

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 72 OF 104

Ransom and Riches

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Isaiah 50-59
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 90-91
Gospels	Luke 19:1-27
General New Testament	1 Timothy 5-6

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to put a price tag on two things: what our salvation cost, and what our lives are being spent on. Isaiah 53 answers the first, and it deserves the heaviest, most careful hour you give the class all quarter. Psalm 90, Zacchaeus, and 1 Timothy 6 press the second. Moses asks God to teach him to count his days. Zacchaeus counts his money differently by the end of one dinner. Paul tells Timothy that we brought nothing in and can carry nothing out.

Doctrinally, three things must be handled with care. First, Isaiah 53 teaches substitution plainly. He bore what was ours, and it must not be reduced to a moving example or expanded into salvation without response; Acts 8:35-39 shows what preaching that chapter produced. Second, Isaiah 55 offers salvation without price while calling the hearer to seek, call, forsake, and return, so free grace and full surrender are both preserved. Third, Psalm 91 is a psalm of trust, not a guarantee of physical immunity; Satan himself misused it that way, and Romans 8:35-39 gives the promise its true shape.

The formational thread is what a changed heart does with what it owns. Zacchaeus did not make a statement of faith; he made a restitution. The third servant had a clean handkerchief and nothing to show. So ask your class directly: if someone audited your checkbook and your calendar for the last three months, what would they say you actually believe, and what is the one line in either one that you would change tonight?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Isaiah 50-59 first, and give nearly the whole hour to 52:13-53:12. Read it aloud without comment, then work verse by verse through 53:4-6 and the pronouns. Close with Isaiah 55:1-7 and Acts 8:35-39 so the class sees what that chapter produced in one man.

Second session: Take up Luke 19:1-27 second. Zacchaeus is familiar and short enough to leave real time for the parable of the minas, which most classes have never studied. Use 19:11 to settle the kingdom question again, briefly and clearly.

The other two readings: Psalm 90-91 and 1 Timothy 5-6 carry the extended questions well. Say something before the class scatters about how to read Psalm 91, since someone in the room has been told it guarantees protection. If your congregation supports widows or is considering appointing men, 1 Timothy 5 deserves a separate evening.

The Servant Who Was Pierced

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These ten chapters contain the summit of Old Testament prophecy, and the whole week should be organized around it. Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 is a single poem in five stanzas about a Servant who is exalted and yet marred beyond recognition. He grows up like a tender plant out of dry ground, with no form or beauty that men should desire Him. He is despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and we hid our faces from Him. Then the language turns from description to explanation, and the explanation is the gospel.

Teach 53:4–6 with care, because everything depends on the prepositions. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. That is substitution stated seven different ways in three verses, seven hundred years before a Roman cross existed. Verse 10 adds the part no Jewish reader could have expected: it pleased the Lord to bruise Him, and when He makes His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed and prolong His days, which is resurrection language.

The chapters around it are the results of that death. Chapter 54 sings to a barren woman about children she does not yet have. Chapter 55 opens with an auctioneer's cry, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters," and offers wine and milk without money, because the price has already been paid in chapter 53. Chapter 56 puts foreigners and eunuchs inside God's house and calls it a house of prayer for all nations, which Jesus quoted when He cleared the temple. Chapter 58 dismantles religion that fasts while oppressing workers, and chapter 59 states the problem plainly, that our iniquities have separated us from God, before promising that a Redeemer will come to Zion.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is the fourth and fullest of the Servant Songs, following 42:1–9, 49:1–13, and 50:4–9.
- No chapter of the Old Testament is used more in the New Testament than Isaiah 53 (Matthew 8:17; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32–35; Romans 10:16; 1 Peter 2:21–25).
- Isaiah wrote roughly seven hundred years before Christ, and a complete copy of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls predates the birth of Jesus, which settles any suggestion that the chapter was written after the fact.
- Isaiah 56:7, "My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations," is quoted by Jesus in Matthew 21:13 and Mark 11:17.
- Fasting in Isaiah 58 belongs to old covenant practice. The principles of justice, mercy, and sincerity carry over; the ritual requirement does not (Colossians 2:14–17).
- The genre throughout is Hebrew poetry, and chapter 53 in particular uses parallel lines that restate the same truth from several angles. Read the repetition as emphasis, not as separate events.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. Read Isaiah 53:4–6 aloud twice, slowly. Count the words "our," "we," and "us," and notice what sits next to each one. What is being claimed about who did what, and to whom?

