

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 75 OF 104

The House and the Heart

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Jeremiah 6-9
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 98-101
Gospels	Luke 21
General New Testament	Titus 1-3

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from the outside of religion to the inside of it. Jeremiah preaches at a temple gate to people who thought the address protected them. A psalm walks the worshiper through the gates and then follows him home to see what he permits there. Jesus praises a woman whose entire gift would not have paid for one of the stones the disciples were admiring. And Paul tells Titus that what God wants in a town full of hard cases is qualified men and adorned doctrine. By Sunday night the class should know that God has never been impressed by a building.

Doctrinally, four matters deserve care. Jeremiah 7 must be applied to false confidence without becoming an argument against the assembly. Luke 21 must be anchored in the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, with no date setting and no dispensational timetable hung on the times of the Gentiles. Titus 1 settles the pattern for congregational leadership: a plurality of qualified men, appointed on character. And Titus 3:5 is the week's most important verse for a class that lives among neighbors taught salvation by faith only; take it apart slowly and let the washing of regeneration say what it says.

The formational thread is the gap between what people see and what God sees. The crowds saw a magnificent temple and a well dressed scribe; God saw a den of robbers and two small coins. The Cretans saw a reputation for lying; Paul saw people who could adorn the doctrine. So ask your class this before they go: if someone followed you for one ordinary week without your knowing it, what would he conclude about the God you claim, and what one thing would you change before Friday so that his conclusion would be right?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Jeremiah 6-9 first and build the whole hour on the temple sermon of chapter 7. Read verses 1 through 15 aloud, then spend real time on Shiloh and on the requirements of verses 5 through 7. Close with the old paths of 6:16 and the answer the people gave.

Second session: Take up Titus 1-3 second. Give twenty minutes to the elder qualifications, twenty to Titus 2 and adorning the doctrine, and reserve the last fifteen for Titus 3:4-7. That last verse is the one your members will be asked about in their neighborhoods, so let them leave able to explain it.

The other two readings: Psalms 98-101 and Luke 21 carry the extended questions. Read Psalm 100 aloud together at the close of a session, and read Luke 21:1-4 without comment before the closing prayer. Encourage members to write out Psalm 101:3 and put it somewhere they will see it when they pick up a phone.

Stand in the Old Paths

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The temple sermon in chapter 7 is the hinge of the book, and it is worth reading aloud slowly. Jeremiah is told to stand in the gate where worshipers enter, which means he preaches to people already on their way in. Their confidence was not in idols at that moment; it was in a building. God had put His name there, David had planned it, Solomon had built it, and it had stood for centuries. Surely God would not let His own house fall.

God's answer is a history lesson. Go to Shiloh, He says, where the tabernacle stood and the ark rested for generations, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people. The house did not protect Eli's sons, and the house will not protect you. Then God lists what He actually requires: honest dealing, protection for the immigrant and the orphan and the widow, no innocent blood, no other gods. Only then, He says, will I let you dwell in this place.

Around that sermon Jeremiah stacks the other failures. Prophets and priests treat a mortal wound with a cheerful diagnosis. The old paths are offered and refused. Topheth in the valley of Hinnom, where children were burned, becomes the valley of slaughter. And the prophet, who feels all of it, asks whether there is no balm in Gilead, no physician there. The book's tears start here, and the class should feel them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The temple sermon is dated in Jeremiah 26:1 to the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, about 609 B.C., and chapter 26 records that Jeremiah was nearly executed for preaching it.
- Shiloh, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem, housed the tabernacle through the period of the judges and was destroyed after the ark was captured (1 Samuel 4).
- Topheth lay in the valley of the son of Hinnom just south of Jerusalem, where children were burned to Molech (7:31; 2 Kings 23:10). The Greek form of that valley's name, Gehenna, later became the New Testament word for hell.
- Judah had just been through Josiah's reforms. The outward religion had been cleaned up while the ordinary practice of justice and the inward loyalty had not, which is exactly what makes a temple sermon necessary.
- Gilead, east of the Jordan, was known for a medicinal resin traded through the region (Genesis 37:25). Jeremiah's question in 8:22 is rhetorical: the medicine exists, and the patient will not take it.
- Paul quotes Jeremiah 9:24 twice, in 1 Corinthians 1:31 and 2 Corinthians 10:17, which makes this one of the prophet's most enduring lines.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Jeremiah 7:1–15 the people were saying, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, as if the building guaranteed their safety. Where are we tempted to let a place, a heritage, or an attendance record stand in for obedience?*

