

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 65 OF 104

The Right Fear

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Isaiah 6-10
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 77
Gospels	Luke 12:22-59
General New Testament	Colossians 2:6-4:18

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

The aim this week is to get the class afraid of the right thing. Isaiah walks into the temple in a year of national anxiety and finds out who is actually on the throne. Ahaz is afraid of the wrong people, refuses the sign God offers, and buys protection that ruins him. Asaph is afraid in the dark and answers his fear by remembering the sea. Jesus tells a little flock not to be afraid, because their Father is glad to give them a kingdom. And Paul tells a church not to be intimidated by anyone selling Christ plus something. By Sunday your students should be able to name what they have been afraid of and what Scripture says about it.

Doctrinally, this is one of the heaviest weeks in the block. Isaiah 7:14 must be affirmed as the virgin birth on Matthew's authority, without letting the class argue about Hebrew vocabulary. Isaiah 9:6-7 must be taught as fulfilled in the reign Christ exercises now. Colossians 2:11-13 must be taught as it reads: buried with Him in baptism, raised through faith in the working of God, forgiven. And Colossians 2:14-17 settles two things at once, that the Law of Moses was nailed to the cross and taken out of the way, and that the sabbath was a shadow. Then 2:20-23 protects the class from replacing Moses with rules of our own making.

Formationally, the thread is where a frightened person puts his weight. Ahaz put his on Assyria and lost the temple treasury. Asaph put his on remembered acts of God and got through the night. The little flock is told to put its weight on a Father's good pleasure. The Colossians are told to put it on a finished cross and an empty grave they themselves were buried into. Ask your class this: name the thing you have been afraid of this month, then name what you have been leaning on to handle it, and tell us honestly which of the two is stronger.

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Colossians 2:6-4:18. It is the doctrinal weight of the week and it will not teach itself in ten minutes. Give the first half of the hour to 2:11-17, walking the class phrase by phrase through the burial, the raising, and the canceled certificate, and the second half to the warning about man-made rules.

Second session: Take up Isaiah 6-10. Begin by reading chapter 6 aloud with no commentary, then ask what Isaiah saw and why he collapsed. Save fifteen minutes for Immanuel in 7:14 and the four names of 9:6, and connect the reign of 9:7 to Colossians 1:13 from last week.

The other two readings: Psalm 77 and Luke 12:22-59 belong to private reading and both reward it. Ask the class to read Psalm 77 out loud at home, slowly, and to mark the word "remember." Ask them to read Luke 12 with a pen and underline every command about fear, and to bring one worry to the next session.

The Throne and the Child**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

Chapter 6 is one of the great scenes in Scripture, and its date matters: the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah reigned fifty-two years, and for a young man in Judah he was the only king there had ever been. The throne is empty, the nation is nervous, and Isaiah walks into the temple and finds out that the throne was never empty. The Lord is high and lifted up, the train of His robe fills the temple, and burning creatures who have never sinned cover their faces and cry, “Holy, holy, holy.”

Isaiah’s response is not awe; it is collapse. Woe is me, I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips. Then a live coal from the altar touches his mouth, his iniquity is taken away, and only then does he hear the question, “Whom shall I send?” The sequence is fixed and it is the pattern of every call in Scripture: sight of God, sense of sin, cleansing, commission. Notice also the commission itself, which is brutal. Go and tell this people who will hear and not understand, until the cities are wasted. Isaiah says yes to a ministry with almost no visible success.

Chapters 7 through 10 put that holiness to work in politics. Ahaz is terrified of Syria and Israel, and God calls those two kings smoking stubs of firewood. Ask for a sign, God says. Ahaz piously refuses, having already decided to buy Assyrian protection, and God gives a sign over his head: Immanuel, God with us. Assyria will come as God’s razor, and the razor will be broken when it boasts. And in the middle of that darkness, chapter 9 turns on the light: unto us a Child is born, the government shall be upon His shoulder, and of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Uzziah died about 740 B.C. Ahaz reigned roughly 735 to 715 B.C., and the crisis of chapter 7 is the Syro-Ephraimite war, when Syria and the northern kingdom tried to force Judah into an anti-Assyrian alliance.
- Isaiah 6 is Isaiah’s call, or possibly his recommissioning, placed here so that the reader meets the holy God before watching a king refuse Him.
- Isaiah 7:14 uses a Hebrew word for a young woman of marriageable age and unquestioned virtue. The Greek translation made centuries before Christ rendered it with the word for virgin, and Matthew, writing by inspiration, applies it to the birth of Jesus.
- Assyria under Tiglath-Pileser, Shalmaneser, and Sennacherib was the superpower of the age. Israel fell to it in 722 B.C.; Judah survived, barely, in 701 B.C.
- Isaiah 9:1–2 is quoted in Matthew 4:14–16 of Jesus beginning His ministry in Galilee, which shows how the New Testament reads this section.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Isaiah sees the Lord and his first words are, “Woe is me, for I am undone.” Why is that the reaction, and what does it say about how casually most of us talk about God?*

