

Through the Bible in 24 Months



WEEK 70 OF 104

Comfort My People

Week 70 of 104 • 67% of the way through the Bible

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

General Old Testament	Isaiah 39-43
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 86-88
Gospels	Luke 17
General New Testament	1 Timothy 1-2

THIS WEEK AT A GLANCE

Somewhere between a sickroom and an exile, the book of Isaiah changes its voice. For thirty-nine chapters it has been warning. At chapter 40 it says, "Comfort, yes, comfort My people." That word runs under everything you read this week. A psalmist asks God to bend down and listen. Another writes the darkest prayer in the Bible and never once stops praying it. Ten lepers are cleansed and exactly one turns around to say thank you. And Paul, who used to drag Christians out of their houses, tells a young preacher that he was shown mercy as a sample of what God is willing to do with the worst man he could name. This week God bends toward the tired. Let Him.

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 Isaiah 39-43

Comfort for a Weary People

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Hezekiah proudly shows Babylonian envoys everything in his treasure house, and Isaiah tells him it will all be carried to Babylon, his sons included. Then the book turns. A voice cries in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. Grass withers, but God's word stands. He carries lambs in His arms and renews the strength of the weary. He calls a Servant who will not break a bruised reed, and He tells a frightened people that when they pass through the waters He will be with them.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- Isaiah 40:1-11 changes the tone of the whole book. What is the messenger told to say, and why is "comfort" the right word for a people who still have judgment ahead of them?
- Isaiah 40:28-31 promises renewed strength to those who wait on the Lord. Talk together about what waiting on God actually involves when you are the one who is exhausted, and what it is not.
- Isaiah 42:3 says the Servant will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax. Who in your life is a bruised reed right now, and how should that verse change the way you handle him this month?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Isaiah 39 is a short chapter with a long shadow. Trace what Hezekiah did, what Isaiah told him, and how he answered in verse 8, then consider what that answer reveals about him.
2. List every “fear not,” “do not be dismayed,” or similar reassurance in Isaiah 41 through 43, and write down the reason God attaches to each one.
3. Compare Isaiah 40:3–5 with Matthew 3:1–3 and Luke 3:4–6. Who is the voice, whose way is prepared, and what does that tell you about the identity of the One who came?
4. Isaiah 42:1–9 is the first of the Servant Songs. Read Matthew 12:15–21 and note how much of the song Matthew quotes and what event in Jesus’ ministry he attaches it to.
5. Isaiah 43:1–2 promises God’s presence in the water and the fire, not exemption from them. Name the water you are walking through right now, and write verse 2 somewhere you will see it every morning this week.

WISDOM LITERATURE Psalm 86–88

When Prayer Meets Darkness

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Three very different prayers. Psalm 86 is David asking God to bend down and listen, calling himself poor and needy, and asking for something surprising: a heart united to fear God’s name. Psalm 87 celebrates Zion and then astonishes the reader by registering Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Ethiopia as citizens born there. Psalm 88 is the darkest prayer in the Psalter. It opens in trouble, stays in trouble, and ends with the words “darkness is my closest friend,” with no resolution offered.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Psalm 86:11 asks God to unite his heart to fear His name. Describe what a divided heart looks like from the inside, and name where you feel the division most in your own week.
2. Psalm 87 lists Israel’s old enemies as citizens born in Zion. How does that anticipate what God does in Christ (Ephesians 2:11–22), and what should it do to the way our congregation looks at the people we consider outsiders?

3. Psalm 88 ends with no relief and no resolution. Why would God include a prayer like that in Scripture, and what does it offer to a person sitting in the dark tonight that a cheerful psalm could not?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Go through Psalm 86 and list the reasons David gives God for answering him. How many are about David, and how many are about God's own character?
2. Psalm 86:15 quotes a sentence God spoke about Himself. Find it in Exodus 34:6–7, then note the echoes in Numbers 14:18, Psalm 103:8, Joel 2:13, and Jonah 4:2. Why do you think that one self-description is repeated so often?
3. Read Psalm 88 aloud, slowly. Mark every complaint and every question. Now identify the one thing the psalmist never stops doing, even at his lowest point.
4. Compare Psalm 88 with 2 Corinthians 1:8–10. How does Paul describe his own despair, and what does he say God intended it to accomplish in him?
5. Think of someone you know who is in a Psalm 88 season. Instead of sending a verse, plan one specific act of presence this week, put it on your calendar, and do it.

