James 5:16 and 1 John 1:9 both assume specifics. Encourage one concrete step and offer yourself privately to whoever needs a brother to help carry it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 51:5 is the standard proof text for inherited guilt, and it does not teach it. David is confessing the depth and thoroughness of his own sinfulness in the poetic manner of the psalms, not stating that he was guilty at conception. Scripture is explicit that the son does not bear the guilt of the father (Ezekiel 18:20), that we must become as little children (Matthew 18:3), and that of such is the kingdom (Matthew 19:14). Teach this kindly; many in the class have been told otherwise all their lives.
- Psalm 51:11 concerns the Spirit's enabling of the king, which David had seen removed from Saul. Do not build a doctrine of the Christian's relationship to the Spirit from it, and do not use it to frighten members about losing salvation over a single sin. Teach apostasy from the passages that address it (Hebrews 3:12–14; Galatians 5:4).
- Psalm 52 contains strong language about God destroying a man. Handle it as an appeal to divine justice, not as a model for personal vengeance (Romans 12:19).
- Do not let the class turn Psalm 51 into a comfortable ritual. David's repentance cost him publicly for the rest of his life. Forgiveness is free; consequences often are not.

Waiting in the Temple

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke keeps putting this family inside the Law. They circumcise on the eighth day, they come for the purification according to the Law of Moses, they present the firstborn as it is written, they offer the sacrifice the Law allows for the poor, and later they go up every year to the Passover. Galatians 4:4 explains why this matters: born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law. He kept it perfectly before He fulfilled it and took it out of the way.

Simeon and Anna are two old people at the end of long waits, and Luke pairs them the way he often pairs a man and a woman. Simeon's song is serene, and then it turns. This child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, a sign that will be spoken against, and a sword will pierce Mary's own soul. That is the first mention of the cross in Luke's gospel, spoken to a mother holding a forty day old baby. The class should feel that jolt.

The final scene is the only window Scripture opens on Jesus between infancy and thirty. A twelve year old sits among teachers, hearing and asking, and everyone is astonished at his understanding. His parents find Him after three days of searching, and His first recorded words are a question that puts His Father before His family. Then Luke adds the sentence that makes Him real: He went down with them and was subject to them. Perfect submission in an ordinary home for another eighteen years.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Two separate requirements are in view: the purification of the mother after forty days (Leviticus 12) and the redemption of the firstborn son (Exodus 13:2, 12–13; Numbers 18:15–16).
- The offering of two turtledoves or pigeons was the concession for those who could not afford a lamb (Leviticus 12:8), a quiet indicator of the family's poverty.
- Simeon and Anna belong to a faithful remnant described as waiting for the Consolation of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem; four hundred years had passed without a prophet.
- Jewish boys took on fuller responsibility for the commandments around age twelve or thirteen, which is why this Passover trip is significant.
- Passover pilgrims traveled in large family and village groups, which makes a day of travel before noticing a missing twelve year old entirely plausible.
- Luke 2:52 closely echoes 1 Samuel 2:26 about the boy Samuel, another child given to God and raised near the sanctuary.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Simeon calls the child a light to the Gentiles and then tells Mary that He is set for the fall and rising of many, a sign spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (2:32–35). How does Jesus still expose what is really in people, and where has He exposed something in you?*

Simeon's warning is that Jesus does not leave people neutral. Encountering Him sorts people, not because He is looking for a fight but because His presence makes visible what a person has been protecting. The rich young ruler discovered he loved his money. The Pharisees discovered they loved position. Peter discovered he was not as brave as he said. John 3:19–21 explains the mechanism: light comes into the world, and men love darkness or come to the light, and either way something hidden becomes visible.

Make the second half personal and go first if you can. A teacher who can say, here is what following Christ exposed in me, gives the class permission to be honest. Look for the things that only surface under pressure: what

we do when we are criticized, how we talk about money, what happens when obedience costs a friendship. Those moments are Simeon's prophecy still operating.

Question 2. *Anna was eighty four, widowed after seven years of marriage, and served God with fastings and prayers night and day for decades before this moment. What does her life say to someone who feels that his own faithfulness is unnoticed and unimportant?*

Anna's biography fits in two verses. Married seven years, widowed for decades, in the temple night and day with fastings and prayers. Nobody was writing about her. There is no indication she ever did anything the world would call significant until one morning a poor couple walked in with a baby and she knew. The years of prayer were not preparation for her ministry; they were her ministry, and they also made her the kind of person who could recognize the Lord at a glance.