The pronouns carry the theology. Ours are the griefs, the sorrows, the transgressions, the iniquities, the peace, the healing, the straying. His are the wounds, the bruises, the chastisement, the stripes. Verse 6 closes the circuit: the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. The Servant is not merely an example of suffering or a victim of injustice, though He is unjustly treated. He is bearing what belonged to someone else, by God's own arrangement.

Do not let the class stay in the abstract. Ask each person to read verse 5 replacing “our” with “my,” silently, and then ask what changes. Then guard the doctrine on two sides. Against those who reduce the cross to an example of love, say that the text says wounded for, bruised for, laid on Him. Against those who make it a transaction with no response required, note that the very next chapters call the hearer to come, to seek, to forsake, and to return (55:1–7), and that the eunuch who read this chapter was baptized before he went on his way rejoicing.

Question 2. *Isaiah 55:1–3 invites the thirsty to come and buy with no money. If salvation costs the sinner nothing, why does Jesus tell people to count the cost (Luke 14:28–33), and how do those two hold together without contradiction?*

Isaiah 55 and Luke 14 are talking about two different currencies. What the sinner cannot do is pay for his pardon; that price was fully paid in chapter 53, which is why the wine and milk are offered without money. What the sinner must do is surrender, which costs him everything he has been living for. Salvation is free and discipleship is total, and both statements are in the same Bible without strain.

Watch for two errors in the room. One person hears “without money” and concludes that nothing is required of him at all, which Isaiah 55:6–7 immediately refutes: seek, call, forsake, return. Another hears “count the cost” and starts trying to earn what is already purchased. Ask the class to say in one sentence what a person must give up and what he could never pay for, and then point out that the two answers are different kinds of thing.

Question 3. *In Isaiah 58 people fast and then complain that God did not notice, and God describes the fast He actually chooses. Where is our own religious practice most in danger of becoming something God never asked for?*

Isaiah 58 is uncomfortably close to home. The people fasted, bowed their heads like a bulrush, spread out sackcloth and ashes, and then asked God why He had not noticed. God answers that on their fast days they pursued their own pleasure and exploited their workers, that their fasting ended in strife and blows. The fast He chooses is to loose the bonds of wickedness, share bread with the hungry, bring the poor into the house, and clothe the naked.

Ask the class where the same disconnect could live among us: perfect attendance alongside a hard heart toward a neighbor; careful doctrine alongside an employee treated badly; a family that never misses the Lord’s Supper and never once has anyone at the table. This is not an argument against faithful practice; God never told them to stop fasting. It is a warning against practice that has been detached from mercy. Ask for one specific act of mercy this month and let the class say it out loud.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Work through Isaiah 52:13–53:12 with two columns. In the first, list every statement of what the Servant suffered. In the second, list every statement of why He suffered. Then read the second column out loud.*

The suffering column includes: marred more than any man, despised, rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, hidden faces, esteemed stricken by God, wounded, bruised, chastised, striped, oppressed, afflicted, silent, taken from prison and judgment, cut off from the land of the living, given a grave with the wicked and with the rich, bruised by the Lord, poured out to death, numbered with the transgressors. The reason column includes: our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities, our peace, our healing, the iniquity of us all, the transgression of My people, an offering for sin, to justify many, to bear their iniquities, to make intercession for the transgressors. The second column is the gospel in Isaiah’s words.

2. *Read Acts 8:26–39. Identify which verses of Isaiah 53 the Ethiopian was reading, what Philip preached from them, and what the man did as a result of that preaching.*

He was reading Isaiah 53:7–8, the verses about the sheep led to the slaughter and the lamb silent before its shearers. Philip began at that Scripture and preached Jesus to him. The result was immediate: the eunuch saw water, asked what hindered him from being baptized, ordered the chariot stopped, went down into the water with Philip, was baptized, and went on his way rejoicing. Note that preaching Jesus from Isaiah 53 evidently included the necessity of baptism, since the eunuch asked about it without prompting.

3. Trace God's claim in Isaiah 55:10–11 that His word will not return to Him empty. Set it beside Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 4:12, and write out in one sentence what is being claimed about Scripture.

The claim is that God's word accomplishes what He sends it to do. It does not depend on the eloquence of the speaker or the receptiveness of the moment for its power; like rain and snow that water the earth, it produces. Romans 10:17 says faith comes by hearing the word of God, which is why preaching is not optional, and Hebrews 4:12 says the word is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword, discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart. In one sentence: Scripture is God's effective instrument, and using it is never wasted effort.