Isaiah was not a scandalous man. He was, as far as we can tell, the most godly person in Jerusalem. That is exactly why his reaction matters. A vision of God’s holiness does not produce comparison; it produces collapse. Notice what he says about himself: unclean lips, and a people of unclean lips. The prophet whose entire vocation is his mouth discovers that the instrument is filthy.

Ask the class why our talk about God is usually so relaxed, and be careful to make the point without scolding. We sing about holiness without flinching, we pray in language we would not use with a bank manager, and we treat the assembly as one appointment among several. Isaiah 6 does not call for gloom; the coal comes and the guilt is

taken away. But cleansing that never followed a woe tends to be cheap. Ask what a class would sound like if it began with verse 5 rather than with announcements.

Question 2. *Matthew 1:22–23 quotes Isaiah 7:14 about the birth of Jesus. Discuss what that sign meant to Ahaz in his own crisis and how Matthew is using it, and what both uses have in common.*

Handle the two horizons plainly. Ahaz needed a sign relevant to the war in front of him, and the sign has a short fuse: before the child is old enough to know good from evil, the two kings you dread will be gone (7:16). That happened. But the sign is far too large for its occasion. A virgin conceiving, and a name that means God with us, is not the kind of language a crisis in 734 B.C. exhausts. Prophecy frequently works this way, speaking to an immediate situation in words that will not be filled up until Christ.

Matthew settles the question for us. Writing by inspiration, he says the birth of Jesus took place “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.” The common thread between the two uses is the name: in Ahaz’s day God was with Judah in judgment and preservation; in Matthew, God is with us in flesh, and Matthew’s Gospel ends with the same promise, “I am with you always.” Do not let the hour become an argument about a Hebrew word. State the evidence, affirm the virgin birth without apology, and keep the class on Immanuel.

Question 3. *Read the four names of Isaiah 9:6 and the promise about David’s throne in 9:7. Which of those names does this class most need this year, and what would it change?*

Wonderful Counselor: He never needs advice and never gives bad advice. Mighty God: the Child born is called El Gibbor, which Isaiah applies to the Lord Himself in 10:21. Everlasting Father: the Hebrew idiom means a father to His people forever, a ruler who provides and protects without end. Prince of Peace: He does not merely arrange peace, He carries it in His person. And the government is on His shoulder, on the throne of David, and of its increase there is no end.

Then make it personal, because that is how this verse was given. A nation about to be invaded was handed four names. Ask which one the class needs: the family drowning in decisions needs a Counselor; the man watching a diagnosis needs a Mighty God; the fatherless need an everlasting Father; the home at war needs a Prince of Peace. Ask each person to take one name into the week and pray it by name.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Walk through Isaiah 6:1–8 and list what happens step by step. Note the order of seeing, confessing, being cleansed, and being sent, and why that order cannot be rearranged.*

He sees the Lord high and lifted up, with the temple filled; he hears the seraphim cry holy and sees the posts shake and the house fill with smoke; he confesses that he is undone and unclean; a seraph takes a live coal from the altar and touches his mouth; he is told his iniquity is taken away and his sin purged; he hears the Lord ask whom He shall send; he answers, “Here am I! Send me”; and he is given his message. The order cannot be rearranged because no one volunteers for God until he has seen God, and no one can speak for God with unclean lips.

