

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 87 OF 104

Nothing to Bring

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 12-16
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 119:97-136
Gospels	John 6:1-21
General New Testament	1 Peter 2:13-3:22

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to dismantle the idea that we bring God our adequacy. Every reading works the same seam. A vine has nothing to offer but fruit. A foundling had nothing at all and was made a queen. A boy had five barley loaves. Servants and wives in Peter's churches had no social leverage whatever, and eight people in an ark had nothing but a door that God shut behind them. If the class leaves believing that God works with what is handed to Him rather than with what impresses Him, the hour has done its work.

Doctrinally, the weight falls on 1 Peter 3:21. Take it slowly, in pieces, and let the class see that Peter is not embarrassed by it. Alongside it, guard three things: that Ezekiel 16 is covenant history and not an allegory of personal salvation; that the crowd's attempt to crown Jesus in John 6:15 is one of the clearest refusals of an earthly political kingdom in the Gospels; and that the Old Testament passion for God's law in Psalm 119 belongs to a covenant Christians are not under, though the reverence transfers whole.

Formationally, the thread is what you do with a small thing you are ashamed of. The boy's lunch was too little. The servant's position was too low. The wife's influence looked like nothing next to a husband who would not listen. Ask your class this before they leave: what is the one inadequate thing in your hands right now that you have been refusing to offer because it is not enough, and what would it look like to hand it over before next Sunday?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up 1 Peter 2:13-3:22 first. It carries the doctrinal weight of the week, and 3:21 deserves an unhurried hour with the cross-references written out. Begin with the example of Christ in 2:21-25 so that the discussion of baptism rests on the cross rather than on a list of proof texts.

Second session: Take up Ezekiel 12-16 second. The vine of chapter 15 and the foundling of chapter 16 are unforgettable, and together they answer the question of why God ever wanted this people. Summarize the graphic middle of chapter 16 and land the class on verses 60 through 63.

The other two readings: Send them to Psalm 119:97-136 and John 6:1-21 on their own. Suggest they read the psalm one stanza at a time and sit with verse 105. For John 6, ask them to keep a written list comparing the feeding with the manna of Exodus 16, since the class will need it next week.

The Vine and the Foundling

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

These five chapters are God answering the exiles' objections one at a time. They had two comfortable beliefs: that Jerusalem would stand, and that prophets of doom could be safely ignored because nothing ever actually happened. Chapter 12 takes both away. Ezekiel packs an exile's bundle in daylight so everyone can see, digs through the wall at dusk, and covers his face. Years later Zedekiah would do exactly that, be captured, have his eyes put out, and be carried to a Babylon he would never see (2 Kings 25:4–7).

Chapters 13 and 14 turn on the religious leadership. The false prophets have built a wall that will not stand and covered it with whitewash so it looks solid, and God promises a driving rain and great hailstones. The women in 13:17–23 are working charms for money, hunting souls. Then the elders arrive to consult the prophet with idols already set up in their hearts, and God says He will answer such a man according to his idols. Even Noah, Daniel, and Job standing in that land could deliver only themselves.

Chapters 15 and 16 give the two great images. The vine is a compliment in Israel's songs (Psalm 80:8), but Ezekiel presses the metaphor until it hurts: vine wood makes no furniture and no pegs, only fuel. Then chapter 16 tells the covenant story as a marriage, from a newborn thrown out in a field to a queen decked in embroidered linen and fine gold, to a wife who spent her husband's gifts on other lovers. And then, after everything, verses 60 through 63 promise an everlasting covenant and atonement that will leave her ashamed and silent and forgiven.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Ezekiel is still in Babylon, still before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., preaching to exiles who kept expecting to go home soon.
- Sign-acts are a regular feature of this book (the brick, the lying on his side, the shaved hair, the baggage). They were performed publicly and drew a crowd that would not have come for a sermon.
- The prince who covers his face and does not see the land (12:12–13) is Zedekiah, blinded at Riblah after his capture. The prophecy is exact and was fulfilled within a decade.
- The Daniel of 14:14 is almost certainly the contemporary prophet, already famous in Babylon for his righteousness and wisdom, which is precisely why the exiles would have felt the force of the argument.
- Marriage as a picture of God's covenant with His people runs through the prophets (Hosea 1–3; Jeremiah 2:2; 3:1–14; Isaiah 54:5). Chapter 16 is the most graphic example, and it is written as a covenant lawsuit.
- Chapter 16 also records child sacrifice (16:20–21), which 2 Kings 21:6 and Jeremiah 7:31 confirm was actually practiced in the valley outside Jerusalem.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Ezekiel carries his baggage out in broad daylight and digs through a wall at evening (12:1–16). Why does God keep asking this prophet to act out his sermons instead of simply preaching them, and what would it cost you to live a message rather than say one?*

