

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 59 OF 104

Words That Build

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Job 4-11
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 67-68
Gospels	Luke 8:1-39
General New Testament	Ephesians 4

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to make the class think hard about words, their own and God's. Job's friends prove that a person can be theologically articulate and pastorally destructive in the same sentence. Psalm 67 shows what blessing is for: so God's way would be known and spoken among all nations. Jesus warns that the same word lands on four kinds of ground, so how we hear determines what we keep. And Ephesians 4 says the ascended Christ gave His church men who speak, so that the whole body could grow up and learn to say only what builds.

Doctrinally, Ephesians 4 is the anchor. The seven ones settle the question of one body and one baptism, and 4:11-16 settles both the purpose of the gifts and the fact that apostles and prophets belonged to the foundation of a revelation now complete. Luke 8:13 says that some believe for a while and fall away, which no honest reading can square with unconditional security. And the speeches of Job's friends give you the chance to teach your class a permanent habit: check who is speaking in a passage before you quote it as doctrine.

Formationally, the thread is fruit that takes time. The good soil in Luke 8:15 keeps the word and bears fruit with patience, and Ephesians 4 says we grow up into Christ rather than arriving there. Neither picture is instant, and both are ordinary. Ask your class this question and make them answer with a noun: name the one thorn, by name, that is currently growing up alongside the word in your life, and tell us what you will cut this week so that something can finally come to maturity.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Ephesians 4. It is the doctrinal center of the week and the most immediately practical chapter in the letter. Spend a third of the hour on the seven ones, a third on verses 11 through 16, and a third on the specific commands from verse 25 to the end.

Second session: Take up Luke 8:1-39. The parable of the sower explains itself, so give the class time to sit with the thorns, which is where most members actually live. Close with the man in the tombs and the town that asked Jesus to leave.

The other two readings: Assign Job 4-11 and Psalms 67 and 68. Warn the class in advance that the friends are recorded without being endorsed, and tell them to read Job 42:7 first so they read the speeches correctly. Point out that Psalm 68:18 is quoted in Ephesians 4:8, and ask them to read the two together.

The Comfort That Wounds

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The seven days of silence end and the dialogue begins, and a teacher should set the ground rules for the class before reading a line of it. Everything from chapter 4 through chapter 31 is human speech, accurately recorded and not divinely endorsed. God Himself says at the end of the book that Eliphaz and his two friends have not spoken of Him what is right (42:7). That single verse is the lens for eight chapters, and a class that misses it will come away with bad theology carefully memorized.

The friends share one conviction: God is just, God repays people according to their conduct, therefore suffering on this scale proves serious sin. Eliphaz says it politely and from a spooky night vision. Bildad says it bluntly, suggesting that Job's ten children got what they had coming. Zophar says it cruelly, telling Job that God has actually forgotten part of his iniquity. Each one is arguing from a principle that is generally true, that sin brings trouble, and misapplying it to a case where it does not fit.

Job's answers are not tidy. He asks to die. He says the arrows of the Almighty are in him. He accuses his friends of being unreliable, and then he turns and argues with God directly, which is remarkable and important. Watch for the flashes of light in the middle of his darkness: in 9:33 he wishes for a mediator who could put a hand on both parties, and later he will say he knows his Redeemer lives. A man in the dark, feeling for a door that will not be opened until Christ.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Job is set in the patriarchal era. There is no Law of Moses, no priesthood, no nation of Israel in the book, which is why the arguments proceed from creation, observation, and tradition rather than from statute.
- Chapters 3 through 31 form three cycles of speeches: each friend speaks, and Job answers each one. This reading covers the entire first cycle.
- Hebrew poetry works by parallelism, repeating and intensifying an idea in the second line. Reading it aloud helps a class hear the argument.
- Eliphaz appeals to a personal revelation, Bildad to the wisdom of previous generations, Zophar to blunt assertion. The three represent the standard ways people argue when they have decided the conclusion in advance.
- God's verdict on these speeches comes in 42:7. Read it to the class before you begin the dialogue, and again when you finish.
- The book is wisdom literature wrestling with a real question: why do the righteous suffer? It never gives a tidy answer, and the refusal is deliberate.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Eliphaz builds his case on one question in 4:7, whether anyone innocent ever perished. Where is that assumption partly true, and where does it fail completely? Where have you heard it, in different words, in your own mouth or in a hospital hallway?*