Bring this to the people in your class who feel invisible: the member who has quietly set up the building for twenty years, the woman who has prayed for a wayward son since the Reagan administration, the man who visits the nursing home where nobody sees him do it. Hebrews 6:10 says God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love. Ask the class to name one such person in the congregation and to tell that person this week.

Question 3. *At twelve Jesus says He must be about His Father's business, and then goes home to Nazareth and is subject to His parents (2:49-51). How do those two verses belong together, and what does that pattern suggest about how a young person honors God and parents at the same time?*

The two verses are not in tension; they are the shape of a whole life. Jesus states His ultimate allegiance clearly, and then He goes home and obeys His parents for eighteen more years. Submission to parents was itself His Father's business, since the fifth commandment is God's command. He did not use a higher calling as a reason to be exempt from an ordinary duty, which is precisely what many people do with spiritual language.

This is one of the most useful passages you will ever hand a teenager. Ephesians 6:1-3 tells children to obey their parents in the Lord. Where a parent commands sin, Acts 5:29 governs, and God comes first. But short of that, a young person who wants to serve God serves Him in a real home, at a real table, with real chores and a real curfew. Ask parents in the class where they have made it hard for a child to honor both, and ask the young people where they have used spiritual language to avoid an ordinary obligation.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Read Leviticus 12:1-8 and note the offering required and the concession made for the poor. What does Luke 2:24 tell you about Joseph and Mary's circumstances?*

Leviticus 12 required a lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a sin offering, and it allowed a woman who could not afford a lamb to bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons instead. Luke 2:24 records exactly that concession, which tells us the family of the Messiah was poor. The King of glory entered a household that had to take the cheaper option at the temple.

2. *Write out Simeon's song in 2:29-32 in your own words. How many nations are included, and what has he been waiting for all these years?*

Simeon says that God may now let His servant depart in peace according to His word, because his own eyes have seen God's salvation, prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. All peoples are included, not Israel only. He had been waiting for the Consolation of Israel, and the astonishing thing is that he identifies a forty day old infant as the salvation of God, which requires the Holy Spirit's revelation and a lifetime of expectancy.

3. *Count the references to the Law of the Lord or the custom of the Law in 2:22-39. Why does Luke emphasize that this family kept the Law, and how does Galatians 4:4-5 explain it?*

Luke mentions it at least five times in these verses, in 2:22, 23, 24, 27, and 39, plus the annual Passover in 2:41. He is establishing that Jesus came in complete conformity to the Law, which Galatians 4:4-5 explains: God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law. He had to keep it in order to fulfill it, and He fulfilled it in order to take it out of the way (Colossians 2:14; Matthew 5:17).

4. Luke 2:52 says Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men. Read Philippians 2:5–8 and Hebrews 4:15, and describe what this verse tells you about His real humanity without diminishing His deity.

The verse means what it says. Jesus really grew, mentally, physically, socially, and in the approval of God, which is only possible if His humanity was genuine rather than a costume. Philippians 2:6–8 says He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and Hebrews 4:15 says He was tempted in every point as we are, yet without sin. He remained fully God (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9) while living an actual human life with an actual childhood. Hold both without trying to explain the mechanics.

5. Simeon and Anna both spent years waiting on a promise, and both recognized Him immediately when He came. Name one promise of God you have grown tired of waiting on, and decide on one practice this week, in prayer, in Scripture, or in service, that will keep you recognizable as someone who is still watching.

Answers will vary. The pairing of Simeon and Anna is the point: waiting well is active. Simeon came by the Spirit into the temple; Anna never departed from it. Listen for a practice with a time attached rather than a general resolve to be more patient, and be alert to the person whose tiredness is really grief that needs pastoral attention after class.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The purification offering was for Mary under Leviticus 12 and says nothing about sin in the child. Make that clear if anyone raises it.
- Do not let 2:49 be used by a young person, or by an adult, as license to neglect family duty in the name of spiritual priorities. Verse 51 is the balance and is stated in the same paragraph.
- Luke 2:52 is sometimes pressed to deny the deity of Christ. Affirm both natures plainly from John 1:1–14, Colossians 2:9, and Philippians 2:5–8, and resist speculation about what He knew and when.
- Traditions about Jesus' childhood from apocryphal writings occasionally surface in classes. Say plainly that Scripture gives us one scene between infancy and baptism and that everything else is fiction.