Make the parallel carefully, because it can be misused in both directions. Jeremiah is not attacking the temple, which God Himself commanded. He is attacking a superstition that had grown up around it, the belief that a religious structure creates automatic safety regardless of how people live. The chant in 7:4 is a slogan repeated three times, and slogans are what people reach for when they have stopped thinking.

Then ask where our slogans live. A church building, a family name in the congregation, a baptism thirty years ago, a perfect attendance record, being raised right. None of those things is bad; every one of them can become a cistern. The test Jeremiah gives is behavioral: how do you treat the vulnerable, what do you do with the truth, and whose voice settles your decisions? Be sure the class does not slide from this into disparaging the assembly. The

answer to false confidence in a building is not staying home (Hebrews 10:24–25); it is bringing an obedient life into the building.

Question 2. *Twice Jeremiah says the prophets healed the hurt of God's people slightly, crying peace, peace, when there was no peace (6:14; 8:11). Describe what a shallow healing looks like in a congregation, and why people prefer it.*

The picture is a battlefield surgeon who glances at a deep wound and applies a small bandage so he can move on. The Hebrew says they healed the breach of my people lightly. What makes it attractive is obvious: the patient feels better immediately, the surgeon is thanked, and nobody has to endure the pain of real treatment. Peace, peace is not a lie anyone objects to.

In a congregation shallow healing looks like counsel that never names sin, preaching that stays in the general, a leadership that avoids a hard conversation because a family might leave, or a friend who tells you what you want about a decision you have already made. Ask the class to think of a time someone told them something hard that turned out to be the kindest thing anyone did for them. Then ask who in their life has permission to do that now.

Question 3. *Jeremiah 9:23–24 says do not boast in wisdom, might, or riches, but boast in understanding and knowing the Lord. Listen to how people talk about themselves for one day, including yourself. What do we actually glory in?*

Jeremiah names the three things people have boasted in for every century of human history: wisdom, might, and riches. Each is real, each is a genuine gift, and each is a terrible foundation because each can be lost in an afternoon. What God offers instead is not a fourth achievement but a relationship: let him glory in this, that he understands and knows Me.

Notice how verse 24 defines knowing God. It is knowing that He exercises lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth, and that He delights in these things. To know God is to be reshaped by what He delights in. That is why Paul lands on this verse when the Corinthians were dividing over brilliance and status. Give the class the one day listening assignment. People will come back genuinely surprised by what they heard themselves say.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out everything God says the people must actually do in Jeremiah 7:3–7. How many of those requirements involve how they treat other people?*

God requires them to amend their ways and their doings, to thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, not to oppress the stranger, the fatherless, or the widow, not to shed innocent blood in that place, and not to walk after other gods to their hurt. Four of the five concern how they treat other people. The temple would not stand on correct ritual; it would stand on justice done in ordinary transactions.

2. *Read 1 Samuel 4:10–11 and Psalm 78:60 to learn what happened at Shiloh. Why does Jeremiah put Shiloh in front of people who felt safe in Jerusalem?*

At Shiloh the ark was captured, the priests Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the sanctuary was eventually abandoned. Psalm 78:60 says God forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent He had placed among men. Jeremiah puts Shiloh in front of Jerusalem because it is the one case that proves God will walk away from His own house when the people using it are corrupt. A privilege presumed upon is a privilege already being lost.