Eliphaz is partly right, and that is what makes him dangerous. Sin does bring trouble; Galatians 6:7 says a man reaps what he sows, and Proverbs is built on that observation. The failure is in the reverse inference: because sin causes suffering, therefore suffering proves sin. The reader already knows Job is blameless, so the argument is refuted before it is made. Jesus rejected the same reasoning about the man born blind (John 9:1-3) and about the Galileans Pilate killed (Luke 13:1-5).

Now make it uncomfortable. The same logic lives in Christian speech today in softer clothes: "God must be trying to teach you something." "Everything happens for a reason." "Is there unconfessed sin in your life?" Each of those

can be true and each can be a weapon. Ask the class what they have said to a suffering person that they now wish they could take back, and let the room be quiet for a moment.

Question 2. *In 9:32–33 Job says God is not a man that he could answer Him, and there is no umpire between them who could lay his hand on both. Trace what Job is longing for and how deeply he feels the lack of it. How is that longing finally answered, and why could Job not have known it?*

Job wants an arbitrator, someone who can stand between a man and God and lay a hand on both. The problem, as he states it, is asymmetry: God is not a man, so there is no court where the case could be heard fairly. He is not being irreverent. He is describing, with painful accuracy, the distance between a holy God and a suffering human being, and saying that what he needs is someone who belongs to both sides.

The answer, when it comes, is a person. There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus (1 Timothy 2:5), who shared our flesh and blood (Hebrews 2:14–17) and who is therefore able to lay a hand on both. Job could not have known this; he lived long before, and the promise was still a shadow. But teach it here anyway, carefully: do not turn Job into a Christian, and do not miss that the deepest ache of the oldest book in the Bible is answered at the cross.

Question 3. *Job tells his friends in 6:15–20 that they are like a desert streambed that runs dry exactly when the caravan arrives thirsty. When have your own words been that dry streambed to someone in pain, and what would have been better than the thing you said?*

The image is precise and worth explaining. A wadi in that country runs full with snowmelt in the cool season and vanishes in the heat. Caravans detour to it, arrive when they are desperate, and find dust. Job says his friends looked like water and turned out to be a dry channel: available when he did not need them, absent when he did.

The class application is not to stop speaking to hurting people. It is to stop treating a person's pain as a problem to be solved before the person has been heard. Romans 12:15 says weep with those who weep, and it says it without adding an explanation to deliver afterward. Ask for a specific memory, and then ask what one sentence would have actually helped. Most people will discover the helpful sentence was short.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Chart the three speeches. Write down each friend's main argument and the authority he appeals to: Eliphaz in 4:12–16, Bildad in 8:8–10, Zophar in 11:5–6. What happens to the tone as the chapters go on?*

Eliphaz argues from a night vision and from his own observation that the innocent do not perish. Bildad argues from the tradition of the fathers, telling Job to inquire of the former age. Zophar simply asserts that if God spoke He would tell Job his guilt is worse than he thinks. The tone hardens noticeably across the three: Eliphaz begins by acknowledging that Job has strengthened others, and Zophar ends by calling him an empty headed man.

2. *Job 7:11 says he will not restrain his mouth but will speak in the anguish of his spirit. Notice how much of chapters 7, 9, and 10 is addressed to God rather than about Him. Compare Psalm 62:8, and describe the difference between complaining about God and complaining to Him.*

Job talks to God through most of chapters 7, 9, and 10, asking Him what a man is that He should test him every moment, telling Him He knows Job is not wicked. Psalm 62:8 invites the same thing: pour out your heart before Him. Complaining about God to other people accomplishes nothing and hardens us; bringing the same complaint to God keeps the relationship open even when the understanding is closed.