Ezekiel's sign-acts got past the defenses that sermons could not reach. A man digging through his own wall at dusk with a bundle on his shoulder starts conversations; a man announcing judgment gets tuned out. God also makes His prophet carry the message in his own body, which is His pattern all through Scripture: Hosea marries Gomer, Isaiah walks barefoot, Jeremiah wears a yoke, and ultimately the Word becomes flesh.

Press the second half of the question, because it is where the class lives. It is comparatively easy to hold a right opinion and comparatively expensive to embody it: to actually keep the budget, actually forgive the relative,

actually leave the meeting rather than participate in the gossip. Ask for one place where their message and their calendar currently disagree. Ezekiel had to move furniture. Most of us would settle for moving an appointment.

Question 2. *In 13:10–16 the false prophets build a flimsy wall and then whitewash it. Describe exactly what the whitewash does and does not accomplish, and name where we are tempted to reach for a brush in our own teaching and in our own hearts.*

Whitewash changes nothing structural. It makes an unsound wall look finished, and it makes the builders look competent, and it buys time until weather arrives. Verse 10 names the message underneath: they said “Peace” when there was no peace. That is the whole business of false prophecy, then and now, and Jeremiah 6:14 says the same thing. God’s response is a flood of rain, hailstones, and a stormy wind, and when the wall falls the question will be, where is the mortar you daubed it with?

Bring this close to home in two directions. In teaching, whitewash is any presentation of the gospel that leaves out sin, repentance, judgment, or cost because those subjects make people uncomfortable. In our own hearts, whitewash is the polished answer we give when someone asks how we are doing. Ask the class what they have coated instead of repaired, and remind them that the storm in verse 13 is not vindictive; it is God refusing to let people live behind a wall that will kill them.

Question 3. *Ezekiel 15 compares Jerusalem to the wood of a vine, useless for anything but burning, because a vine exists for one purpose. Read John 15:1–8 beside it and talk honestly about what that says about the point of belonging to God.*

Chapter 15 works by asking practical questions. Can you make a beam from vine wood? A peg for hanging a pot? No. A vine has exactly one use, and if it does not bear, there is nothing left to do with it but burn it. Israel had come to think of the relationship in terms of privilege, as though being God’s vine were a status. Ezekiel says it is a function. John 15 says the same thing in the Lord’s own words: the branch that abides bears much fruit, and the branch that does not is gathered and burned.

This is the place to talk about fruitlessness without letting it become a discussion of other people’s fruitlessness. Fruit in John 15 is not merely converts; it includes the character described in Galatians 5:22–23 and the obedience described in John 15:10. Ask each person to name one kind of fruit that has actually grown in the last year. If nobody can name anything, that silence is the lesson, and it should be handled with tenderness rather than a lecture.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *In 14:12–20 God names Noah, Daniel, and Job. Why those three men, and what does He say their righteousness could and could not accomplish for others?*

Noah, Daniel, and Job are three men who lived in the middle of overwhelming corruption or overwhelming loss and remained righteous, and each of them saw others spared in connection with his life. God’s point is that in the judgment coming on Jerusalem, even these three would deliver neither son nor daughter but only their own souls by their righteousness. Righteousness is not transferable. A godly grandmother’s faith will not save a grandson, which is a hard word and a necessary one.

2. *List the three popular sayings the people were leaning on in 12:22, 12:27, and 13:10. Write beside each one what made it attractive.*

In 12:22 they were saying, “The days are prolonged, and every vision fails,” which is the comfort of delay. In 12:27 they said his visions were for many days yet to come, which is the comfort of postponement; the message may be true, but not yet, not for us. In 13:10 the prophets were saying “Peace,” which is the comfort of denial. All three let a person keep his life exactly as it is, which is what made them attractive and what made them fatal.

3. *Ezekiel 14:3 describes elders who set up idols in their hearts and then come to inquire of God. Compare James 1:5–8 and describe the kind of asking God refuses to answer.*

God says He will answer such a man according to the multitude of his idols, that He may seize the house of Israel by their own heart. James describes a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, who should not suppose he will

receive anything from the Lord. In both passages the problem is not the sincerity of the question but the condition of the asker. A man who has already decided what he wants is not consulting God; he is shopping for endorsement.