4. Isaiah 59:1–2 explains why prayers can seem to go unheard. Read it with 1 Peter 3:12 and Psalm 66:18, and write down carefully what those verses do and do not say about God's ability and willingness.

Isaiah 59:1 says the Lord's hand is not shortened that it cannot save, nor His ear heavy that it cannot hear. The problem is not on God's side at all. Verse 2 says our iniquities have separated us from God, and our sins have hidden His face from us so that He will not hear. Psalm 66:18 says the same from the other direction: if I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear. First Peter 3:12 says the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and His ears are open to their prayers. So the passage does not say God has grown weak or indifferent; it says unrepented sin is a barrier, and the remedy is repentance, not louder praying.

5. Isaiah 55:7 tells the wicked to forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Name the thought pattern, not merely the act, that you need to forsake, and write one sentence of Scripture you will preach to yourself every time it starts.

Answers will vary. The instruction in 55:7 is precise: the wicked forsakes his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Most people can name an act sooner than a thought pattern, so press gently: self-pity, contempt, envy, rehearsed grievance, catastrophizing, lust that begins as a second look. The sentence of Scripture to preach to oneself should be short enough to recall in the moment.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Isaiah 53 teaches substitution: He bore what was ours, by God's deliberate arrangement. Say it plainly. At the same time, do not let it be turned into salvation without response. Isaiah 55:6–7 and Acts 8:35–39 belong in the same lesson.
- Isaiah 53:10–12, that He shall see His seed and prolong His days after making His soul an offering for sin, is resurrection language. Point it out; it is one of the clearest hints of resurrection in the Old Testament.
- Isaiah 54 and 60 through 62 are pictures of the redeemed people of God, fulfilled in the church. Do not convert them into an earthly millennial kingdom.
- Fasting in Isaiah 58 is old covenant practice, not a requirement bound on Christians. Teach the principle of mercy and justice that God is defending, and do not bind the ritual.

Teach Us to Number Our Days

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses, which makes it almost certainly the oldest psalm in the collection, written by a man who watched an entire generation die in the wilderness. It opens with the only stable thing in the poem: “Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.” Before the mountains were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Everything after that is measured against that sentence, and everything after that is short.

Moses is unsparing about human brevity. We are swept away like a flood, like sleep, like grass that flourishes in the morning and is cut down by evening. Our days are seventy years, or eighty by reason of strength, and even then the best of it is labor and sorrow, and it is soon cut off and we fly away. He ties this to sin, not merely to biology: You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your countenance. Then, out of that, comes the request: teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Death is not the tragedy the psalm is trying to solve; wasted life is.

Psalm 91 is a psalm of trust, and it should be taught as such. Its promises are vivid and absolute in tone: no evil will befall you, no plague will come near your dwelling, He will give His angels charge over you. Read as a legal guarantee, it collapses the first time a godly woman gets cancer. Read as the confidence of a person whose life is genuinely hidden in God, it is exactly right, and the New Testament shows us the final shape of the promise. The devil offered Jesus this psalm as a guarantee, and Jesus refused it. Then Jesus went to a cross and the Father did not send the angels, and by that refusal we were saved.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalm 90 carries the heading “A Prayer of Moses the man of God,” placing it in the wilderness years after Numbers 14.
- It opens Book IV of the Psalter, which follows the crisis of Psalm 89 and answers it by turning attention from David’s throne to God’s eternal reign.
- Psalm 91 is anonymous and is a psalm of trust, a genre expressing settled confidence rather than issuing legal guarantees.
- Verses 11 and 12 are quoted by Satan in the temptation of Jesus (Matthew 4:6; Luke 4:10–11), which is itself a lesson in how Scripture can be quoted accurately and used wrongly.
- Hebrew poetry uses absolute and vivid language for emphasis. Proverbs must be read as general principles, and psalms of trust must be read as confidence in God’s care rather than as contracts.
- The New Testament frames the final answer: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35–39), which is deliverance through death rather than around it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 90 asks God to teach us to number our days so we may gain a heart of wisdom. What actually changes in a person who has honestly faced how short his life is, and what changes in a person who refuses to?*

A person who has counted his days makes different decisions about small things. He stops postponing conversations, because he knows the supply of Tuesdays is finite. He becomes harder to offend, because the grudge starts to look expensive. He gives away more and worries about less. Moses connects the counting directly to wisdom, which in Hebrew thought is skill in living, so the point of facing mortality is not gloom but competence.