3. *Eliphaz says in 5:17–18 that the man God corrects is happy, because God wounds and binds up. Hebrews 12:5–11 says something similar. Can a statement be completely true and still be the wrong thing to say to a particular person at a particular moment?*

Yes, and Job is the clearest case in Scripture. The statement in 5:17–18 is true; Hebrews 12 teaches God's discipline of His children. But Eliphaz aims it at a man whose suffering was not discipline for sin at all, and he uses it to imply guilt. Truth spoken at the wrong moment, for the wrong purpose, to the wrong person, functions as a lie about that person's situation.

4. *Job asks in 9:2 how a man can be righteous before God. Read Romans 3:23–26. What answer does the gospel give that Job did not yet have in front of him?*

Job has no answer, only the question. Romans 3:23–26 supplies it: all have sinned, and God justifies freely by His grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, so that He is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. The righteousness Job could not achieve or argue for is given in Christ, received through obedient faith (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27).

5. *Think about the last time someone told you about real trouble in their life. Write down what you actually said. This week, the next time it happens, ask two honest questions before you offer a single answer, and notice what changes.*

Answers will vary. The two questions requirement is the whole exercise. Most people default to advice within about eight seconds of hearing bad news. Ask the following week what the two questions were and what the person said in reply.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Say clearly, at the start and the end, that the friends' speeches are recorded accurately without being approved. God rebukes them in 42:7. Never build a doctrine on a verse from Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar without checking it against the rest of Scripture.
- Job's own despairing words are also not doctrine. He wishes he had never been born and says things about God he later retracts (42:3–6). The Bible reports a real man in real anguish.
- Passages such as 4:17–19 and 11:12 are sometimes used to teach that people are born depraved. They are Eliphaz and Zophar talking, and even taken at face value they teach human frailty, not inherited guilt. Each person becomes guilty when he himself sins (Ezekiel 18:20).
- Resist the urge to resolve the book early. The class will want an answer in week one of Job, and the book withholds it on purpose. Teaching them to sit with that is part of the formation.

Let God Arise

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 67 is seven verses long and contains one of the clearest statements of missionary purpose in the Old Testament. It opens by echoing the blessing Aaron was told to pronounce over Israel, God be merciful to us and bless us and cause His face to shine upon us, and then it does something the original blessing did not: it gives a reason. That Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. Israel was never blessed merely for Israel's comfort. The refrain, let all the peoples praise You, appears twice, and the psalm ends with all the ends of the earth fearing Him.

Psalm 68 is a very different piece, a long, loud processional celebrating God's march from Sinai to Zion. It opens with the words Moses used whenever the ark set out (Numbers 10:35): Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered. It is thunderous poetry, and some of its lines are among the hardest in the Psalter to translate. But the center of it is unexpectedly tender. The God who scatters kings and shakes Sinai is the same God who is a father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows in His holy habitation.

The verse the class will remember is 68:18: You have ascended on high, You have led captivity captive, You have received gifts among men. Paul takes that verse in Ephesians 4:8 and applies it to the ascension of Christ, adapting it to say He gave gifts to men. That is not carelessness; it is inspired interpretation, showing that the conquering King's ascent, which in the psalm ends with tribute received, ends in Christ with tribute distributed to His people. Read both this week and the connection will preach itself.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 67 is a short community psalm of praise and petition, likely connected to harvest (verse 6, the earth has yielded her increase).
- The priestly blessing of Numbers 6:24–26 stands behind verse 1, which means the congregation is praying back to God the words He gave the priests to speak over them.
- Psalm 68 is a processional psalm attributed to David, probably associated with bringing the ark to Zion (2 Samuel 6).
- Its opening line repeats Moses' words when the ark set out in the wilderness (Numbers 10:35), tying the psalm to the whole history of God going before His people.
- Psalm 68 contains several textually difficult verses. Teach the clear lines and do not build anything on the obscure ones.
- Paul's application of 68:18 to the ascension of Christ in Ephesians 4:8 is inspired commentary and settles how a Christian reads that verse.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 67 asks for blessing and then immediately says what the blessing is for. Read verses 1 and 2 together. How would your prayers sound different if every request for God's favor carried that purpose clause attached to it?*

Most of our praying stops at the request. Bless my family, bless this job, bless this decision. Psalm 67 attaches a purpose: bless us so that Your way is known on earth. That single addition reorders everything. It means the blessing is not the point; it is the equipment. It also quietly answers the question of why God does not always grant comfort, since comfort is not what He promised to supply.