2. *Isaiah 6:9–10 is quoted repeatedly in the New Testament. Read Matthew 13:14–15, John 12:39–41, and Acts 28:25–27, then describe carefully what hardening means and who does it.*

In each place the hardening describes people who have shut their own eyes and closed their own ears, and God, through the preaching of His word, confirms them in the choice they have made. Matthew 13:15 is explicit: “their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed.” The same sunlight that softens wax hardens clay. This is judicial hardening in response to persistent refusal, not God arbitrarily deciding before the world began who would be lost.

3. *Ahaz is told, “If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established” (7:9). Read 2 Kings 16:7–9 and trace what Ahaz did instead. What did his fear end up costing his nation?*

Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria with silver and gold from the house of the Lord and from his own treasury, saying, “I am your servant and your son; come up and save me.” Assyria did come, and destroyed Damascus, but Judah became a vassal, the temple was stripped, Ahaz copied a pagan altar he saw in Damascus, and

the nation that refused a sign from God ended up owned by the empire it hired. Fear that will not trust God always buys something worse than what it feared.

4. *Isaiah 10:5–15 shows an axe boasting against the man swinging it. Explain in your own words how Assyria can be God's instrument and still be guilty.*

God says Assyria is the rod of His anger, sent against a hypocritical nation, but Assyria does not know it: "Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so." Assyria intends conquest and plunder for its own glory, and boasts that its own hand did it. God is sovereign over the actions of nations without being the author of their sin, and He holds them accountable for the intentions they actually had. Verse 15 is the whole argument: shall the axe boast against him who chops with it?

5. *Isaiah 8:12–13 tells frightened people to stop calling everything a conspiracy and to let the Lord of hosts be their fear. Name what has actually frightened you this month, and say one sentence from these chapters out loud in answer to it.*

Answers will vary. Listen for real fears rather than respectable ones: a layoff, a scan, a child's choices, a marriage going quiet. Then make sure the sentence they choose is actually from the text. Isaiah 8:13, Isaiah 9:6, and Isaiah 10:20 all work.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Isaiah 7:14 will raise questions about the Hebrew word for virgin. Answer briefly and confidently: Matthew, writing by inspiration, applies it to the virgin birth of Christ (Matthew 1:22–23), and that settles it. Do not let the class spend the hour on lexicography, and do not allow the virgin birth to be treated as symbolic.
- Isaiah 9:6 calls the Son "Everlasting Father." This does not confuse the Son with the Father; it is a Hebrew way of saying He is a father to His people forever. Guard against any teaching that erases the distinction between the Father and the Son (John 1:1; Matthew 3:16–17).
- Isaiah 9:7 promises the throne of David forever. That promise is fulfilled in Christ's present reign at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29–36; Colossians 1:13), not in a future earthly political kingdom.
- Isaiah 6:9–10 must not be used to teach unconditional election or that God decides in advance who cannot believe. The hardening follows the refusal (Matthew 13:15); God desires all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9).

When the Night Will Not End

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 77 is worth teaching for its honesty alone. The first six verses are a man describing insomnia and grief in the first person: I cried out, my hand was stretched out in the night, my soul refused to be comforted, I complained and my spirit was overwhelmed, You hold my eyelids open, I am so troubled I cannot speak. Note that he is praying the whole time. This is not a man who has stopped believing; it is a man who cannot find God in the dark and keeps calling anyway.

Verses 7 through 9 are the low point, and they are stated as questions rather than accusations, which is the difference between lament and rebellion: will the Lord cast off forever, is His mercy gone, has His promise failed, has God forgotten to be gracious, has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Every one of those is answerable, and the psalm does not answer them directly. It does something better.

Verse 10 is the hinge: “And I said, This is my anguish; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.” Then the pronouns change. I will remember the works of the Lord, I will meditate on all Your work. And suddenly we are watching the waters see God and be afraid, the clouds pour water, the thunder roll, the lightning light the world, and a path open through the sea. The psalm ends with the line that says everything: “You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” The footprints were invisible, but the flock got across.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 77 is one of the Asaph psalms in Book Three, addressed to Jeduthun, one of David’s three chief musicians (1 Chronicles 25:1).
- It is a lament, the most common type of psalm, following the usual pattern of complaint, questions, turn, and confidence, though here the turn comes through remembrance rather than through a fresh promise.
- The crisis is never named. That is likely deliberate, and it is one reason the psalm fits so many different nights.
- Verses 16 through 20 rehearse the exodus in poetic terms, and the Red Sea is Israel’s standard reference point for God’s power to save (Exodus 15; Psalm 106:9–12).
- Nearly a third of the Psalter is lament. A congregation that only sings triumph has cut itself off from a large part of what God gave His people to say.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Asaph says plainly that his soul refused to be comforted (77:2). Is there a place in faithful Christian living for a night like that, and what makes it dangerous to set up camp there?*