4. *Trace God's actions toward the abandoned child in 16:6–14, every verb in order. Then read Titus 3:3–7 and mark the places where the two passages overlap.*

God passed by and saw her, said “Live,” caused her to multiply and grow, passed by again, covered her nakedness, swore an oath, entered into covenant with her, washed her, anointed her, clothed her in embroidered cloth and fine linen and silk, adorned her with ornaments, put a crown on her head, and fed her fine flour, honey, and oil. Titus 3:3–7 runs the same way: we were foolish and disobedient, then the kindness and love of God appeared, and He saved us by the washing of regeneration, justified by His grace, heirs of hope. Both texts begin with a person who contributed nothing.

5. *Chapter 16 ends with God remembering His covenant and providing atonement for all that had been done (16:60–63). Name one thing you have quietly assumed God could not forgive, and bring it to Him this week by name.*

Answers will vary, and this question should be handled with unusual care. Chapter 16 records worse than most people in your class have done, and it still ends with God saying, “I will establish My covenant with you,” and “I provide you an atonement for all you have done.” Listen for the person who has been carrying something for years and has never actually brought it into the light (1 John 1:7–9). Follow up privately if you sense it, and do not force anyone to name anything aloud.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Ezekiel 16 is deliberately graphic. In a mixed class, summarize verses 15 through 34 rather than reading them aloud, name the point plainly (covenant unfaithfulness described as adultery, as the prophets regularly do), and move to verses 59 through 63. Do not let embarrassment keep you from teaching the chapter, and do not linger where the class cannot follow.
- Do not allegorize chapter 16 into a story about an individual's salvation and loss. It is the covenant history of a nation. The transferable truth is that God's love was unearned, His gifts were real, and the unfaithfulness was inexcusable.
- Ezekiel 14:14 and 14:20 speak directly against inherited or borrowed righteousness, and they set up chapter 18. Personal accountability is the theme of this whole section of the book.
- Ezekiel 16:60–63 promises an everlasting covenant. Point to its fulfillment in Christ (Hebrews 13:20), not to a future earthly restoration of national Israel.

A Lamp for the Next Step

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

If a class is going to fall in love with Psalm 119, it will probably happen in this section. Mem opens with an exclamation rather than an argument: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” Then come three comparisons that are easy to misread as boasting. He is wiser than his enemies, has more understanding than all his teachers, and understands more than the ancients. The reason given each time is not his intelligence; it is the word, obeyed. Verse 100 is explicit: “because I keep Your precepts.”

Nun gives the most quoted verse in the psalm, and it is more modest than we usually make it. A lamp in that world was a small clay dish of oil with a wick, carried at ankle height. It showed you the next step and the hole in the road, not the far end of the valley. That is exactly the guidance God promises, and it explains why so many Christians feel He has gone quiet: they wanted a floodlight over the next five years and were handed a lamp for tomorrow.

Samek and Ayin bring back the danger, and Pe brings the tears. He hates the double-minded (113), asks to be upheld so that he will not be ashamed of his hope (116), trembles at God’s judgments (120), pleads “It is time for You to act, O Lord” (126), and finally weeps rivers because people will not keep the law he loves (136). Love for the word and grief for people are not in competition here. They come from the same heart.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- This reading covers five stanzas: Mem (97–104), Nun (105–112), Samek (113–120), Ayin (121–128), and Pe (129–136).
- “Law” here translates torah, which means instruction rather than merely legislation. The psalmist is talking about all of God’s revealed teaching, not just the statutes.
- The lamp of verse 105 is a household oil lamp, small enough to hold in one hand, giving light for a step or two. The image is about sufficiency, not about scope.
- Verse 99 is not a claim to be untaught. Jewish instruction was largely oral and communal; the psalmist means that obedience takes a man further than mere instruction does.
- Christians are not under the Law of Moses (Galatians 3:24–25; Colossians 2:14), but every attitude in this psalm transfers to the completed Scriptures, which are able to make us wise for salvation (2 Timothy 3:15).
- Teach this section by stanza and let one verse per stanza carry the weight. Forty verses read quickly will lose a class that eight verses read slowly would have held.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Verse 105 promises a lamp for the feet and a light for the path, which is enough for the next step and not much more. Why would God give guidance in that measure, and how should it change what you expect from Him this month?*

God gives light for the step in front of you. That is deliberate, and it keeps guidance tied to relationship rather than to information. A person with a five-year map does not need to walk with anyone; a person with a lamp has to keep walking near the One holding it. Compare Matthew 6:34, where Jesus says today has enough trouble of its own, and Hebrews 3:13, where the exhortation is “daily, while it is called Today.”