Have the class rewrite one of their standing prayer requests with the purpose clause attached, out loud if they are willing. Bless my business, that Your way may be known through how I treat my employees. Heal my mother, that

Your salvation may be known in the way our family faces this. The exercise takes ten minutes and often changes how people pray for months.

Question 2. *Psalm 68:5–6 calls God a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, and the one who sets the solitary in families. Who in this congregation is solitary right now, and what would it take for us to become the family the psalm describes?*

Verse 6 says God sets the solitary in families, and the New Testament shows how He does it: through a church that calls each other brother and sister and means it. First Timothy 5 treats the care of widows as a congregational responsibility with names and lists attached. James 1:27 defines pure religion as visiting orphans and widows in their trouble. God does the setting; the church is where He sets them.

Push for actual names, not categories. Every congregation has someone who eats every meal alone, someone who sits in the back and leaves during the closing song, a teenager whose parents drop him off. Ask the class to name three and then ask who will take which. Assignments made out loud in a class get done far more often than resolutions made silently.

Question 3. *Paul quotes Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8, and he says the ascended One gave gifts to men. Read both places side by side. What does Paul say the ascended Christ gave, and who received it?*

Read the two verses in sequence and the class will notice the difference immediately: the psalm says received gifts among men, and Paul says gave gifts to men. In the ancient picture, a victorious king ascends to his city with captives and tribute. Paul, by inspiration, shows that Christ's ascent completes differently: He takes the spoils and distributes them to His people. The victory was His; the benefit is ours.

What He gave, according to Ephesians 4:11, was people: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The gift of the ascended Christ to His church was men who could speak His word so the body could grow up. That is worth saying plainly in a congregation, because it reframes preaching and teaching as a gift from the throne rather than a job somebody has to do.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Compare Psalm 67:1 with the priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24–26. What has the psalmist added to the blessing, and why does that addition change the whole prayer?*

Numbers 6:24–26 asks for blessing, keeping, the shining face, grace, and peace, and stops there. Psalm 67 adds the purpose in verse 2: that Your way may be known on earth, Your salvation among all nations. The addition turns a blessing on a nation into a mission through a nation, and it anticipates the promise to Abraham that in his Seed all nations would be blessed (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:16).

2. *Go through Psalm 68 and list everything God is said to do for the weak: the fatherless, the widow, the solitary, the prisoner, the weary inheritance. Which of those categories is represented in the pew nearest you?*

God is a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows, sets the solitary in families, brings out prisoners into prosperity, confirms His weary inheritance, daily bears our burdens, and is the God of salvation to whom belong escapes from death. Answers on the second half will vary; the exercise is to look sideways in the assembly rather than straight ahead.

3. *Trace Paul's use of Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8–11. Who ascended, what captivity was led captive, and what gifts were given to the church as a result?*

Christ ascended, having first descended (Ephesians 4:9–10). He led captivity captive, that is, He took captive the powers that had held men captive, having triumphed over them (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14–15). The gifts He then gave were apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, given for the equipping of the saints and the building of the body.

4. *Psalm 68:19 says the Lord daily loads us with benefits. Sit down with paper and list the benefits of yesterday alone, ordinary ones included. Stop only when you reach twenty.*

Answers will vary, and reaching twenty is the point. Most people stall around eight and then discover that the ordinary things they never counted, safe travel, a working refrigerator, a friend who texted, are exactly what the psalm means by daily loading.