There is absolutely a place for it, and the presence of this psalm in Scripture proves it. Grief that refuses comfort is not automatically unbelief; Jacob refused to be comforted over Joseph, and Jesus wept at a grave He was about to open. What Christians often need to hear is that saying these things to God is prayer, and that a believer in the dark is still a believer.

The danger is in the geography of verses 1 through 6, which is entirely interior. Count the first-person pronouns: I, my, me, over and over. Pain shrinks the world to the size of the person in it. Staying there long enough turns lament into rehearsal, and rehearsal into a settled case against God. That is the difference between Asaph and Job’s friends’ version of Job. Ask the class how long is too long, and what a friend should do at that point, which is usually to sit down and start remembering out loud with them.

Question 2. Read the six questions of 77:7–9 out loud. Which of them have you asked, and what do you make of the fact that God put questions like these into the songbook of His people?

Read them slowly and let the room be quiet. Will the Lord cast off forever? Will He be favorable no more? Has His mercy ceased forever? Has His promise failed forevermore? Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Most Christians have thought at least one of these and then felt guilty for thinking it.

The fact that God inspired these questions and put them in the hymnbook of Israel says something no sermon can say as well: He is not fragile, and He is not offended by an honest sufferer. He would rather be asked than avoided. Make the pastoral point explicitly, because somebody in your class has been pretending. A God who wrote Psalm 77 can handle your worst night, and He prefers it said to His face.

Question 3. The turn in 77:10–12 is a decision rather than a feeling: “I will remember.” Talk about what remembering actually looks like on a night when you do not feel like doing it.

Notice the verbs: I will remember, I will remember, I will meditate, I will talk of Your deeds. These are things a person does with his mind and his mouth, not things that happen to him. Asaph is not waiting for the feeling to lift; he is choosing what to put in front of his attention while the feeling is still there.

Give the class the practical version. Reciting a psalm from memory in the dark. Keeping a written list of specific answered prayers and reading it when nothing makes sense. Telling one person out loud about something God did ten years ago. Singing, which is why God gave His people songs and not only sermons. Ask each person to name the one memory they would reach for first, and if someone cannot think of one, that is the assignment for this week.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. Trace the pronouns in 77:1–6 and then in 77:13–20. Who is the subject of the first half of the psalm, who is the subject of the second, and what does that shift accomplish?

The first six verses are saturated with I, me, and my: I cried, my voice, my hand, my soul, I complained, my spirit, I am so troubled. In verses 13 through 20 the subject becomes God: Your way, Your greatness, You are the God who does wonders, You have declared, You have redeemed, Your way was in the sea, You led Your people. Nothing about the circumstances changed. What changed is where he is looking, and that is the entire therapy of the psalm.

2. List the six questions asked in 77:7–9 and answer each one from somewhere else in Scripture, naming the passage you used.

Will the Lord cast off forever? Romans 11:1–2 and Hebrews 13:5 answer no. Will He be favorable no more? Lamentations 3:22–23. Has His mercy ceased forever? Psalm 103:17. Has His promise failed? Numbers 23:19 and Titus 1:2. Has God forgotten to be gracious? Isaiah 49:15–16. Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies? Micah 7:18–19. The exercise is worth doing with a pen, because the answers are all in the Bible the reader already owns.

3. Psalm 77:19 says, “Your way was in the sea, Your path in the great waters, and Your footsteps were not known.” Read Exodus 14:21–31 and describe what that last phrase adds to the account.

Exodus tells us the sea was driven back by a strong east wind, the waters were a wall on the right and the left, and Israel walked across on dry ground. Psalm 77 adds that God Himself was in the water and left no trace. His path was real, effective, and completely invisible afterward. That is a description of providence: God moves through the deep places of our lives and we usually cannot find the footprints, sometimes not for years.