The person who refuses to count also changes, though more slowly. He lives as though there is always another year to fix the marriage, to be baptized, to reconcile with his father, to get serious. Hebrews 3:13 warns about the

hardening that comes from that kind of delay. Ask the class a plain question: if you knew you had two years, what would you change on Monday, and why are you not doing it now?

Question 2. *Psalm 91 says no evil shall befall you, and yet faithful Christians are injured, sick, and killed. How do we read a psalm like this so that it neither becomes a guarantee of immunity nor gets quietly emptied of its comfort?*

Start by naming the genre. Psalm 91 is a song of confidence, and its language is the absolute, sweeping language of poetry, not the careful hedging of a contract. It is true in the way a father's promise to a child is true. Then hold two facts together. Faithful people have been sawn in two, stoned, and imprisoned (Hebrews 11:36–38), and God is still their refuge. Paul was beaten, shipwrecked, and finally executed, and he wrote Romans 8.

The comfort is not emptied when it is read that way; it is relocated. Psalm 91 promises that nothing touches the believer outside God's care and that no evil finally wins over him. Verse 16 says, "With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation," and for a Christian that has a horizon this world cannot contain. Ask the class how they would use this psalm with a sick member without either promising healing or making the psalm meaningless.

Question 3. *Satan quoted Psalm 91:11–12 to Jesus on the temple pinnacle (Matthew 4:5–7). What was wrong with the way he used the verse, and where do we make the same mistake with promises we like?*

Satan quoted the verse accurately and applied it corruptly. He turned a promise of God's care over the one who walks in His ways into a justification for a stunt: throw yourself down and force God to prove it. Jesus answers with Deuteronomy 6:16, "You shall not tempt the Lord your God." A promise of protection is not a license to manufacture danger and require God to intervene.

We do the same thing in quieter ways. We claim a promise to justify a decision God never authorized, take a financial risk we cannot support and call it faith, neglect an obvious duty and expect God to cover it, or ignore medical advice and call that trust. Notice also that Satan skipped the line about keeping you in all your ways. Ask the class where they have used a verse to make God responsible for something they chose.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Psalm 90 says about God, then everything it says about man. Note where the two lists touch, especially in verses 1, 12, and 17.*

Of God: He is our dwelling place in all generations, He existed before the mountains, He is from everlasting to everlasting, a thousand years are as yesterday to Him, He turns man to destruction, His wrath is real, He sets our secret sins in His light, and He is asked to satisfy, gladden, and establish. Of man: we are dust, swept away like a flood, like sleep, like grass, our days are seventy or eighty years, full of labor and sorrow, soon cut off. The two lists meet in verse 1, where the eternal God is the home of temporary people, in verse 12, where He teaches us to count, and in verse 17, where He establishes work that would otherwise vanish.

2. *Psalm 90:12 asks for a heart of wisdom. Read James 4:13–15 and Ephesians 5:15–16, and identify the practical habit those passages recommend for someone who has counted his days.*

James says not to boast about tomorrow's business plans, since you do not know what will happen and your life is a vapor; instead say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." Ephesians says to walk circumspectly, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. The habit recommended is planning under God: making real plans while holding them open-handed, and treating time as a purchase to be made deliberately rather than a resource that simply runs out.

3. *Trace the four names for God in Psalm 91:1–2: Most High, Almighty, Lord, and my God. Look up what each one emphasizes, and consider why the psalmist stacks them at the opening.*

Most High (Elyon) emphasizes God's supremacy over every other power, which matters if you are afraid of something. Almighty (Shaddai) emphasizes His sufficiency and strength, the name used with the patriarchs. Lord (Jehovah, or Yahweh) is His covenant name, the God who binds Himself to His people by promise. "My God" (Elohim) makes it personal and possessive. Stacked together in two verses, they say that the highest, strongest, covenant-keeping God is not a distant force but mine.

4. Compare Psalm 91:14–16 with Romans 8:35–39. What is promised to the one who loves God, and what is specifically not promised?

Psalm 91 promises deliverance, protection, answered prayer, God's presence in trouble, honor, satisfaction, and salvation. Romans 8 promises that nothing separates us from the love of God in Christ, and it does so while listing tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword as things Christians actually face. Paul even quotes a psalm about being killed all day long. So what is promised is God's unbreakable love and final victory; what is not promised is exemption from suffering, illness, or death.