5. *Pick one solitary person that God has evidently set near you: a widow, a single parent, a new member, a teenager whose family does not come. Commit to a weekly call or visit through the end of the year, and put it on your calendar now.*

Answers will vary. Insist on a name and a rhythm. The single most common failure here is good intentions with no calendar entry, which is why the assignment specifies putting it on the calendar in the room.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 68 contains several obscure verses and unusual images. Teach the plain lines with confidence and say honestly when a line is difficult rather than inventing meaning for it.
- The warfare language belongs to Israel's national setting under the Old Covenant. Christians do not war after the flesh (2 Corinthians 10:3–5; Ephesians 6:12).
- Psalm 67:6, the earth yielding its increase, is harvest language about God's providence, not a promise of material prosperity to the faithful.

Four Soils and a Storm

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke begins with a detail the other Gospels do not record: a group of women traveling with Jesus and the Twelve, several of them healed of infirmities, who provided for the work out of their own possessions. Joanna was the wife of Herod's household manager, which means the ministry of Jesus was partly funded from inside Herod's own court. Luke names them, and the same names reappear at the tomb. He wants his reader to know who stayed.

The parable of the sower is one of the few Jesus explains, and the explanation is the sermon. The seed is the word of God. The first hears and the devil takes it away. The second receives it with joy but has no root and falls away in time of temptation. The third is choked by cares, riches, and pleasures, and brings no fruit to maturity. The fourth hears with a noble and good heart, keeps it, and bears fruit with patience. Then Jesus adds a warning about how we hear and a definition of His family: those who hear the word of God and do it.

The last two scenes show the same authority in two directions. On the lake, He speaks to wind and water and there is a calm, and the men who have been with Him all along ask who He is. Across the lake, a man nobody could chain meets Him, and the demons know exactly who He is and beg. When the townspeople come out and find the man clothed and in his right mind, they are seized with fear and ask Jesus to leave. He goes. But He leaves behind the one man they all knew, telling his story in every town.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Luke alone records the women of 8:1–3 by name. Their financial support of the work is stated plainly and without apology.
- Parables in the Gospels are not simple illustrations for everyone; Jesus says in 8:10 they both reveal and conceal, depending on the hearer's willingness.
- The lake of Galilee sits in a basin some seven hundred feet below sea level, where cold air off the heights can produce violent squalls with little warning.
- The country of the Gerasenes lay on the eastern shore, largely Gentile territory, which explains the herd of pigs.
- Demon possession is presented in the Gospels as a real phenomenon during Jesus' ministry and the apostolic age. Teach the texts as history without speculating about modern parallels.
- The Decapolis was a league of Gentile cities east of the Jordan. The healed man becomes the first preacher sent to that region (Mark 5:20).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Walk through the four soils and name exactly what stops the word in each of the first three. Which of those three failures is the most respectable, the one a person could suffer for years without anyone in the church noticing?*

The path is hardened, and the word never gets in; the devil takes it away before belief can begin. The rock has no depth, so joy comes fast and roots never form, and the plant dies at the first heat. The thorns are the respectable failure. Nothing dramatic happens. The man keeps coming, keeps agreeing, keeps meaning to, and the cares and riches and pleasures of this life grow up alongside the word and choke it so slowly that no one can name the year it happened.

Ask the class to describe a thorn choked Christian, and they will describe someone who looks fine. Present most Sundays, generous enough, busy, tired, and bearing no fruit to maturity. Then ask each person which soil this past

year of their life has been. Give them a moment of silence rather than making them answer aloud, and then ask what one thorn would have to be cut for the ground to change.

Question 2. *Jesus says in 8:18 to take heed how you hear. Most of us think about whether we hear, not how. What would careful hearing actually look like on a Sunday morning, before, during, and after the lesson?*

How we hear determines what we keep. Verse 18 says that whoever has, more will be given, and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken. Hearing in Scripture is never passive reception; James 1:22–25 uses the picture of a man glancing in a mirror and walking off. The good soil in verse 15 keeps the word, which implies effort, and bears fruit with patience, which implies time.

Make the answer practical and specific. Before: pray, read the passage in advance, and come rested rather than arriving in the second song. During: take notes, keep the Bible open, resist the habit of mentally applying every point to someone who is absent. After: say one sentence to someone about what you heard, and pick one thing to do before Wednesday. A class that adopts even two of those will be a different class in six months.