4. Compare Psalm 77:20 with Psalm 23:1 and John 10:11. What kind of leadership is being described, and who is doing the leading in each passage?

All three describe a shepherd who leads rather than drives, who goes ahead, who takes responsibility for getting the flock through. Psalm 77:20 adds that He did it by the hand of Moses and Aaron, which is how God usually shepherds: through people He appoints. John 10:11 goes further than the others, because this Shepherd gives His life for the sheep. The flock crossing the sea did not know where they were going; they only knew who was in front.

5. Write your own short list of the years of the right hand of the Most High in your life: five things God has actually done. Keep the list where you can find it at three in the morning.

Answers will vary, and this one is more valuable than it looks. Insist on five specific items with dates or names, not general statements about God's goodness. Suggest people keep it in a wallet, a Bible flyleaf, or a phone note. A list made in daylight is the only kind that is any use in the dark.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not treat the questions of verses 7 through 9 as sin to be rebuked. They are inspired lament. Someone in your class needs permission to say them out loud to God rather than carry them silently.
- Remembering in this psalm is not denial or positive thinking. It is recalling actual acts of God, and it works precisely because those acts really happened.
- Psalms of lament describe experience truthfully; they do not establish doctrine about God abandoning His people. Read the questions in light of the answers Scripture gives elsewhere.

Fear Not, Little Flock

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The first half of this reading is the gentlest teaching on anxiety in the Bible, and it is aimed at disciples, not at the crowd. Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will put on. Consider the ravens: they have no storeroom or barn, and God feeds them. Consider the lilies: they do not labor or spin, and Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of them. Notice that Jesus does not tell them to stop thinking about food and clothing; He tells them to seek the kingdom, and adds that these things will be added to them.

Verse 32 is the hinge of the whole section and one of the warmest sentences Jesus ever spoke: do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. The reason worry loses its grip is not that circumstances improve; it is that the God who owns everything has already decided to give His children the kingdom. A Father like that is not going to forget the groceries.

The tone now changes, and on purpose. Anxiety about the present is answered by trust; carelessness about the future is answered by readiness. Keep your belt fastened and your lamps burning, like men waiting for a master to come home from a wedding. Be like a household that would have stayed awake if it knew the thief's hour. And the faithful steward is contrasted with the one who said in his heart that his master was delayed, and began to beat the servants and get drunk. Jesus ends by scolding a crowd that can forecast rain from a western cloud and cannot read the hour standing in front of them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This continues the travel narrative toward Jerusalem. Much of it is paralleled in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6), which shows Jesus taught the same material more than once.
- Ravens were unclean birds (Leviticus 11:15). Jesus deliberately chooses a bird no Jew would value to make the argument about the Father's care.
- A servant expecting his master back from a wedding feast could not know the hour; such feasts ran late and unpredictably. The image assumes long, uncertain waiting.
- "Gird up your waist" meant tucking a long robe into the belt so a man could work or run. It is a picture of readiness, not of tension.
- Luke 12:47–48 assumes degrees of accountability based on knowledge, a principle that runs through Scripture (John 9:41; James 3:1; Hebrews 10:26–29).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus answers anxiety by pointing at birds and wildflowers (12:22–31). Why is that argument actually persuasive, and where does it seem to break down when your own bills are on the table?*

The argument works because it is an argument from the lesser to the greater, and because it rests on a relationship. God feeds birds He does not call His children and clothes grass that will be fired in an oven tomorrow. You are of more value than many sparrows, and He is your Father. Worry, in this passage, is not primarily a failure of nerve; it is a failure to reckon with who God is toward us.

Then be honest about where it breaks down in practice, because a class that pretends otherwise will not be helped. Ravens do not have mortgages, and lilies do not have a child in the hospital. The answer Jesus gives is not that nothing bad will happen, since He tells these same men in verse 4 that some of them will be killed. The promise is that the Father knows what we need and that seeking His kingdom first puts everything else into an order that can be borne. Ask what one worry the class would have to hand over this week to find out whether verse 31 is true.