3. *Jeremiah 7:22–23 says God did not speak to their fathers concerning burnt offerings but commanded them to obey His voice. Compare 1 Samuel 15:22, Hosea 6:6, and Micah 6:6–8. What is God ranking, and what is He not denying?*

God is ranking obedience above sacrifice, not denying that He gave the sacrificial law, which He clearly did in Exodus and Leviticus. The Hebrew idiom states a comparison in absolute terms for force, as when Jesus says to hate father and mother (Luke 14:26). The emphasis is in 7:23: obey My voice, walk in all the ways I have commanded. Ritual disconnected from obedience was never what God was after, in that covenant or in this one.

4. Trace the four commands of Jeremiah 6:16: stand, see, ask, walk. What answer do the people give, and where do you hear that same answer today?

Stand in the ways, see, ask for the old paths where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. The people answer, we will not walk in it. Then God sets watchmen to sound a trumpet, and they answer again, we will not listen. The modern version of that answer is rarely defiant; it sounds like we have always done it the newer way, or that was fine for another generation. Note that the old paths are not nostalgia for a decade; they are the way God marked out.

5. Jeremiah 8:20 says the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. Name one thing you have been meaning to do for God for more than a year. What will you do about it in the next seven days?

Answers will vary. The verse is the sound of a man realizing that a season closed while he was intending to act. Look for one delayed obedience named out loud, and press for the specific step: the apology made, the visit paid, the giving started, the baptism no longer postponed. Teachers should ask about it next week by name if the class is small enough to allow it.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Jeremiah 7:22–23 does not deny that God commanded sacrifices. It is a Hebrew way of stating priority. Say so plainly before someone concludes that the law of Moses was a human invention.
- The temple sermon condemns false confidence in a building, not the assembly of God's people. Guard the class from using it as an argument for neglecting the assembly (Hebrews 10:24–25).
- God's statement in 7:31 that child sacrifice never came into His heart is a strong denial that He ever willed or imagined such a thing. Do not let a discussion of God's foreknowledge blur what the verse actually says about His will.
- Jeremiah 7:16 and 11:14, where God tells the prophet not to pray for this people, describe a specific national judgment already settled. They are not a pattern for deciding that someone today is beyond prayer.

Enter His Gates

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These four psalms move from the widest possible scene to the narrowest. Psalm 98 has the sea roaring, the floods clapping, and the hills singing because God has made His salvation known in the sight of all nations. Psalm 99 pulls in to the temple, the cherubim, the pillar of cloud, and three declarations of holiness. Psalm 100 brings the worshiper to the gate. Psalm 101 follows him home and asks what he does when the doors are shut.

Psalm 100 deserves a full stop in your class. It is seven commands and two reasons. Serve, come, know, enter, be thankful, bless, and the reasons are that the Lord is God who made us, and that the Lord is good and His mercy is everlasting. Notice verse 3: we are His people and the sheep of His pasture, not our own project. Half the exhaustion in a modern Christian's life comes from forgetting that sentence.

Psalm 101 is a king's policy statement, and it is startlingly personal. David begins with his eyes, moves to his household, and then to his court and city. He will set no worthless thing before his eyes, he will not know a wicked person, he will not tolerate slander or a proud heart, and faithful people will be the ones who serve near him. Whatever else leadership is, it begins with what a man permits in his own house.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 93 through 100 belong together as psalms of God's reign, and Psalm 100 functions as the closing doxology of the group.
- Psalm 100 is the only psalm titled a psalm of praise, literally of thanksgiving, which may connect it with the thank offering of Leviticus 7:12.
- Enter His gates and His courts is temple language. For Israel this meant physically passing into the sanctuary precincts with an offering in hand.
- Psalm 99 names Moses, Aaron, and Samuel as intercessors, three men whose prayers are recorded as turning aside judgment (Exodus 32:11–14; Numbers 16:46–48; 1 Samuel 7:8–9; 12:23).
- Psalm 101 is a royal psalm, most naturally read as David's commitment on taking the throne. Its last line, to cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord, is the language of a king administering justice, not of a private citizen judging neighbors.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 100:3 says know that the Lord is God, that He made us and we are His people and the sheep of His pasture. How would a person's Monday look different if he actually believed he did not make himself?*

Verse 3 is a statement about ownership. He made us, and we are His. The older rendering, and not we ourselves, presses the same point: no person is self made and no person is self owned. Everything downstream flows from that. Gratitude becomes reasonable, obedience becomes fitting, and the frantic project of justifying your own existence can finally be set down.