Question 3. *The storm and the man in the tombs stand back to back. The disciples ask who this can be, the demons already know exactly who He is, and then an entire town asks Jesus to leave. What do we quietly hope Jesus will leave alone in our own lives, and why is His presence sometimes more unsettling than our problem?*

The disciples are terrified of the storm and then more terrified of the calm. The demons need no introduction; they name Him Son of the Most High God. And the townspeople, faced with a neighbor healed and a hillside of dead livestock, decide they would rather have the pigs and the familiar madman than this man in their region. Fear, not hostility, is what Luke records. The presence of Jesus disturbed their arrangements.

Bring this home gently but do not skip it. Everyone has an area where the arrangement works and Jesus would upset it: a business practice, a relationship, a schedule, a grudge that provides a strange comfort. Ask what each person would least want Jesus to address if He walked into their house tonight. That answer is usually the exact place where He intends to begin.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the women named in 8:1–3 and what Luke says they did. Then read Luke 23:55–24:10 and note where those same women turn up. What does their support and their persistence tell you about the place of women in the work of the Lord?*

Mary called Magdalene, out of whom seven demons had gone; Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; and Susanna, along with many others. They provided for Him from their substance. The same women are at the cross and at the tomb and are the first to carry the resurrection report to the apostles. Their service was practical, sustained, and costly, and Luke considers it worth naming in the record.

2. *Read Jesus' explanation in 8:11–15 and write out the four outcomes in your own words. Pay close attention to the phrase at the end of verse 15 about keeping the word and bearing fruit with patience.*

The path: the devil takes the word away so they may not believe and be saved. The rock: they receive with joy, have no root, believe for a while, and fall away in temptation. The thorns: they go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures, and bring no fruit to maturity. The good ground: having heard, they keep the word with a noble and good heart and bear fruit with patience. The last phrase matters because fruit is slow, and many give up during the interval.

3. *Luke 8:13 describes people who receive the word with joy, believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away. Compare Hebrews 3:12–14 and 2 Peter 2:20–22. Can a person who has genuinely believed be lost, and what does the answer mean for how you live this month?*

Yes. Jesus says these believed for a while and then fell away, which cannot describe someone who never believed. Hebrews 3:12 warns brethren against an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God, and 2 Peter 2:20–22 describes people entangled again after escaping the pollutions of the world. The practical meaning is that faithfulness is a daily matter, which is why Hebrews 3:13 says to exhort one another daily.

4. *The healed man begged to go with Jesus, and Jesus sent him home instead (8:38–39). Compare Mark 5:18–20. Why would going home be the harder and better assignment, and where is your Decapolis?*

Going home is harder because home knows your history. The man had been the town's terror; now he must live among people who watched him break chains, and tell them what God did. Jesus tells him to declare what great things God has done for him, and Mark says he went and proclaimed it throughout the Decapolis. Your Decapolis is wherever people knew you before, which is why family and old friends are the most demanding mission field anyone has.

5. *Verse 14 names the thorns: cares, riches, and pleasures of life. Name yours specifically, not in general, and make one concrete cut this week. Write the date on which you made it.*

Answers will vary. Insist on the specific noun and the date. Cares, riches, and pleasures are abstractions until a person writes down the second job, the account balance he checks eleven times a day, or the hours that disappear every evening.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Luke 8:13 says plainly that some believe for a while and fall away. This passage will not support unconditional security. Teach it kindly and let the words of Jesus do the work.
- The thorns include riches and pleasures. Do not turn this into a claim that wealth or enjoyment is sin; the danger is crowding, not existence (1 Timothy 6:17–19).
- Handle demon possession as the Gospels present it, without sensationalism and without equating it with mental illness. Avoid speculation about the present day; the confirming signs of that era served their purpose (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4).
- The stilling of the storm demonstrates who Jesus is. It is not a guarantee that following Him produces calm circumstances; the same Gospel has Him warning of division and persecution.