Question 2. *“Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (12:32). What changes in a person who really believes that sentence, and what does its opposite look like?*

Two words carry it: little and pleasure. They were a tiny, unimpressive group about to be sent against an empire, and Jesus calls them a little flock without embarrassment. And the Father does not give the kingdom reluctantly; it is His good pleasure. A person who believes that stops trying to earn standing with God, stops measuring the church by its size, and stops treating obedience as a bill to be paid.

The opposite looks familiar: a Christian who serves anxiously, who suspects God is looking for a reason to be disappointed, who gives grudgingly because he is not sure there will be enough. Trace the effect of verse 32 into verse 33, where Jesus moves immediately from the Father’s generosity to ours. People who know they are being given a kingdom become free with what they have. Ask the class where their giving is governed by fear rather than by verse 32.

Question 3. *In 12:42–48 the two stewards differ mainly in what they expected about the master’s return. How does expectation shape behavior, and what would a stranger conclude about our expectations from watching our week?*

Expectation always shapes behavior; every parent and every employee knows it. The wise steward behaves as though the master could walk in at any hour, so he feeds the household on time. The foolish one says in his heart that the master is delaying, and within a verse he is beating the servants and getting drunk. He did not change his theology; he changed his timetable, and his conduct followed.

Now turn it on the class without letting it become abstract. If someone followed us for a week with a camera, what would they conclude about when we expect to give account to God? Watch for the two failures the passage names: mistreating people under our authority, and self-indulgence. Both come from the same root, a belief that there is plenty of time. Ask each person to name one thing they would do differently this week if they knew the accounting were Friday.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List every argument Jesus makes against worry in 12:22–31. Which of them speaks most directly to the thing you actually lie awake about?*

Life is more than food and the body more than clothing; ravens neither sow nor reap and God feeds them; you are more valuable than birds; worry cannot add a cubit to your stature, so why be anxious about the rest; lilies neither toil nor spin and outshine Solomon; if God clothes grass destined for the oven, He will clothe you; the nations of the world chase these things, but your Father knows you need them; seek the kingdom and these will be added. Answers on which one lands will vary; press people to name the actual worry rather than the category.

2. *Jesus says, “Sell what you have and give alms” (12:33). Compare Acts 2:44–45, Acts 5:4, and 1 Timothy 6:17–19, then explain whether this is a universal command to poverty and how you know.*

It is not a universal command to poverty. In Acts 2 and 4 Christians sold property as needs arose, and Acts 5:4 shows Peter telling Ananias the land was his own and the proceeds were in his own control, which means the selling was voluntary. First Timothy 6:17–19 instructs the rich, in the church, not to divest but to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share. Jesus is commanding a settled, active generosity that converts earthly holdings into heavenly treasure, and for some people, then and now, He means it literally.

3. *Trace the pictures in 12:35–48: servants waiting with lamps, a householder and a thief, a wise steward and a foolish one. Identify the single attitude that ties all of them together.*

Readiness, grounded in expectation. The waiting servants expect the master; the householder did not expect the thief and lost his house; the wise steward acts as though the master may arrive any hour; the foolish one assumed there was time. The point is not anxiety about the date but faithfulness in the present assignment, which is exactly what the steward is doing when the master arrives: giving the household its portion of food in due season.

4. Read 12:49–53, where the Prince of Peace says He came to bring division. Explain how that fits with Isaiah 9:6 and with the peace Jesus gives in John 14:27.

The division is a result, not the purpose. When the gospel comes into a family, some obey and some refuse, and the line runs right through the living room. Jesus is warning His followers in advance so that opposition at home does not shake them. The peace of Isaiah 9:6 and John 14:27 is peace with God and the peace He gives inside a person; it was never a promise that every relationship would remain comfortable. Many Christians have paid for Christ at their own kitchen table.

5. Jesus says that from everyone to whom much is given, much will be required (12:48). Write down what you have actually been given, then name one thing you will do this week because of it.

Answers will vary, and the list is often longer than people expect: Scripture in their own language, a congregation, health, education, money, freedom, a Christian home, years of teaching. The follow-up is the point. Much given means much required, so make the assignment one action this week that is proportionate to something on the list.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Luke 12:33 should not be turned into a command that all Christians sell everything, nor softened until it means nothing. Teach it alongside Acts 5:4 and 1 Timothy 6:17–19 as radical, ongoing generosity.
- The readiness passages warn against predicting the time and against assuming there is plenty of it. Avoid date-setting of every kind (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7), and keep the emphasis where Jesus put it: faithful work in the present.
- Luke 12:47–48 teaches degrees of accountability and punishment. Teach it soberly; it is a warning to the well-taught, which describes everyone in your class.
- The kingdom in 12:32 is the reign of Christ that His people already possess (Colossians 1:13), with an eternal inheritance still ahead (2 Peter 1:11). Do not let the verse be read as a future earthly kingdom.