Take it to Monday. A man who knows he did not make himself can lose an argument without losing his identity, can take a demotion without despair, can rest on Saturday, can serve someone who will never repay him, and can hear correction without collapsing. Ask the class where they are currently living as if they were self owned. Usually it shows up as exhaustion, defensiveness, or an inability to stop working.

Question 2. *Psalm 101 is David's list of what he will and will not allow in his own house and before his own eyes. Work through his list, then talk honestly about what a Christian version of that list would include in a home with screens in every room.*

Work David's list in order, because the order matters. He begins with his own eyes and heart (verse 2, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart; verse 3, I will set no wicked thing before my eyes). Then his associations (verses 4 through 5, no froward heart, no secret slanderer, no proud look). Then his staff (verse 6, my eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me). He does not begin with policy; he begins with privacy.

The modern version is uncomfortable, which is the point. What comes into the house on a screen after ten at night? What shows are on when the children are in the room? Whose voices are in a person's ears for two hours a day through a podcast or a feed? Ask the class to write one decision rather than discuss generalities. Verse 3 is one of the few Bible verses that can be obeyed in ninety seconds with a phone in hand.

Question 3. *Psalm 99:8 says God forgave them and also took vengeance on their inventions. How do forgiveness and consequence sit together in the same verse, and where have you seen both in a life you know?*

The verse says God answered them, forgave them, and took vengeance on their inventions. Both halves are true at once. Numbers 14 is the clearest example: God pardons the people at Moses' intercession, and the same paragraph says that generation will not see the land. Forgiveness restores the relationship; it does not always cancel the consequence, and Scripture never pretends otherwise.

This is pastorally important. Someone in the room has been forgiven of something whose wreckage is still in his life, and he has begun to doubt the forgiveness because of the wreckage. Say clearly that a forgiven sin is a forgiven sin (1 John 1:9; Acts 3:19), and that living with the results of it is not God withholding pardon. David was forgiven and still buried a child. Handle the discussion gently; do not ask anyone to supply the example from his own life unless he offers.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Psalm 98 gives reasons for the new song. List what God has done in verses 1 through 3, and note who is said to see it.*

God has done marvelous things, His right hand and holy arm have gotten Him the victory, He has made known His salvation, He has openly shown His righteousness in the sight of the heathen, and He has remembered His mercy and truth toward the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth are said to have seen the salvation of our God. The song is new because the act is new, and the audience is the whole world.

2. *Three times Psalm 99 says He is holy or holy is He (verses 3, 5, 9). Read Isaiah 6:1-5 alongside it. Why does holiness keep getting repeated rather than explained?*

Isaiah hears the seraphim cry holy, holy, holy, and his immediate response is to say he is undone. Holiness is repeated rather than explained because it is not one attribute in a list; it is the quality of God's otherness that runs through every other attribute. Repetition is the Hebrew way of writing it in capital letters. A God who is merely powerful can be admired; a God who is holy has to be reckoned with.

3. *Count the commands in Psalm 100, then name the reason given in verses 3 and 5 for each half of the psalm. Which reason do you most need on a hard week?*

Make a joyful noise, serve the Lord with gladness, come before His presence with singing, know that the Lord is God, enter His gates with thanksgiving, enter His courts with praise, be thankful to Him, bless His name. The reason in verse 3 is that He made us and we are His sheep; the reason in verse 5 is that the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting, and His truth endures to all generations. Answers will vary on which is needed most; many will say verse 5.

4. *Write out every I will statement in Psalm 101. Which one would be hardest for you to keep for a month?*

I will sing of mercy and judgment, I will sing praises, I will behave wisely in a perfect way, I will walk within my house with a perfect heart, I will set no wicked thing before my eyes, I will not know a wicked person, I will cut off the one who slanders his neighbor secretly, I will not endure a proud heart, and I will destroy the wicked of the land. Answers will vary; most people name the one about the eyes.