The practical payoff is large. Most of the anxiety people carry into class concerns steps four and five, which God has not yet lit. Ask what decision is actually in front of them this week, and whether Scripture speaks to that one. Usually it does, plainly, and usually we already know what it says. The lamp is rarely the problem. Willingness to take the step is.

Question 2. Read verses 97 through 104 and notice the three groups this man says he has surpassed: his enemies, his teachers, and the aged. What accounts for the difference, and is the same thing available to the people sitting in this room?

Verse 98 says God's commandments made him wiser than his enemies because they are always with him. Verse 99 says he has more understanding than all his teachers because God's testimonies are his meditation. Verse 100 says he understands more than the aged because he keeps God's precepts. Notice the three causes: constant possession, sustained meditation, and actual obedience. None of them is talent. Every one of them is available to anyone in the room who is willing to spend the time.

Guard the tone here, because this could easily become spiritual pride. The safeguard is in the same stanza: he hates every false way (104) and he keeps his feet from every evil way (101). A person who really is learning from God grows humbler, not louder. Ask the class to name one older Christian who fits that description, and then ask what that person actually does with a Bible during the week. The answer is usually unglamorous and repeatable.

Question 3. Verse 136 says rivers of water ran down his eyes because men do not keep God's law. Where does a love for Scripture turn into grief for people, and what would that look like in the town you actually live in?

Verse 136 is the emotional high point of the psalm, and it is not about him at all. He has spent one hundred and thirty-five verses on what the word does for him, and then he looks up and sees people who do not have it, and he weeps. Jesus wept over Jerusalem the same way (Luke 19:41-44), and Paul said he had great heaviness and continual sorrow for his kinsmen (Romans 9:1-3). This is what mature love for Scripture eventually produces.

There is a counterfeit to name. Loving the Bible can curdle into contempt for the people who ignore it, and church people are not immune. The difference between verse 136 and mere disapproval is tears. Ask the class to picture one specific person, not a category, and ask when they last prayed for that person by name with any feeling. Then ask what one invitation, one meal, or one honest conversation this month might look like.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. Verses 103 and 127 compare God's words to honey and to fine gold. Read Psalm 19:7-11 and list every comparison and every benefit named there.

Psalm 19 calls the law of the Lord perfect, converting the soul; the testimony sure, making wise the simple; the statutes right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord clean, enduring forever; the judgments true and righteous altogether. Then it says they are more to be desired than gold, yes, than much fine gold, and sweeter than honey and the honeycomb, and adds that by them God's servant is warned and in keeping them there is great reward. Value and sweetness are the same two comparisons Psalm 119 uses.

2. Trace what the psalmist says he does with the word in verses 97, 99, 101, 102, 104, and 112. Write down the six verbs and see whether any of them is passive.

He loves it (97), meditates on it all the day (97, 99), keeps his feet from evil ways so that he may keep it (101), does not depart from God's judgments (102), hates every false way because of it (104), and inclines his heart to perform God's statutes to the very end (112). Not one verb is passive. Loving, meditating, restraining, holding, hating, and inclining are all things he does, and verse 112 makes the inclining of his own heart a deliberate act rather than a mood that happened to him.

3. Verse 109 says his life is continually in his hand and verse 110 says the wicked have set a snare for him. Given that pressure, what holds him steady? Give his own answer from verses 111 and 112.

Verse 111 says God's testimonies are his heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of his heart, and verse 112 says he has inclined his heart to perform God's statutes forever, to the very end. He is steady because he has settled two questions in advance: what he owns and where he is going. A man who has already decided that the word is his inheritance and that he will obey to the end does not renegotiate that every time a snare appears.

4. Compare verse 130 with 2 Timothy 3:14–17. What is Scripture said to do for the simple, and who exactly qualifies as simple?

Verse 130 says the entrance of God's words gives light and gives understanding to the simple. Second Timothy 3:15 says the Scriptures are able to make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, and verses 16 and 17 say they are profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete and thoroughly equipped. "Simple" in Hebrew wisdom writing means untaught and open, not stupid. Every one of us qualifies at some point, which is why God wrote a book a plain person can understand.

