

# Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 59 OF 104

Words That Build

Week 59 of 104 • 57% of the way through the Bible

## 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  |

### THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

This week is about what words do. Three men sit down beside a ruined friend, and for eight chapters they talk, and every speech leaves him worse than it found him. A psalm asks God for blessing and then says why: so that His way would be known on earth among all nations. Jesus tells a story about a farmer flinging seed on four kinds of ground, and then says something startling, that we should take heed how we hear. And Paul tells the church at Ephesus that the ascended Christ handed His people men who could speak, so that the whole body would grow up, speaking the truth in love, until no corrupt word comes out of us at all. Words wound or words build. Very little of what we say is neutral.

**How to use this guide:** Read all four passages during the week. Your teacher will take up two of them in class, one in each session. For the other two, work through the “Extended Class Discussion or Self-Study” questions on your own and write your answers in the space provided.

## GENERAL OLD TESTAMENT Job 4–11

### The Comfort That Wounds

#### WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

The silence breaks and the arguing begins. Eliphaz speaks first and most gently, appealing to a vision he had in the night and to his own experience: who ever perished being innocent? Job answers that his words are desperate because his pain is heavy, and he begins speaking directly to God. Bildad is blunter and rests on the tradition of the fathers, suggesting that Job’s children died for their own sin. Zophar is harshest of all, telling Job that God is exacting less than his guilt deserves.

#### FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

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?

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?
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?

#### EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

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?
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.
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?
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?
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.

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### WISDOM LITERATURE   Psalm 67–68

#### Let God Arise

#### WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Psalm 67 is short and startling. It borrows the priestly blessing, asks God to be gracious and bless, and then states the reason: so that God's way may be known on earth and His salvation among all nations. Psalm 68 is a long processional psalm that opens with a battle cry, Let God arise, and then turns to describe the God who is a

father to the fatherless, who sets the solitary in families, who ascended on high and gave gifts, and who daily loads His people with benefits.

#### FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

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?
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?
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?

#### EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

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?
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?
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?
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.
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.

## **Four Soils and a Storm**

### **WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE**

Luke names the women who traveled with Jesus and supported the work out of their own means. Then comes the parable of the sower, with seed falling on the path, on rock, among thorns, and on good ground, and Jesus' own explanation of what each soil means. He warns His hearers to take heed how they hear, and says His real family is made of those who hear the word and do it. Then a storm on the lake, and a man in a graveyard who nobody could bind.

### **FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

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?
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?
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?

### **EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY**

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?
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.
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?
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?
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.

**Grown Up in Christ****WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE**

Paul turns the corner from doctrine to conduct. He begs his readers to walk worthy of their calling, with lowliness, gentleness, and patience, keeping the unity of the Spirit. Then comes the list of seven ones, including one body and one baptism. He quotes Psalm 68 to show that the ascended Christ gave gifts, names the men He gave, and says why: so the saints would be equipped and the body would grow up. The chapter ends with the letter's most practical instructions, about anger, honesty, work, and speech.

**FOR CLASS DISCUSSION**

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?
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?
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.

**EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY**

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.
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?
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.
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?

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.

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**NEXT WEEK'S READING:** Job 12-19 · Psalm 69 · Luke 8:40-9:17 · Ephesians 5-6

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