5. Psalm 101:3 says *I will set no wicked thing before my eyes*. Name one specific thing you will remove, block, or stop watching this week, and tell someone you have done it.

Answers will vary. Insist on a specific object rather than a category: the app deleted, the filter installed, the channel unsubscribed, the account unfollowed, the laptop moved out of the bedroom. Telling one other person is part of the assignment, because secrecy is the oxygen of the habit.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 100 speaks of gates and courts because Israel worshiped at a temple. Apply the psalm's heart to the Christian assembly without importing the Old Covenant system; we come to God through Christ, not through a sanctuary made with hands (Hebrews 9:11–14).
- The harp, trumpet, and horn of Psalm 98:5–6 belonged to temple worship under the law of Moses. The New Testament directs Christians to sing and make melody with the heart (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). State it once, briefly and kindly, and go on.
- Psalm 101:8 is the vow of a king with judicial authority. It does not authorize a Christian to take vengeance or to write people off (Romans 12:19).

Two Mites and Great Stones

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Luke joins two scenes that belong together. In 20:47 Jesus condemns scribes who devour widows' houses. In 21:1 a widow walks up and puts in two mites. He is sitting where He can see the thirteen trumpet shaped receptacles of the treasury, and the offering that impresses Him is the one nobody heard land. His measure is not the amount given but the amount kept back.

Then the conversation turns to the temple itself, the pride of the nation, still being enlarged in Jesus' day, with foundation stones of astonishing size. Jesus says it is coming down. The disciples ask two questions, when and what sign, and much of the chapter answers them concerning Jerusalem. Verse 20 is the decisive sign: when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, know that her desolation is near. And then the strange command: do not defend the city, flee to the mountains.

Handle the closing section with care and humility. Verses 25 through 28 use the language of cosmic upheaval, which the prophets regularly used for the fall of nations, and verse 32 says this generation will not pass until all is fulfilled. Much of this discourse was fulfilled within forty years, when Rome destroyed Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Whatever else is here, the point of the ending is not a timetable. It is verses 34 through 36: watch, pray, keep your heart light enough to stand.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The temple Jesus is sitting in was Herod's renovation, begun about 20 B.C. and still under construction. Josephus describes foundation stones of enormous size, which is why the disciples' remark in verse 5 is natural.
- The mite was the smallest coin in circulation, and two of them together amounted to a fraction of a day's wage.
- The temple was destroyed by the Roman army under Titus in A.D. 70, with the city besieged and burned, exactly the scene of verses 20 through 24.
- Early sources report that Christians in Judea, remembering this warning, left the city before the final siege closed rather than defending it, which is the opposite of what patriotism would have demanded.
- Prophetic literature routinely describes the fall of a nation in the language of the sun darkening and the powers of heaven shaking (Isaiah 13:10; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:7). Keep that convention in mind before reading verses 25 through 26 as astronomy.
- The times of the Gentiles in verse 24 refers to the period of Gentile domination of Jerusalem. It is not a dispensational clock, and Scripture nowhere attaches a date to it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus says the widow put in more than all the rich, though her two coins would not buy a meal (21:1-4). How does He measure a gift, and what would that measure say about your own giving this year?*

Jesus measures by what remains. The rich gave out of their abundance, meaning their gift changed nothing about their week. She gave two mites, which Luke says was all her living. The gift was too small to fund anything and too large for her to survive comfortably, and Jesus calls it more than all the rest. God is not raising money; He is raising children, and He is interested in what the gift costs the giver (2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 12).

Move it to the class carefully. Avoid the two ditches: turning this into a guilt driven appeal, or softening it into a nice thought about attitude. Ask each person to consider what percentage of income he gives, and whether he could name the number without looking. Then ask the harder question: when did giving last change anything about how you lived? Most of us give from the abundance and call it sacrifice.

Question 2. *The disciples are admiring the temple stones when Jesus tells them the whole thing is coming down. Why do we attach so much to impressive buildings and institutions, and how should Christians hold such things?*

We attach ourselves to buildings because they feel permanent and because they represent something we helped build. The temple was not a vanity project; God had authorized a temple. Yet Jesus, sitting inside it, says the stones are coming down. The lesson is not that buildings are wrong but that nothing made of stone is the thing God is finally building. The church is people (1 Peter 2:5).