5. Psalm 90:17 asks God to establish the work of our hands. Name the one piece of work you most want to outlast you, and identify the single change this week that would actually serve it.

Answers will vary. Moses asks twice for God to establish the work of our hands, which suggests he knew that the work will not last unless God makes it last. Listen for answers about children, marriages, congregations, and people taught, and note gently when someone names something that cannot outlast him. Then press for the single change this week, since Psalm 90 is finally about how the next ordinary day gets spent.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 91 is not a guarantee of physical immunity and must never be taught as one, especially to a class that includes the sick and the grieving. It is a psalm of trust, and its full answer is in Romans 8:35–39.
- Satan's use of 91:11–12 is a case study in quoting Scripture accurately and applying it falsely. Use it to teach responsible handling of promises.
- Psalm 90 speaks of God's anger and of our secret sins. Do not soften it into a meditation on mortality alone; Moses ties our brevity to our sin.
- Do not use Psalm 91 to promise healing, and do not use it to imply that the suffering lacked faith. That is the error of Job's friends.

Zacchaeus and the Minas

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke has just shown us a rich ruler who went away sorrowful, and immediately he gives us a rich man who does not. The contrast is deliberate. Zacchaeus is a chief tax collector, which means he was rich by collaborating with Rome and by taking a cut from his own neighbors. He is also, Luke notes with a novelist's eye, short. A wealthy man running down a street and climbing a tree in front of a crowd has already surrendered his dignity before Jesus says a word to him.

The turning point is that Jesus calls him by name and says, "Today I must stay at your house." The crowd complains that He has gone to be a guest with a man who is a sinner, which is the same murmur that produced the parables of Luke 15. Zacchaeus's response is not a statement of belief but an announcement of restitution: half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold. Jesus answers, "Today salvation has come to this house," and then gives the sentence that sums up His whole ministry: the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost.

The parable that follows is told because they were near Jerusalem and the crowd expected the kingdom to appear immediately. In it, a nobleman goes to a far country to receive a kingdom and return, which is exactly what Jesus was about to do in His ascension. He leaves his servants with money to trade. Some citizens send word that they will not have this man to reign over them. When he returns, the faithful servants are rewarded in proportion to what they produced, the servant who hid his mina loses it, and the rebels who refused his reign face judgment. The kingdom was coming, but not the way they expected, and the interval was to be spent working.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Jericho lay about eighteen miles from Jerusalem, on the final approach for a pilgrim going up to the Passover.
- A chief tax collector oversaw other collectors and profited from their collections, which made Zacchaeus both wealthy and thoroughly despised.
- The Mosaic law required restoring what was taken plus a fifth (Numbers 5:7), with fourfold or fivefold restitution for theft of livestock (Exodus 22:1). Zacchaeus volunteers the harshest standard.
- A mina was about three months' wages, a modest sum compared with the talents of Matthew 25, which suits a parable about small beginnings.
- The detail of citizens sending an embassy to reject the nobleman mirrors real history: Archelaus, son of Herod, traveled to Rome for confirmation as king while a Jewish delegation followed to oppose him.
- The nobleman's departure to receive a kingdom and later return pictures the ascension and enthronement of Christ (Daniel 7:13–14; Acts 2:33–36) and His final coming.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Zacchaeus's repentance shows up in his account books within minutes. Why does Jesus point to that as the evidence that salvation had come to this house, and what would equivalent evidence look like in your life?*

Because repentance that costs nothing has not happened yet. Zacchaeus did not merely feel differently about Jesus; he returned money, and he returned it at a rate the law did not require of him. Jesus' statement that salvation had come to the house follows the announcement, not because giving purchased anything, but because the giving proved a changed man. John the Baptist said the same when he told the crowds to bring forth fruits worthy of repentance and then told tax collectors specifically to collect no more than what was appointed (Luke 3:8, 13).

Press the class for the modern equivalent, and do not accept general answers. Restitution might mean an apology to a former employee, a debt paid that everyone has forgotten, taxes filed honestly, a rumor corrected in front of the same people who heard it, an inflated expense report confessed. Ask whether there is anyone in the room who knows exactly what his Zacchaeus moment would be and has been avoiding it.