GOSPELS Luke 17

Faith, Duty, and Gratitude

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Jesus warns that stumbling blocks will come and pronounces woe on whoever brings them, then tells the disciples to forgive a brother seven times in a single day if he repents. Their response is a plea for more faith, and Jesus answers with a mustard seed and a story about a servant who does not expect applause for doing his job. Ten lepers are cleansed on the road, one returns, and the chapter closes with sober teaching about the day the Son of Man is revealed.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Jesus says to forgive a brother seven times in one day if he repents, and the apostles immediately answer, "Increase our faith." Why would that particular command make them feel they were running low?

2. The mustard seed and the parable of the unworthy servant belong together (17:5–10). What is Jesus correcting about how we measure faith, and about how we picture our own service to God?
3. Nine men were healed and one came back. Why is gratitude so easy to skip, and what does twenty years of unexpressed thankfulness do to a person's soul?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. Trace exactly what the one leper did in 17:15–16, and note what Jesus said to him in verse 19 that He did not say to the other nine. What might that mean?
2. Jesus says in 17:10 that when we have done everything commanded we are unprofitable servants. Read Romans 4:4–5 and Ephesians 2:8–10, and explain how duty and grace fit together without either one canceling the other.
3. In 17:20–21 Jesus says the kingdom of God does not come with observation. Compare Mark 9:1, Acts 2:1–4 and 2:36–47, and Colossians 1:13. When did the kingdom come, and where is it now?
4. List the details Jesus gives about the days of Noah and the days of Lot in 17:26–30. What were those people doing, and what exactly was wrong with it?
5. Jesus says, “Remember Lot's wife” (17:32). Name what you keep turning around to look at, and take one step this week that makes going back to it harder.

GENERAL NEW TESTAMENT 1 Timothy 1–2

Mercy, Prayer, and Order

WHAT YOU WILL FIND HERE

Paul leaves Timothy in Ephesus with one assignment: charge certain men to stop teaching another doctrine. He explains the proper use of the law, then interrupts himself with his own story, calling himself the chief of sinners and saying God showed him mercy as a pattern of what He is willing to do. Chapter 2 turns to the assembly: pray for all men, including kings; there is one God and one Mediator; and men and women each have a part to fill.

FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners and says he obtained mercy as a pattern for those who would believe afterward (1:15–16). How should that change the way we speak to someone who is convinced he has gone too far?
2. First Timothy 2:1–4 tells Christians to pray for kings and all in authority, written under an emperor who would eventually have Paul executed. What does praying regularly for rulers we did not choose and do not admire do inside of us?
3. Paul grounds his instruction in 2:11–14 in creation rather than in the customs of Ephesus. How should that shape the way a congregation orders its assemblies now, and how do we teach it in a way that honors the women who serve so faithfully among us?

EXTENDED CLASS DISCUSSION OR SELF-STUDY

1. List the kinds of people named in 1 Timothy 1:9–10 for whom the law is intended. What is Paul's point about using the law lawfully?
2. Trace Paul's account of himself in 1:12–17: what he was, what happened to him, the reason he gives, and the conclusion he draws. Compare it with Acts 9:1–19 and Acts 26:9–18.
3. First Timothy 2:5 says there is one God and one Mediator between God and men. Read Hebrews 7:25 and 1 John 2:1, and explain what that rules out about how a person approaches God.
4. Paul tells women to adorn themselves in modest apparel, with good works (2:9–10). Read 1 Peter 3:3–4 beside it. What principle stands behind the instruction, and how is it applied without either ignoring it or turning it into a contest?
5. Paul urges prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks for all men (2:1). Write down the names of three people in authority over you, including one you did not vote for, and pray for each by name every day this week.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Isaiah 44–49 • Psalm 89 • Luke 18 • 1 Timothy 3–4

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