Ask the class a local question. What would this congregation be if the building burned on Saturday night? Would we still be a church on Sunday, and where would we meet? Congregations that can answer that question calmly hold their property as a tool. Congregations that cannot have quietly moved their identity into the walls, which is the very error Jeremiah preached against in the reading paired with this one.

Question 3. *In 21:34–36 Jesus warns that hearts get weighed down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. Of those three, which one dulls a faithful church member most often, and how would you know it was happening to you?*

Notice the three: dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life. The first two are obvious sins; the third is not a sin at all in most people's minds. Yet Jesus lists it with them, because the effect is identical. A heart weighed down cannot stand up. The word Luke uses pictures being loaded down, as with a heavy meal or a hangover, and the danger is that the day comes on you suddenly, as a snare.

In a faithful congregation the culprit is almost always the third. Ask the class how a person would know: when prayer becomes a thing he intends to do, when the Bible is open less than the calendar app, when Sunday feels like one more obligation in a crowded week, when he is too tired to notice the person in front of him. Then ask what would have to be taken off the calendar for the weight to lift, and whether he is willing to take it off.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything Jesus says will happen before the destruction of Jerusalem in 21:8–19. Which of those things did the apostles actually live through, according to Acts?*

Deceivers coming in His name, wars and commotions, nation rising against nation, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, fearful sights and great signs, and before all these, persecution: hands laid on them, delivery to synagogues and prisons, being brought before kings and rulers, betrayal by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends, some put to death, hatred from all, and yet not a hair of their heads perishing. Acts records nearly all of it: arrests in chapters 4, 5, and 12, Stephen's death in chapter 7, Herod's execution of James, Paul before governors and a king, and famine relief in chapter 11.

2. *Read Luke 21:20–24 beside Luke 19:41–44. What sign does Jesus give, and what specific instruction does He give to disciples who see it?*

The sign is Jerusalem surrounded by armies. The instruction is startling: those in Judea are to flee to the mountains, those in the city are to get out, and those in the country are not to go in. There is no call to defend the temple or the city. Jesus had already wept over the city in 19:41–44 and said the enemy would build an embankment around it because it did not know the time of its visitation.

3. *Jesus promises in 21:14–15 a mouth and wisdom their adversaries cannot resist. Compare Acts 4:13 and Acts 6:10. Why is that promise not a reason for a preacher today to skip preparation?*

In Acts 4:13 the council marvels at the boldness of unlearned men, and in Acts 6:10 the opponents could not resist the wisdom and spirit by which Stephen spoke. The promise concerns the direct help of the Spirit to inspired men under trial in the apostolic age, when revelation was still being given. It is not a promise that a modern teacher will be given words he did not study for. Paul told Timothy to give attendance to reading and to study to show himself approved (1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:15).

4. Trace the contrast Luke sets up between 20:46–47 and 21:1–4. What does putting those two paragraphs next to each other say about how God evaluates religious people?

Luke sets scribes who love long robes, best seats, and long prayers, and who devour widows' houses, immediately beside a widow giving her last two coins. The juxtaposition says that God's evaluation runs opposite to the room's. The men everyone could see were bankrupt, and the woman no one noticed was rich. It also quietly indicts a religious system that consumed the very people it should have protected.

5. The widow gave everything she had to live on. Name one gift you could make this month that would actually be felt in your budget or your schedule, and set the date for it now.

Answers will vary. Push past a round number pulled out of the air toward something actually felt: a month of eating out redirected, a portion of a bonus, a Saturday given to a widow's yard, a standing commitment increased. Ask for the date, and ask whether anyone else will know. The widow told no one.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Much of Luke 21 concerns the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and verse 20 gives a sign already fulfilled. Do not let the class treat this chapter as a headline decoder, and do not permit date setting (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7).
- The times of the Gentiles in verse 24 is not a dispensational timetable pointing to a future earthly kingdom. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:34–36; Colossians 1:13).
- The widow's example teaches sacrificial, proportional giving from the heart, not recklessness or the abandonment of a family's needs (1 Timothy 5:8; 2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Verses 12 through 15 promise inspired help to men under trial while revelation was being given. Do not turn it into a promise of miraculous assistance today or into an excuse for unprepared teaching.