Boasting in Weakness

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These two chapters read differently from the rest of the letter because Paul is finally answering his critics directly, and he hates doing it. He calls it foolishness four times. But the church at Corinth is being taken in by men who carry letters of recommendation, speak impressively, take money, and belittle Paul for being unimpressive in person. If the Corinthians reject Paul, they reject the gospel he brought them, so he defends the apostleship for their sake, not his.

Chapter 10 sets the terms. The war is real but the weapons are not fleshly. Strongholds, arguments, and every high thing exalting itself against the knowledge of God are pulled down by truth, not by force or charisma. Then Paul names the false standard his rivals use: they measure themselves by themselves. He answers with Jeremiah's line, he who glories, let him glory in the Lord, and with the principle in 10:18 that approval is not self issued.

Chapter 11 is where the sarcasm shows. Bear with me a little in my folly, he says, and then explains that the Corinthians put up with people who enslave them, devour them, and strike them in the face, but will not put up with him. He calls the rivals false apostles and deceitful workers, notes that Satan himself appears as an angel of light, and then gives the only resume he has: prisons, thirty nine lashes five times, three beatings with rods, a stoning, three shipwrecks, a night and a day in the deep, and the daily care of all the churches.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Written from Macedonia about AD 56, after Titus returned with news from Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:5–7).
- The opponents appear to be Jewish Christian teachers who claimed superior credentials (11:22) and probably carried formal letters of recommendation (3:1).
- Traveling philosophers and orators in the Greek world were judged by presence, delivery, and their willingness to accept fees; Paul violated all three expectations by working with his hands (Acts 18:3).
- Thirty nine lashes was the Jewish penalty limited by Deuteronomy 25:3; the three beatings with rods were Roman punishments; the stoning was at Lystra (Acts 14:19).
- The escape in a basket at Damascus is recorded in Acts 9:23–25; Paul offers it as his crowning credential, which is deliberate irony.
- Much of what Paul lists here is not recorded in Acts, a reminder that Acts gives a selective history.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Second Corinthians 10:4–5 talks about casting down arguments and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. What does that look like on an ordinary Tuesday, in your own head, with your own recurring thoughts?*

Start by protecting the passage from misuse. Paul is not describing a technique for confronting demons or claiming territory. The strongholds are arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, that is, ideas and reasonings that stand between people and obedience to Christ. The weapon is the word of God (Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12), and the outcome is thoughts brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Then make it daily and specific, because most people have never thought of their thought life as a place where obedience happens. The recurring resentment replayed on the drive home. The comparison that starts every time the phone unlocks. The fantasy that nobody sees. The anxious rehearsal at two in the morning. Philippians 4:8 gives the replacement material, and Colossians 3:2 the direction. Ask each person to name one recurring thought and one verse he will put in its place this week.

Question 2. *In 10:12 Paul says that those who measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves among themselves are not wise. Where does comparison do the most damage in your life, and what does 10:17–18 offer instead?*

Comparison is measurement with the wrong ruler, and Paul says it is simply unwise. It flatters us when we compare downward and crushes us when we compare upward, and in both cases the standard is another person rather than Christ. Galatians 6:4 says let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone and not in another.

Verses 17 and 18 give the alternative: glory in the Lord, because the approved man is not the one who commends himself but the one whom the Lord commends. That reframes the question from how do I compare to whether God is pleased. Ask where comparison bites hardest for the people in the room, and expect honest answers about children, careers, houses, appearance, and even spiritual reputation in the congregation.

Question 3. *Paul says Satan transforms himself into an angel of light and his ministers into ministers of righteousness (11:13–15). If false teaching often looks good and sounds spiritual, how is an ordinary Christian supposed to recognize it?*

Paul's warning is that error rarely arrives labeled. The men at Corinth were persuasive, credentialed, and religious. Satan does not appear with horns; he appears as an angel of light, and his ministers appear as ministers of righteousness. That means sincerity, eloquence, apparent success, and warm feelings are not tests of truth.