5. Verse 133 asks God to order his steps in the word and to let no iniquity have dominion over him. Name the one sin most likely to trip you this week, write out the passage you will use against it, and put it where you will see it.

Answers will vary. Look for a named sin and a named passage rather than a general resolution. The psalmist does not ask to be made to feel better about the sin; he asks that it not have dominion over him, which is the same request Romans 6:12–14 answers. If someone cannot think of a passage, help them find one before they leave the room.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verses 98 through 100 are not a license for private interpretation or for dismissing teachers. Second Peter 1:20–21 and Acts 17:11 hold the balance: study for yourself, test everything by the text, and remain teachable.
- The psalmist's delight is in the Law of Moses. Teach his posture toward God's revelation rather than binding his covenant on Christians.
- Verse 113 says he hates the double-minded. The hatred is for a way of life, not a license for personal hostility. Compare Romans 12:19–21.
- Do not let love for Scripture become a badge of superiority. Verse 136 keeps the whole section honest, and it should be where you land.

Five Loaves and a Rough Sea

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

This is the only miracle before the resurrection that appears in all four Gospels, which tells you how large it loomed in the memory of the early church. John, writing last, adds details the others leave out: Passover was near (6:4), Philip is the one questioned, the loaves are barley (the bread of poor people), and a boy is the source. John also tells us the question was a test, and that Jesus knew all along what He intended to do.

The mechanics are worth noticing. Jesus does not produce bread out of the air. He takes what a child brought, gives thanks, and distributes, and it does not run out. Everyone is filled, which John states twice, and then twelve baskets of fragments are gathered at the Lord's command. The God who can create from nothing here chooses to multiply something, and He refuses to waste the leftovers. Both facts preach.

The two events in this reading belong together. The crowd sees the sign and concludes that this is the Prophet, and their next thought is to make Him king by force, which is precisely the wrong conclusion from the right evidence. He withdraws. Then, on a dark sea with the wind against them, the disciples get a truer revelation than the crowd did: a figure walking on the water saying "It is I; do not be afraid." The crowd wanted a provider they could install. The disciples got a Lord they could only receive.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The setting is the eastern side of the sea of Galilee, near Passover (6:4), which is why John mentions green grass (Mark 6:39) and why the crowds were already thinking about deliverance from Egypt and from Rome.
- Five thousand counts the men (6:10), so the actual crowd was considerably larger. Two hundred denarii (6:7) was roughly two thirds of a year's wages for a laborer.
- Barley loaves were coarse, cheap, and associated with the poor. The boy's lunch is not a picnic basket; it is about as little as a person could carry.
- Popular expectation held that the Messiah would repeat the miracle of manna. That expectation drives the whole discussion in the second half of chapter 6, which the class reads next week.
- The sea of Galilee sits in a basin roughly seven hundred feet below sea level, and sudden violent winds down the surrounding hills are a well-known feature of it.
- "It is I" translates the Greek ego eimi, the same words used in the Greek Old Testament at Exodus 3:14 and by Jesus in John 8:58.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus asks Philip where they will buy bread, and John tells us He already knew what He would do (6:5-6). Why test him at all, and where in your own life has God let you reach the end of your resources before He moved?*

The test was not for Jesus to learn something about Philip. It was for Philip to learn something about Philip. Philip does the arithmetic, and the arithmetic is correct and useless: two hundred denarii would not buy enough for each to have a little. That is the honest end of human resources, and it is the necessary starting place for seeing what Jesus then does. Had the disciples had enough money, they would have solved it and learned nothing.

Ask the class for the place where the numbers do not work: the medical bill, the marriage, the adult child, the year. God regularly lets people reach the end of their arithmetic. The point is not that He always multiplies loaves; it is that He is never limited by the calculation and He is never surprised by it. Verse 6 is the pastoral heart of the paragraph: He Himself knew what He would do. Say that sentence over any situation somebody names.

Question 2. *The crowd's response in 6:14–15 is to seize Him and make Him king, and His response is to disappear. What kind of king were they after, and in what ways do we still try to conscript Jesus for an agenda of our own?*

They wanted a king who would keep the bread coming. Verse 26 will say it out loud: you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. A king like that solves the occupation, funds the nation, and stays within the limits of what the crowd has already decided it wants. Jesus will not be installed on those terms, so He withdraws into the mountain alone. Note that He refuses a crown here and accepts one at the cross, which tells you what kind of King He came to be.