Setting the Church in Order

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Crete was a hard field. Paul quotes a Cretan poet's own verdict on his countrymen and agrees with it, and he says Titus was left there to set in order the things that were lacking. The first instruction is not a program; it is men. Appoint elders in every city, plural elders in each congregation, chosen because of what they already are at home and in the assembly. Paul repeats the word blameless twice and then explains it with a list anyone in the town could verify.

Chapter 2 is the household of God at work. Older men are to be sober and sound in faith. Older women are to be reverent and to teach the younger women the ordinary and holy business of loving husbands and children. Young men are to be self controlled, with Titus himself as the pattern. Servants are to be honest even about small things. And the reason given each time is external: that the word of God not be blasphemed, that an opponent have nothing bad to say, that the doctrine be adorned.

Chapter 3 grounds all of it in the gospel. We ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by passions. Then the kindness and love of God appeared, and He saved us, not on the basis of righteous deeds we had done, but according to His mercy, through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit. Everything Paul asks of Cretan Christians rests on the fact that people like them were washed.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Titus is one of three letters commonly called the pastoral letters, written by Paul after the events of Acts 28, probably in the mid sixties.
- Titus was a Greek, uncircumcised, whom Paul refused to have circumcised as a test case for the gospel's freedom (Galatians 2:1–5). He later carried the hard letter to Corinth (2 Corinthians 7:6–7).
- Crete is a large island with many towns, which is why Paul speaks of elders in every city. The New Testament pattern is a plurality of elders in each local congregation (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1).
- Titus 1:5 uses elder and 1:7 uses bishop, or overseer, of the same men, as does Acts 20:17 and 28 and 1 Peter 5:1–2. Elder, bishop, overseer, and pastor name one office.
- The quotation in 1:12 is from Epimenides, a Cretan poet. Paul cites a local proverb the Cretans applied to themselves; he is not authorizing Christians to stereotype a nationality.
- Titus 2:13 calls Jesus our great God and Savior, one of the clearest statements of the deity of Christ in Paul's letters.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Read the qualifications for elders in Titus 1:6–9 aloud. Almost every item concerns character rather than ability. Why would God build the leadership of His church that way, and what does it say about what leadership actually is?*

Read the list slowly and count. Not given to wine, not violent, not greedy, not self willed, not quick tempered, a lover of hospitality, a lover of what is good, sober minded, just, holy, self controlled, the husband of one wife, with believing children who are not accused of dissipation or insubordination. Only the last item in verse 9 concerns skill, and even that is about holding fast the faithful word rather than eloquence. God builds His church on proven character because shepherding is done by example, not by administration (1 Peter 5:2–3).

Draw the practical conclusions. A man qualifies for this work over years, in a marriage, in a home, in a business, where people can watch. Note that these men are appointed, plural, in each congregation, and that Scripture reserves this work to men (1 Timothy 2:12; 3:1–7). Say that plainly and without apology, and say just as plainly

that women do essential and irreplaceable teaching work in the very next chapter. If your congregation lacks elders, do not let the class treat that as normal; ask what the men in the room would need to become in five years.

Question 2. *Titus 2:10 says Christians should adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things. Describe what it looks like when someone's life makes the teaching attractive, and what it looks like when a life makes it repulsive.*

The word adorn is the word behind cosmetic. It means to arrange something so that its beauty shows, the way a jeweler sets a stone. Paul uses it of a slave being honest about small things and not pilfering. The teaching about God is invisible; a life is not. When a Christian is steady, truthful, kind, and hard to offend, the doctrine looks like something a person might want.

Then be honest about the other direction. A believer who is sharp tongued at home, careless with money, unreliable at work, or ugly on the internet has not merely failed personally; he has made the gospel look false to people who will never read Romans. Ask the class where the congregation's reputation in this town actually comes from. It is not the sign out front. It is thirty or three hundred people at their jobs all week.