Give the class the tests Scripture actually gives. Galatians 1:8–9 says the standard is the gospel already delivered, not a new message however impressive its messenger. 1 John 4:1 says test the spirits. Acts 17:11 commends the Bereans for searching the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 2 John 9 says whoever does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. The practical habit is simple and unglamorous: know the book well enough that an error sounds wrong to you. Ask the class how much of their Bible knowledge is firsthand and how much is secondhand.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the criticisms of Paul that you can identify in chapters 10 and 11, and note how he answers each one. Which criticisms does he take seriously and which does he simply set aside?*

The criticisms include that he is bold in letters and weak in person (10:1, 10), that his speech is contemptible (10:10; 11:6), that he walks according to the flesh (10:2), that he lacks the credentials his rivals have (11:22), and that his refusal of support proves he does not love them or is not a real apostle (11:7–11). He answers the charge about his message and motives seriously, because the gospel is at stake, and he brushes aside the complaints about his speaking ability and presence, admitting freely that he is untrained in speech but not in knowledge.

2. *Paul says he betrothed the church to one husband, to present her as a chaste virgin to Christ (11:2). Read Ephesians 5:25–27 and Revelation 19:7–8. What does this image say about a congregation's first loyalty?*

The image makes the church a bride betrothed to one husband, and it makes Paul the friend of the bridegroom whose job is to deliver her to Him pure. Ephesians 5:25–27 says Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her to present her glorious, holy and without blemish; Revelation 19:7–8 pictures the marriage of the Lamb. The first loyalty of a congregation is not to a preacher, a family, a tradition, or a personality, but to Christ, and any teacher who cultivates loyalty to himself is doing the opposite of what Paul does here.

3. *Trace Paul's catalog of sufferings in 11:23–28. Count the categories, and then notice what he places last and calls a daily pressure. Why might that one have been the heaviest?*

He lists labors, prisons, beatings beyond measure, frequent near deaths, five times thirty nine lashes, three beatings with rods, one stoning, three shipwrecks, a night and a day in the deep, and eight categories of peril, along with weariness, sleeplessness, hunger, thirst, fasting, cold, and nakedness. Then he places last what comes upon him daily: the care of all the churches, and the burning that he feels when someone stumbles. Physical suffering ends. Love for people who are in danger does not let go, and it costs more over time than a beating does.

4. Compare Paul's boasting in 11:30 with Jeremiah 9:23–24 and 2 Corinthians 10:17. What is the only kind of boasting Scripture permits?

Jeremiah 9:23–24 says let not the wise, the mighty, or the rich glory in wisdom, might, or riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows the Lord. Paul quotes the substance of it twice (1 Corinthians 1:31; 2 Corinthians 10:17). When he does boast personally, he boasts in the things concerning his infirmity, because those point away from him to the God who sustained him. Boasting is permitted only when the credit lands somewhere other than on us.

5. Paul refused support from Corinth so that no one could accuse him of preaching for money (11:7–12). Name one place where you should be willing to give up a legitimate right this week for the sake of someone else's conscience or the reputation of the gospel.

Answers will vary. Paul had a right to support (1 Corinthians 9:1–14) and gave it up at Corinth so the gospel would not be hindered. Romans 14:13–21 and 1 Corinthians 8:9–13 apply the same principle to liberty. Look for something concrete: a freedom set aside in front of a struggling brother, a business practice tightened beyond what the law requires, a habit dropped that a younger Christian misreads.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- 2 Corinthians 10:3–5 is widely used to support deliverance ministries and territorial spiritual warfare practices. Keep it where Paul puts it: arguments and reasonings overthrown by the word of God.
- Paul's sarcasm in chapter 11 is inspired and pointed, but it is not a license for members to be cutting with one another. Note that he is defending the gospel, not his feelings, and that he calls the whole exercise foolishness.
- 11:14–15 should produce discernment, not suspicion of everyone. Teach the tests of Acts 17:11, Galatians 1:8–9, and 1 John 4:1, and warn against the opposite error of treating every difference of opinion as false teaching.
- 11:2 is about the church collectively as the bride of Christ. Avoid the sentimental individualized version of this image that turns into a private romance with Jesus.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: 2 Chronicles 21–29 · Psalm 53–55 · Luke 3 · 2 Corinthians 12–13

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