Question 2. *Luke tells us plainly why Jesus told the parable of the minas: the crowd thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately (19:11). How does the parable correct their expectation, and what does it correct in ours?*

The parable corrects the timing and the shape of their expectation at once. A nobleman who must travel to a far country to receive his kingdom is not about to set up a throne in Jerusalem this week. Jesus was going to the cross, then to the Father, and He would be crowned there (Acts 2:33–36; Hebrews 1:3). The kingdom would come in power at Pentecost, and He reigns now; what remains is His return to settle accounts.

It corrects us at a different point. Our error is rarely expecting the kingdom tomorrow; it is living as though the accounting will never come. Occupy till I come, the older translation says, and the word means do business. Ask the class what they would do differently this year if they genuinely expected to give an account of it, and note that the servants were not asked to produce equally, only to produce.

Question 3. *The servant who hid his mina explained that he was afraid, because he believed his master was a hard man. Where does a wrong picture of God make people cautious and unfruitful rather than bold?*

The third servant's explanation is revealing: I feared you, because you are an austere man, collecting what you did not deposit and reaping what you did not sow. His picture of the master made caution seem reasonable. If the master is harsh and unfair, the safest thing is to risk nothing and return exactly what you were given. The master answers him out of his own words, which is not an endorsement of the description but an argument from it: if you really believed that, you would at least have put the money in the bank.

Wrong pictures of God still paralyze people. A God who is mostly disappointed produces members who attend and never volunteer, who will not teach for fear of doing it badly, who will not talk to a neighbor about Christ because they might answer a question wrongly. Ask the class where fear has been dressed up as humility in their own service. Then point them back to Isaiah 53 and Luke 19:10: this Master came to seek and to save, and that is the face to work in front of.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace Zacchaeus's actions step by step in 19:3–8. Then read Exodus 22:1 and Numbers 5:6–7, and compare his restitution with what the law actually required of him.*

He sought to see who Jesus was, was hindered by the crowd and his height, ran ahead, climbed a sycamore tree, was called by name, came down quickly, received Jesus joyfully, stood up in the middle of the murmuring, and announced that he would give half his goods to the poor and restore fourfold anything taken by false accusation. Numbers 5:7 required restoring the principal plus twenty percent; Exodus 22:1 required fourfold for a stolen sheep. Zacchaeus volunteered the strictest standard rather than the minimum, which is what repentance usually looks like when it is real.

2. *Set the rich ruler of Luke 18:18–23 beside Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1–10. What did the two men have in common, and what made the difference between them?*

Both were wealthy, both sought Jesus out, and both were treated kindly by Him. The difference was what each did when his money and Jesus stood in the same room. The ruler kept the money and lost the moment; Zacchaeus kept the moment and let the money go. Note also that Jesus made no demand of Zacchaeus at all. The initiative came from a changed heart, which is the point Luke wants his reader to notice.

3. *List what the nobleman gives, what he expects on his return, and what he says to each of the three servants. What is the mina most likely to represent, and what does the differing reward suggest?*

He gives ten servants one mina each and tells them to do business till he comes. He expects a return, and he rewards the faithful in proportion to their gain: ten cities for the one who gained ten, five for the one who gained five. To the

servant who hid his mina in a handkerchief he says, out of your own mouth I will judge you, and the mina is taken and given to the one who had ten. The mina best represents the opportunity and responsibility entrusted equally to every servant, the gospel and the stewardship of a life in Christ. The differing reward suggests that faithfulness is measured by what we did with what we were given, not by comparison with anyone else.

4. *Jesus says the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost (19:10). Read Luke 15:4, Ezekiel 34:11–16, and 1 Timothy 1:15, and describe the picture of God that emerges from all four passages together.*

The picture is of a God who takes the initiative. Luke 15:4 shows a shepherd leaving ninety-nine to go after one until he finds it. Ezekiel 34 has God Himself saying that because the shepherds failed, He will search for His sheep, seek them out, bring them back, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick. First Timothy 1:15 says Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. In every case, the movement begins with God, not with us, and the object is the one who is lost rather than the one who is doing well.