The modern version of this is politer and just as real. We want Jesus for what He can fix: the anxiety, the finances, the marriage, the reputation of our nation. None of those desires is wicked, and all of them can quietly reduce Him to a means. Ask the class to finish this sentence honestly: "I would follow Jesus anywhere, as long as He does not ask me to give up this one thing." Whatever fills that blank is where the crowd of verse 15 still lives.

Question 3. *Read 6:16–21 slowly. The disciples were doing exactly what they had been told when the storm came up. Talk about what it means that Jesus came to them in the middle of the sea instead of sparing them the crossing.*

They were in the boat because they had been sent (Mark 6:45). Obedience put them in the storm, which is worth saying plainly to a class that has been taught obedience produces smooth water. Then He comes, walking on the very thing that terrifies them, and the first words out of His mouth are not a rebuke of their fear but an announcement of His presence: "It is I; do not be afraid." The sea that is their crisis is His footpath.

John's ending is remarkable: they willingly received Him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land where they were going. Jesus does not always remove the crossing; He comes into it. Ask for the difference between the two things people usually pray for: that the storm would stop, or that He would come. Then ask which one He promised (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5).

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write down what was available at the start (6:9) and what was left at the end (6:13). Why do you think Jesus ordered the fragments gathered so that nothing would be lost?*

At the start: five barley loaves and two small fish belonging to one boy, which Andrew himself calls nothing among so many. At the end: everyone filled, and twelve baskets of fragments left, more than what they began with. Jesus orders the fragments gathered so that nothing is lost, and the detail is deliberate. Abundance is not an excuse for waste, and the God who multiplies is not careless with what He multiplies. There is also a quiet mercy in it; twelve baskets meant twelve tired disciples had supper.

2. *Compare this feeding with the manna in Exodus 16:14–21. List three points of contact, and keep the list; you will need it for next week's reading in John 6:22–71.*

Points of contact include bread supplied in a wilderness place, a people unable to provide for themselves, God giving through a mediator (Moses, then Christ), enough for everyone with nothing lacking, and a command about the leftovers. The contrasts matter too: the manna sustained one generation and they died (John 6:49), while the bread Jesus gives is Himself, and whoever eats of it lives forever. The crowd will raise manna themselves in 6:31, which is why the list is worth keeping.

3. *Andrew brings the boy's lunch forward with an apology attached (6:9). Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–29 and describe God's settled pattern for what He chooses to use.*

Paul says God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, the weak things to put to shame the mighty, and the base and despised things, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no flesh should glory in His presence. That is exactly the shape of John 6:9. A boy with a poor man's lunch is precisely the sort of instrument God prefers, because when the crowd is fed, nobody credits the caterer.

4. In 6:20 Jesus says, "It is I; do not be afraid." Look up Exodus 3:14 and John 8:58, and consider what else those words may be carrying.

The words translate as "I am," the divine name given to Moses at the burning bush, and the words for which the crowd will pick up stones in John 8:58. John uses the phrase repeatedly with clear intent. On a dark sea, the answer to terror is not information about the weather but the presence of the One who says I am. It is enough for a class to feel the weight of that without over-arguing the grammar.

5. Name the small and clearly inadequate thing you actually have (an hour, a skill, a spare room, one paycheck) and hand it to Jesus this week in a specific way, without waiting until it feels like enough.

Answers will vary. Watch for two failures: the person who promises something vague, and the person who insists on waiting until he has more. The boy did not wait to bring a better lunch. If a class member names an hour, a room, or a skill and puts a day on it, this question will have done more than any exhortation about generosity could.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- This was a real miracle, not an outbreak of sharing. John says the men themselves declared it a sign (6:14), and the crowd's reaction makes no sense if all that happened was a communal picnic.
- The attempt to make Jesus king by force is one of the plainest texts against an earthly political messiah. Christ's kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), and He reigns now from the right hand of God (Acts 2:33-36).
- The walking on the water is presented as a miracle over nature. Do not allow it to be softened into a misunderstanding about shallow water or a sandbar.
- Avoid turning the twelve baskets into a code. John records the number as a fact; the point the text makes is that nothing was lost.