Buried and Raised with Him

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Paul's answer to every error at Colosse is the same: you already have Christ, and in Christ you already have everything. As you received Him, walk in Him, rooted and built up and established in the faith. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him. That word complete is the hinge of the letter. Any teacher who says you need Christ plus something is telling you that you are not.

Verses 11 through 15 are among the richest in the New Testament, and they are why this reading needs real class time. In Christ you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands; buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. You who were dead in your trespasses He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. Then the legal picture: He wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, took it out of the way, and nailed it to the cross.

Everything after that is the shape of a raised life. If you were raised with Christ, seek those things above. Put to death what belongs to the old self: immorality, covetousness which is idolatry, anger, filthy language, lying. Put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and above all love. Let the peace of Christ rule and the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Then wives and husbands, children and fathers, servants and masters, and finally prayer and wise speech toward outsiders. Doctrine becomes a household.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The Colossian error mixed Jewish ceremonial law, veneration of angels, claims of visionary experience, and harsh treatment of the body. Paul answers each in 2:8–23.
- “Handwriting of requirements” translates a word for a certificate of debt, a signed IOU. The picture is a debt canceled and the document publicly nailed up.
- Colossians 2:16–17 is one of the clearest statements in Scripture that the sabbath belonged to the shadow and not to the body, which is Christ.
- Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 are the two passages that authorize the singing of the church. Both specify singing and both specify teaching and admonishing one another.
- The household instructions of 3:18–4:1 address a world where slavery was legal and universal. Paul regulates the relationship and plants the seed that destroys it (see Philemon, written and delivered at the same time).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Colossians 2:11–13 describes what happens in baptism: a burial, a raising, a forgiving. Walk through exactly what the text says takes place, and talk about why God chose a burial as the picture.*

Read the text phrase by phrase and let it say what it says. Buried with Him in baptism: that is why immersion, since nobody buries a person by sprinkling dirt on his forehead. Raised with Him: baptism is also a resurrection, which is why the New Testament never speaks of a Christian as still in the grave. Through faith in the working of God: the power is God's, not the water's and not the administrator's, which answers anyone who calls this a work of human merit. Made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses: this is where forgiveness is located in the sentence.

Then ask why God chose a burial. Because a burial means a death happened, and a death means the old life is not on probation but finished. Because it is public and irreversible. Because it puts the Christian into the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus rather than into a ceremony about Him (Romans 6:3–4). Ask the class what they remember about their own baptism, and then ask what has been buried since, because Paul moves straight from this to putting the old man to death in chapter 3.

Question 2. *Colossians 2:14–17 says the handwriting of requirements was wiped out and nailed to the cross, and that sabbaths were a shadow of things to come. What does that settle about which law binds Christians today, and what does it not mean?*

Say it plainly: the Law of Moses, as a covenant with binding requirements, was taken out of the way at the cross. It was not lowered or amended; it was canceled, and the certificate was nailed up for everyone to see. That is why Paul can say no one has any right to judge a Christian regarding food, drink, a festival, a new moon, or sabbaths. Those things were a shadow of things to come, and the substance is Christ. Hebrews 8:13 says the first covenant is obsolete and vanishing away.

Now guard the other side, because people hear this badly. It does not mean the Old Testament is useless; it was written for our learning (Romans 15:4) and it is the story we are living inside. It does not mean God's moral character changed; murder and adultery are still sin, not because Moses said so but because Christ says so. And it does not mean Christians have no law; we are under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2; 1 Corinthians 9:21). The question is never whether we obey, but whose covenant we are under. Note too that the first day of the week, not the sabbath, is when the church met to break bread (Acts 20:7), and that the Lord's Day is not a Christian sabbath.