5. *Name one thing God has entrusted to you that you are currently protecting rather than investing. Decide what putting it to work would look like this month, and write down the first step with a date.*

Answers will vary. Watch for the phrase “I am not qualified,” which is usually the third servant’s handkerchief in different words. Common answers include a spare room never used for hospitality, money saved past all need, a skill never offered to the congregation, a class never taught, a neighbor never invited. The date matters more than the intention.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Zacchaeus met Jesus before the cross and before Pentecost, under the old covenant. His account teaches the nature of repentance beautifully, but conversion under the gospel is described in Acts (Acts 2:38; 8:35–39; 22:16). Do not use Luke 19:9 as the pattern for entering Christ today.
- The parable’s closing judgment on those who would not have him reign is severe language about real accountability, not a model for how Christians treat opponents.
- The crowd’s expectation that the kingdom would appear immediately is corrected, not postponed to a future earthly reign. The nobleman received the kingdom when He ascended; He reigns now (Acts 2:33–36; Colossians 1:13).
- Do not teach that Zacchaeus purchased his salvation with generosity. Jesus points to the giving as evidence, and the initiative in the account is entirely His: “Today I must stay at your house.”

Widows, Elders, and Contentment

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapter 5 is a working manual for a preacher dealing with real people. Paul begins with tone: do not rebuke an older man sharply but exhort him as a father, treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters with all purity. Then he takes up widows in detail, and the guiding principle is one of the most practical in the New Testament. Where a widow has children or grandchildren, they must repay their parents, for that is good and acceptable before God. The church supports those who are widows indeed, left alone, trusting in God, continuing in prayer night and day.

The section on elders follows the same pattern of practical wisdom. Elders who rule well, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine, are worthy of double honor, which in context includes financial support, since Paul immediately quotes “you shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain” and “the laborer is worthy of his wages.” At the same time, an accusation against an elder is not to be received except from two or three witnesses. Both protections matter. Good men must not be destroyed by gossip, and sinning elders must not be shielded.

Chapter 6 lands on money, and Paul’s sentences are worth reading aloud. Godliness with contentment is great gain. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Note carefully that the root is the love of it, not the thing itself, because Paul then turns to the rich without telling them to become poor. He tells them not to be haughty, not to trust in uncertain riches, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, laying up a good foundation for the time to come.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Paul is writing to Timothy at Ephesus, a large congregation with real benevolence obligations and a number of leaders.
- Widows in that world had almost no means of support apart from family, which makes the church’s practice a matter of survival rather than convenience.
- The enrollment of widows in 5:9–10 appears to describe a recognized list of older widows supported by and serving the congregation, not an office of authority.
- “Double honor” in 5:17 carries the sense of both respect and material support, as the two quotations in verse 18 make clear (Deuteronomy 25:4; Luke 10:7).
- Paul’s advice about a little wine in 5:23 is medicinal counsel to a man with stomach trouble in a world without safe water, given to someone whose practice was evidently abstinence.
- The instructions to servants in 6:1–2 regulate the conduct of Christians inside an existing social institution; the New Testament’s principles quietly dissolved it (Philemon 15–16; Galatians 3:28).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *First Timothy 5:8 says a man who does not provide for his own household has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. That is severe language. Why is caring for family treated as a matter of faith rather than of personal preference?*

Because faith that does not reach the people under your own roof has failed at the nearest point. Paul’s logic is that even unbelievers ordinarily care for their aging parents; a Christian who will not do what natural affection alone produces has denied something. The passage is aimed first at adult children and grandchildren who were

letting the congregation carry a burden that belonged to the family, and Paul calls that repaying their parents, which is a striking way to describe it.

Handle this with pastoral care, because the room will contain people in impossible situations: a parent with dementia, a family scattered across states, a caregiver who is exhausted. The command is to provide, which is not always to personally nurse. Ask the class what real provision looks like in a hard case, and ask what this congregation could do to support the members who are currently caring for a parent and telling no one.

Question 2. *Paul builds protections around accusations against elders (5:19–21) and then requires public rebuke of those who go on sinning. Why the extra protection first, and what does the passage require once a charge is actually established?*

Elders are exposed. They make unpopular decisions, they know things they cannot repeat, and they are natural targets for anyone who is unhappy. So Paul requires the same standard the law of Moses required in capital cases, two or three witnesses, before an accusation is even received. That protects the man and it protects the congregation from being run by rumor. Notice how easily a whispered complaint can circulate for months without ever being brought to anyone who could answer it.

But Paul does not stop there, and neither should we. Those who are sinning are to be rebuked in the presence of all, so that the rest may fear, and Timothy is charged before God to do this without prejudice or partiality. The same verse protects a good elder from gossip and prevents a bad one from being covered. Ask the class which failure is more common in churches they have known, and what verse 21 requires of a congregation that has grown fond of a man who is genuinely in the wrong.