Grown Up in Christ

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Ephesians 4:1 is the hinge of the letter. Three chapters of what God has done give way to three chapters of how we then walk, and the first word is “therefore.” Everything Paul asks for in the second half rests on everything he announced in the first. The first thing he asks for is not activity but character: lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Unity is not created by us; it is given, and we are told to guard it.

Then comes the foundation of that unity in the seven ones of verses 4 through 6: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. This is the plainest statement in the New Testament that division among believers is not merely unfortunate but contrary to the facts. There is one body, singular, and there is one baptism, singular, and a congregation that reads this paragraph slowly will have most of its questions about denominationalism answered.

Verses 11 through 16 explain how the body grows. The ascended Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, and the purpose clause is critical: to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body, until we all come to the unity of the faith and to a mature man. The goal is maturity: no longer children, tossed about by every wind of doctrine, but speaking the truth in love and growing up into Christ, who is the head. The rest of the chapter is what that maturity looks like at close range: honest speech, controlled anger, honest work, edifying words, kindness, forgiveness.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ephesians divides cleanly: chapters 1 through 3 are doctrine, chapters 4 through 6 are duty, joined by the “therefore” of 4:1.
- The quotation in 4:8 is from Psalm 68:18, applied by inspiration to the ascension of Christ.
- The word rendered “pastors” means shepherds, and the New Testament identifies shepherds, elders, and overseers as the same men in the same office (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–4; Titus 1:5–7).
- Apostles and prophets are placed in the foundation of the building in 2:20; a foundation is laid once. The revelation they delivered is now complete and written (Jude 3; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10).
- “Grieve not the Holy Spirit” (4:30) is personal language: the Spirit is a person who can be grieved, resisted (Acts 7:51), and quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19), not an impersonal force.
- The vice and virtue material of 4:17–32 reflects the standard shape of apostolic teaching: put off the old, be renewed in mind, put on the new.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Read Ephesians 4:4–6 aloud, slowly, counting the sevens. Which of these ones does the religious world most commonly turn into many, and what would it cost us to take each of the seven as seriously as Paul does?

Count them in order: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. The world has taken at least three of them and multiplied them. One body has become many bodies with competing names and creeds, though Paul says the body is the church (1:22–23) and Christ has one. One faith has become many faiths, though Jude 3 speaks of the faith once delivered. One baptism has become a menu of forms and meanings, though the New Testament knows one: an immersion of a penitent believer into Christ for the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:27).

The cost of taking all seven seriously is real and worth naming. It means a person cannot choose a church the way he chooses a restaurant. It means we speak of the church as the New Testament does, without party labels

(Romans 16:16). And it means we hold this conviction with the lowliness and longsuffering commanded three verses earlier, or we will be right in a way that drives people from the very unity we claim to defend.

Question 2. *According to 4:11–12, the men Christ gave were given for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry. Who does the work in that sentence? How would our expectations of preachers, elders, and members change if that verse actually governed them?*

The saints do the work. The men Christ gave are not hired to do the ministry on behalf of everyone else; they are given to equip everyone else to do it. The word translated equipping was used for setting a bone or mending a net: putting something into working condition. So the preacher's job is not to be the congregation's religion but to prepare the congregation for its own.

The change in expectations runs both ways. Members stop asking what the church is doing for them and start asking what they have been equipped to do. Elders and preachers stop measuring success by attendance at their own performance and start measuring it by how many members are serving, teaching, visiting, and evangelizing. Ask your class a blunt question: name one thing you personally do in the work of the Lord that would not get done if you stopped.