Question 3. *Colossians 2:20–23 warns about rules like “do not touch, do not taste, do not handle” that have an appearance of wisdom. Where do we still manufacture rules God never gave, and why are they so attractive to religious people?*

Start with why they appeal. Man-made rules are measurable, they make progress visible, they let us compare ourselves favorably with others, and they are usually easier than the thing God actually asked for. Paul says they have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. That last clause is the devastating part: the rules do not even work.

Then ask for our own list, carefully and without cynicism, because a class can swing from legalism into carelessness in a single hour. The test is simple and it is the one Paul uses: does the New Testament authorize it, or did we add it? Traditions and judgments about dress, schedules, methods, and personal practices may be wise, and some are, but the moment we bind them as though God gave them, we have become the men of Colossians 2:22. Keep the distinction sharp: God's word binds; our preferences do not. And where God has spoken, no appeal to freedom sets it aside.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace what Colossians 2:11–13 says God did: a circumcision made without hands, a burial, a raising, a making alive, a forgiving. Compare Romans 6:3–4 and Acts 2:38, and list what baptism is connected with in each passage.*

Colossians 2:11–13 connects baptism with a circumcision of the heart, a burial with Christ, a resurrection with Him, being made alive, and the forgiveness of all trespasses. Romans 6:3–4 connects it with being baptized into Christ Jesus, into His death, and with walking in newness of life. Acts 2:38 connects it with repentance, the remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Three passages, one consistent answer: this is where a person comes into contact with the death of Christ and receives forgiveness.

2. *Colossians 2:16 names food, drink, festivals, new moons, and sabbaths. Read Hebrews 8:6–13 and Galatians 5:1–4, then write down what happened to the Law of Moses and what happens to someone who goes back to it.*

Hebrews says Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant established on better promises, that the first covenant was faulty in that the people did not continue in it, and that in calling the new covenant new He has made the first obsolete and ready to vanish away. Galatians 5:1–4 warns that anyone who takes up circumcision as a requirement

becomes a debtor to keep the whole law, is estranged from Christ, and has fallen from grace. Going back is not a harmless preference; it is a change of covenants.

3. *Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 describe the singing of the church. List what the text says we do, to whom we do it, with what, and from where.*

We speak to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, we teach and admonish one another, we sing and make melody, we do it with grace and with thankfulness, we do it in our hearts, and we do it to the Lord. Two things are commanded: singing, and doing it in a way that teaches. The New Testament authorizes singing and gives no authority for mechanical instruments in the worship of the church, which is why we sing without them.

4. *List the things to put off in 3:5–9 and the things to put on in 3:12–17. Match them into pairs where you can, and mark the pair you most need to work on.*

Put off: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, covetousness which is idolatry, anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language, lying. Put on: tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, love, the peace of Christ, the word of Christ, thankfulness. Anger pairs with meekness and longsuffering; malice with kindness; lying with the truth of a new self; covetousness with thankfulness. Note that most of the sins in both lists are committed with the mouth and inside relationships.

5. *Colossians 4:5–6 says to walk in wisdom toward those outside, with speech seasoned with salt. Name one person outside Christ whom you see every week, and plan one specific conversation before next Sunday.*

Answers will vary. Push past “I will be a better example.” Paul asks for wisdom in the way we walk, redeeming the time, and speech that is gracious and seasoned, so that we know how to answer each one. A plan might be an invitation to a meal, a straightforward question about what they believe, or an offer to study. Name the person, name the day.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Colossians 2:12 is one of the plainest baptism passages in Scripture. Teach it as a burial and a resurrection accomplished by the working of God, received by faith. It is not a human work earning salvation, and it is not an optional symbol added afterward.
- The taking away of the Law of Moses must be taught without implying that the Old Testament is worthless or that Christians are under no law. We are under the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).
- Colossians 2:16 removes the sabbath from Christian obligation. Handle sabbath-keeping neighbors with courtesy while being clear, and do not turn the Lord’s Day into a Christian sabbath. Christians assemble on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 16:2).
- Colossians 3:18–4:1 will raise questions about the role of wives and about slavery. Teach the text as it stands, note that Paul addresses both parties with real obligations, and point to Philemon for how the gospel dismantled slavery from the inside.

NEXT WEEK’S READING: Isaiah 11–17 • Psalm 78 • Luke 13 • 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2:16

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