Question 3. *Paul says godliness with contentment is great gain, and that the love of money has caused people to wander from the faith (6:6–10). Where does discontent operate in our lives without ever being named, and what would twelve months of genuine contentment change?*

Discontent is rarely called by its name. It goes by comparison, by upgrading, by an ache that shows up when we visit a certain house, by the quiet calculation of what someone else has that we do not. Paul's antidote is startling in its simplicity: having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. He does not say that wealth is sin; he says the desire to be rich is a trap and that the love of money pierces people through with many sorrows, and he names the worst consequence first, that some have strayed from the faith because of it.

Twelve months of genuine contentment would change specific, checkable things: what gets bought, how much gets given, how many hours are worked, how much attention goes to comparison, how a job change is evaluated. Ask the class to name one purchase they would not make and one gift they would, and then ask what they are training their children to want, since discontent is inherited faster than money is.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List the qualifications for a widow to be enrolled in 5:9–10. Then note from 5:4 and 5:16 who bears responsibility before the congregation does, and why Paul arranges it that way.*

A widow enrolled is to be at least sixty, to have been the wife of one man, and to be well reported for good works: if she has brought up children, lodged strangers, washed the saints' feet, relieved the afflicted, and diligently followed every good work. Paul says in 5:4 that children and grandchildren must first show piety at home and repay their parents, and in 5:16 that a believing man or woman with widows in the family must relieve them so the church is not burdened and can relieve those who are widows indeed. The arrangement honors the family, keeps the congregation's resources for real need, and gives the church's benevolence integrity.

2. *First Timothy 5:17–18 says elders who rule well are worthy of double honor, and quotes both the law and the words of Jesus. Read 1 Corinthians 9:7–14 and Galatians 6:6, and summarize what is being taught about supporting those who labor in the word.*

The teaching is that those who give themselves to preaching and teaching the word are to be supported materially by God's people. Paul quotes the law about not muzzling the ox and Jesus' own statement that the laborer is worthy of his wages. First Corinthians 9 argues the same at length: those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel,

though Paul chose in Corinth not to use that right. Galatians 6:6 says the one taught in the word should share all good things with the one who teaches. Support is a matter of obedience, not of generosity.

3. *Paul warns Timothy not to lay hands on anyone hastily, or he will share in other people's sins (5:22). Why would hurrying to appoint a man make Timothy a participant in what that man later does?*

Because appointing a man is a public endorsement, and an unqualified man placed in office does damage that the one who appointed him could have prevented. Paul has just given detailed qualifications in chapter 3 precisely so that the decision is not made on personality, popularity, or pressure. Hurry is the enemy of that process. A congregation that appoints because a man is available, or because his family would be offended otherwise, is inviting exactly what verse 22 warns about.

4. *Read 6:17–19 slowly. What is Paul's instruction to those who are rich in this present age, and what does he say such living lays up for them? Then decide honestly whether that paragraph is addressed to you.*

He instructs them not to be haughty, not to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy, to do good, to be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share. He says such living stores up a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. As for whether it applies to us, almost every American Christian is rich by any historical or global measure. If the class concludes the paragraph is about someone else, that conclusion is itself worth examining.

5. *Paul charges Timothy to guard what was committed to his trust (6:20). Name what has been committed to you, name the one thing most likely to erode it this year, and decide now what you will do about that.*

Answers will vary. What was committed to Timothy was the gospel itself and the charge to preach it faithfully. Class members will name faith handed down from parents, a marriage, children, a congregation, a class of teenagers, a reputation for honesty. The erosion is usually slow and nameable: drift, busyness, a compromise repeated, a private habit, a friendship that pulls the wrong way. Ask for the decision, not the diagnosis.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The family's duty to care for its own comes before the church's benevolence. Teach that plainly, and teach it gently in a room that may include people already carrying a heavy load.
- "Double honor" for elders includes material support; it does not create a clergy class or a hierarchy. Elders are shepherds of a local congregation, serving among the flock (1 Peter 5:1–3).
- First Timothy 5:23 is medicinal counsel to one man with a stomach ailment, and it presupposes that Timothy was not otherwise using wine at all. It is not an endorsement of social drinking; teach it honestly, with Proverbs 20:1, Proverbs 23:29–35, and 1 Peter 4:3 in view.
- Chapter 6 opens by instructing bondservants. Explain that Scripture is regulating the conduct of Christians inside an institution that already existed, not approving it, and that its principles ended it wherever the gospel went.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Isaiah 60–66 • Psalm 92–94 • Luke 19:28–20:8 • 2 Timothy 1–2

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