Question 3. *Take the list in 4:25–32 and find the command you personally violate most often: dishonesty, anger carried overnight, unwholesome speech, bitterness, unforgiveness. Describe what obedience to that one command would look like by Monday afternoon.*

This paragraph is where Ephesians gets uncomfortably close. Put away lying, speak truth with your neighbor, because we are members of one another. Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath, and do not give place to the devil. Let the thief steal no more but work and give. Let no corrupt word come out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Put away bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking, and be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

Notice that almost every prohibition is paired with a replacement. Paul does not merely say stop; he says put off and put on. That is why willpower alone fails: an empty space refills. Do not accept general answers in class. Ask for the specific sentence a person will say, the specific hour he will say it, and the specific habit that will occupy the vacancy.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the seven ones in 4:4–6 and find one passage for each. For the one baptism, read Romans 6:3–4, Galatians 3:26–27, Acts 2:38, and 1 Peter 3:21, and describe what that baptism does and who it is for.*

One body, the church (1:22–23; Colossians 1:18); one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13); one hope (Titus 1:2; 1 Peter 1:3–4); one Lord (Acts 2:36; 1 Corinthians 8:6); one faith (Jude 3); one baptism (Romans 6:3–4; Galatians 3:26–27; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21); one God and Father (1 Corinthians 8:6). The one baptism is the immersion of a penitent believer into the death of Christ, for the forgiveness of sins, by which he is added to the one body. It is for those who can hear, believe, and repent.

2. *Ephesians 4:11 names apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. Read Ephesians 2:20 and 1 Corinthians 13:8–10. Which of those belonged to the foundation period of the church, and which continue today, and how do you know from the text?*

Apostles and prophets belonged to the foundation. Ephesians 2:20 places them there, a foundation is laid once, and the revelation they delivered is complete (Jude 3). First Corinthians 13:8–10 says prophecy and knowledge would be done away when the perfect, the completed revelation, came. Evangelists and shepherds and teachers continue, because their work is preaching, oversight, and instruction from a revelation now written, and the New Testament gives ongoing qualifications for elders and instructions to evangelists (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1; 2 Timothy 4:1–5).

3. In 4:14–16 Paul names two dangers: being children tossed by every wind of doctrine, and truth spoken without love. Trace how each one damages a congregation, and describe what a church looks like that has avoided one but not the other.

Doctrinal instability leaves a congregation at the mercy of whatever is persuasive this year, blown by every wind, vulnerable to the trickery of men. Truth without love produces a congregation that is correct and cold, driving away the very people it means to save. A church that avoids the first but not the second will be doctrinally sound and shrinking, with members afraid to admit a struggle. A church that avoids the second but not the first will be warm and will lose the gospel within a generation. Paul demands both: speaking the truth, in love.

4. Ephesians 4:28 gives the thief three steps, not one. List them and notice where the paragraph ends up. How is that pattern a model for repentance from any sin, not just theft?

Stop stealing; work with your hands doing what is good; give to him who has need. Repentance is never merely ceasing. It turns from the sin, replaces it with honest labor or its equivalent, and ends up giving to others what it once took from them. That pattern applies to gossip, to laziness, to lust, to greed: stop, replace, and then use the redeemed capacity to serve someone else.

5. Ephesians 4:26 says do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Name the anger you have carried longer than a day, and settle it this week with a conversation rather than a decision to feel better about it.

Answers will vary. The instruction specifies a conversation because most anger is settled privately in a way that changes nothing (Matthew 5:23–24; 18:15). Listen the following week for whether the conversation happened, and be ready for students who report that it went badly; obedience is still obedience.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Ephesians 4:4–6 is a defining passage on the one body and the one baptism. Teach it thoroughly and without party spirit, holding the truth with the lowliness and patience commanded in verse 2.
- The unity commanded here is unity in the one faith (4:13), never unity purchased by silence about truth. Guard both halves; congregations usually err on one side or the other.
- The offices of apostle and prophet were for the foundation period, and the miraculous gifts confirmed a revelation now complete (Mark 16:20; Hebrews 2:3–4; 1 Corinthians 13:8–10). State this plainly and graciously.
- The word “pastors” in 4:11 means shepherds, and in the New Testament shepherds are the elders of a congregation, qualified men appointed to oversee. It is not a title for a preacher (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–4).
- Grieving the Holy Spirit (4:30) shows that He is a person and that a Christian’s conduct affects that relationship. It does not teach that the Spirit overrides a Christian’s will, nor that a sealed Christian cannot fall (compare 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Hebrews 3:12–14).

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Job 12–19 • Psalm 69 • Luke 8:40–9:17 • Ephesians 5–6

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