Baptism Now Saves Us

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The whole section runs on one engine: voluntary submission for the Lord's sake, modeled on Christ. Peter is not writing to people with power. He is writing to a minority living under Roman governors, household servants with no legal protection, and wives whose husbands had not obeyed the word. He does not tell them to seize influence. He tells them to live so well that the accusation dies (2:12, 15) and so gently that an unbelieving husband might be won without a word.

The center is 2:21–25, where Peter reaches for Isaiah 53 and sets Christ before them as the pattern: He committed no sin, no deceit was found in His mouth, He did not revile in return, He did not threaten, He committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. And then, immediately, Peter says that this same suffering was not merely exemplary: He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, and by His stripes you were healed. The example and the atonement are inseparable in Peter's mind.

The chapter ends at the most quoted and most argued verses in the letter. Christ suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being prepared, in which eight souls were saved through water. And then 3:21: there is an antitype which now saves us, baptism, not the removal of the filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Teach that verse joyfully and without hedging. It is good news.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Peter writes to Christians in five Roman provinces around the early to middle 60s, as suspicion of Christians was hardening into open hostility.
- The household codes of 2:18–3:7 address the real social structures of that world: the emperor and his governors, household slaves (*oiketai*), and marriages in which a wife's conversion without her husband's was socially scandalous.
- Roman household servants were not free to leave, had no legal recourse against a harsh master, and could be punished at will. Peter is speaking to people with no leverage at all.
- "Weaker vessel" (3:7) refers to physical strength and vulnerability in that culture, and the same verse calls husband and wife "heirs together of the grace of life," which settles any question of unequal worth.
- The Greek word behind "answer" in 3:21 (*eperotema*) carries the sense of a pledge, appeal, or formal response, as in answering a question put to you. Baptism is where a person answers God.
- Noah's eight were carried through the water of judgment into a new world. Peter calls that a figure, and says the reality it pointed to is baptism.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Peter tells servants to submit even to harsh masters and immediately points to Christ (2:18–23). Walk through what Jesus did and did not do in verses 22 and 23. Where does that pattern cut hardest against your instincts?*

Verses 22 and 23 give four negatives and one positive. He committed no sin. No deceit was found in His mouth. When reviled, He did not revile in return. When suffering, He did not threaten. And then the positive: He kept committing Himself to Him who judges righteously. That last phrase is the whole mechanism. He could absorb injustice without retaliation because He had already handed the verdict to His Father.

Our instinct is to defend the record. We want the last word in the text thread, the clarifying email, the version of the story told to a friend who will take our side. Peter says the alternative is not passivity but transfer: you give the

matter to a Judge who does not miss anything (Romans 12:19). Ask for one running argument each person is currently prosecuting, and ask what it would mean this week to stop making the case and hand it over.

Question 2. *3:15 tells us to set apart Christ as Lord in our hearts and to be ready always to give a defense, with meekness and fear. Which half of that verse do we neglect more often, the readiness or the meekness, and what does the neglected half cost us?*

Most congregations will admit the readiness is thin, and the honest answer is usually that the meekness is thinner. Peter puts three things in one verse: Christ sanctified as Lord in the heart, an answer prepared, and a manner marked by meekness and fear. Strip the first and the answer becomes performance. Strip the third and the answer becomes an argument won and a person lost. Note the verse before it: the readiness assumes someone has asked, which assumes a life strange enough to prompt a question.

Work on both in class. For readiness, have people actually write four sentences; the vast majority of Christians have never once put it into words and freeze when asked. For meekness, ask about tone: how they talk about people who disagree with them when those people are not in the room. The defense Peter describes is given by someone who is not frightened, because he has already settled who is Lord.

Question 3. *First Peter 3:21 says that baptism now saves us. Work carefully through what Peter says baptism is, what he says it is not, and how Noah's ark serves as the picture. Why do you think so many people are uncomfortable with a verse this plain?*

Take the verse in pieces. What baptism is not: the removal of the filth of the flesh, that is, it is not a bath, not a ceremony of physical cleaning. What it is: the answer of a good conscience toward God, the moment a person responds to God's call and appeals to Him. What it does: it now saves us, in the same way the water bore the ark and carried eight souls out of a condemned world. How it works: through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, not by any power in the water. Peter is careful, and so should we be, but he is not vague about the verb. Baptism saves.