Question 3. *Titus 3:5 says He saved us, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit. Work through that verse phrase by phrase. What is ruled out, and what is not?*

Take it apart phrase by phrase, because this verse is fought over. Not by works of righteousness which we have done: Paul rules out any idea that we earn salvation by accumulating merit, whether by law keeping or by good deeds we can point to. According to His mercy: the initiative and the ground are entirely God's. By the washing of regeneration: the new birth of water and the Spirit (John 3:3-5), which the New Testament everywhere connects to baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Peter 3:21). And renewing of the Holy Spirit: God does the renewing, not the water and not the person being baptized.

So what is not ruled out is the response God commands. Baptism is never a work of human merit; it is the moment a person quits trying to earn anything and submits to being washed. Notice that the verse itself contains a washing, which is an odd way to argue against baptism. Teach this warmly. Many in your community have been told that any act of obedience amounts to salvation by works, and the kindest answer is simply to read the verse and let its own words do the work.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Sort the qualifications in Titus 1:6-9 into three groups: his household, his character, and his handling of the word. Which group is longest, and what does that tell you?*

Household: husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruliness, and ruling his own house well as the parallel list adds (1 Timothy 3:4-5). Character: blameless, not self willed, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre, a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate. Handling the word: holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. Character is by far the longest, which tells you that God is more concerned with what a man is than with what he can do.

2. *Titus 2:11-14 says the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared, teaching us something. List what grace teaches us to deny and what it teaches us to live.*

Grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, while looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity and to purify for Himself a peculiar people zealous of good works. Grace is not merely pardon; Paul describes it as a teacher that trains behavior.

3. *Read Titus 3:1-2 and write out the duties Christians owe to people outside the church. How many of them concern speech?*

Be subject to rulers and authorities, obey, be ready for every good work, speak evil of no one, be peaceable, be gentle, and show all humility to all men. Three of the seven concern speech directly, and gentleness and humility

govern how the rest is said. Paul is describing the Christian's public reputation in a place where Christians had no political power at all.

4. *Compare Titus 3:9–11 with Romans 16:17–18. What kind of person is to be rejected, how many warnings does he get, and what is the difference between a divisive man and a brother who simply disagrees?*

Both passages describe a person who creates division over disputes rather than someone who holds a different opinion honestly. Titus says to reject a divisive man after a first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is self-condemned. Romans 16:17–18 says to mark and avoid those who cause divisions contrary to the doctrine learned, who serve their own appetites and deceive the simple. The difference lies in the pattern and the motive: a brother with a question wants an answer, while a factious man wants a following.

5. *Titus 2 gives every age and station a job. Find your own row in that chapter, write out what Paul assigns you, and name one person you will begin doing it with or for this month.*

Answers will vary. Older men get soberness, gravity, temperance, and soundness in faith, love, and patience. Older women get reverent behavior, no slander, no enslavement to wine, and the teaching of younger women. Younger women get love of husband and children, discretion, purity, care of the home, goodness, and submission to their own husbands. Young men get sober mindedness, a pattern of good works, and sound speech. Look for one name attached to one row.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Titus 3:5 is not an argument against baptism; the verse itself speaks of a washing. Teach clearly that baptism is the appointed point at which God washes and saves, and that it is God's work, not a meritorious human achievement (Acts 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
- Elders are plural in each congregation, and the work is assigned to qualified men (1 Timothy 2:11–12; 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9). State it plainly, and give equal weight to the essential teaching work Titus 2:3–5 assigns to older women.
- Titus 2:4–5 describes the priorities of a Christian home. Do not turn it into a blanket prohibition of employment outside the home, and do not soften it into nothing. Teach what the text says about love of husband, children, and household, and let families apply it.
- Titus 1:12 quotes a Cretan describing Cretans. It is not a warrant for stereotyping any nation or group today, and someone will take it that way if you do not say so.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Jeremiah 10–15 · Psalm 102–103 · Luke 22:1–30 · Philemon

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