Put it beside the rest of the New Testament and let the class see how consistent this is: Acts 2:38, repent and be baptized for the remission of sins; Acts 22:16, arise and be baptized and wash away your sins; Romans 6:3-4, buried with Him by baptism into death and raised to walk in newness of life; Galatians 3:27, as many as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ; Mark 16:16, he who believes and is baptized will be saved. As for why the verse makes people uneasy, be gracious. Many have been taught that any role for baptism robs the cross. Peter's own sentence answers that: the saving power is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and baptism is where a believing, repentant person meets it. Teach it with joy, not as a debating point.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everyone Peter asks to submit in 2:13-3:7, and write beside each one the reason he gives for it. Note which reasons are about God rather than about the person in authority.*

Citizens submit to kings and governors, for the Lord's sake, and because doing good silences ignorant men (2:13-15). Servants submit to masters, good and harsh alike, because this is commendable before God and because Christ left an example (2:18-21). Wives submit to their own husbands, so that unbelieving husbands may be won by conduct (3:1-2). Husbands, though not told to submit, are told to dwell with understanding, give honor, and remember they are heirs together, so that prayers are not hindered (3:7). Notice how many reasons look upward rather than sideways. Submission here is rendered to God through people.

2. *Read 2:21-25 beside Isaiah 53:4-9 and mark every phrase Peter has taken from the prophet. What is he arguing by quoting Isaiah to suffering servants?*

Peter borrows "who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth" from Isaiah 53:9; "He bore our sins in His own body" from Isaiah 53:4 and 12; "by whose stripes you were healed" from Isaiah 53:5; and "you were like sheep going astray" from Isaiah 53:6. By quoting the Suffering Servant to suffering servants, Peter says two things at once: your Lord has been where you are, and your Lord was doing something for you while He was there. Example and atonement in the same paragraph.

3. In 3:1–6 Peter speaks to wives married to men who do not obey the word. Identify the approach he recommends and the adorning he commends, and compare 1 Timothy 2:9–10.

Peter recommends conduct rather than argument: chaste behavior accompanied by fear, so that husbands who do not obey the word may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives. The adorning he commends is not outward arrangement of hair, gold, or clothing, but the hidden person of the heart, the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in God's sight. First Timothy 2:9–10 makes the same contrast, ending with good works as the proper ornament of a woman professing godliness. Neither passage forbids clothing or care; both refuse to let appearance be where a Christian woman invests herself.

4. Verse 3:7 tells husbands to dwell with understanding and to give honor, “that your prayers may not be hindered.” Explain the connection Peter draws between how a man treats his wife and his own access to God.

Peter makes a man's treatment of his wife a spiritual issue between that man and God. To dwell with understanding means to actually know her, and giving honor means treating her as valuable rather than as available. The reason clause is startling: prayers hindered. A man cannot be harsh at home Saturday and expect an open line Sunday. Compare Malachi 2:13–14, where God refuses offerings from men who have dealt treacherously with their wives, and 1 John 4:20, where love for God is measured by love for the brother in front of you.

5. Peter says to be ready always to give a defense. Write out in four sentences why you are a Christian, in words a coworker would understand, and say it out loud to one person before the week ends.

Answers will vary, and the assignment is the point. Four sentences, plain words, no jargon. Listen for a defense grounded in Christ and the evidence rather than in personal preference; “it works for me” is not the hope that is in us. If someone has never said it out loud, have them practice on a fellow class member before they try it on a coworker.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Teach 3:21 plainly and gladly. Baptism saves because it is where a believing, penitent person appeals to God and contacts the death and resurrection of Christ (Romans 6:3–4). Guard both errors: it is not a mere symbol added after salvation, and it is not a magic rite apart from faith and repentance.
- Verses 3:18–20, the spirits in prison, are genuinely difficult. The most defensible reading is that Christ, by the Spirit, preached through Noah to the people of that generation, who are now spirits in prison (compare 1 Peter 1:11 and 2 Peter 2:5, which calls Noah a preacher of righteousness). Say honestly that faithful brethren have understood it in more than one way, state your view, and refuse to build doctrine on it. Scripture is clear that there is no second chance after death (Hebrews 9:27; Luke 16:26).
- Submission to government is real but not unlimited. When rulers command what God forbids, the apostles' own answer stands: we ought to obey God rather than men (Acts 5:29).
- Handle 3:1–7 with care and balance. A wife's submission is to her own husband, is voluntary, and is never a command to accept abuse; the husband's obligations in verse 7 are just as binding and carry a consequence attached to his prayers. Read both paragraphs, not one.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezekiel 17–21 · Psalm 119:137–120:7 · John 6:22–71 · 1 Peter 4–5

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