

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 91 OF 104

Continue in My Word

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 31–35
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 132–135
Gospels	John 8:31–59
General New Testament	1 John 1:1–2:27

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to move the class from admiring the word to abiding in it. Ezekiel 33:32 is the verse to write on the board: you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, for they hear your words but they do not do them. John 8:31 is the answer: if you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And 1 John 2:4 is the test: he who says I know Him and does not keep His commandments is a liar. Three books, three centuries apart, one point.

Doctrinally, keep three things in focus. Psalm 132:11 with Acts 2:29–36 settles the throne of David in favor of Christ reigning now, which is one of the cleanest answers to premillennialism in the Old Testament. Ezekiel 34:23 identifies the one shepherd as Christ, not a future earthly king. And John 8:58 is a direct claim to deity that the crowd understood immediately. Be careful with 8:44; it is about allegiance and conduct, spoken to specific men, and it has been abused against Jewish people in ways your class should be warned about out loud.

Formationally, the thread is remaining. The watchman must keep sounding the trumpet after the city falls. The sheep are sought by a Shepherd who does not give up. The disciples are told that freedom comes to those who stay in the word. And John tells Christians to let what they heard from the beginning abide in them. Ask your class before they leave: where have you already stopped abiding, quietly and without deciding to, and what is the one thing you will restart this week?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up Ezekiel 31–35 first, giving the hour to chapters 33 and 34. Read the watchman charge, then 33:30–33 about listening to a lovely song and doing nothing, then the shepherds of chapter 34 and God's twelve promises about seeking His own sheep. End with 34:23 and where the New Testament puts it.

Second session: Take up John 8:31–59 second. It pairs directly with Ezekiel 33:32, since both passages are about people who heard the word and would not receive it. Work carefully on the condition in 8:31, the bondage of 8:34, and the claim of 8:58, and handle 8:44 with the care it requires.

The other two readings: Send them to Psalm 132–135 and 1 John 1:1–2:27 on their own. Tell them to read Psalm 132:11 and then Acts 2:29–36 in one sitting. For 1 John, ask them to mark every occurrence of “if we say” and every test John gives, and to answer 2:3–6 honestly in private before the next session.

Watchman and Shepherd

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Chapters 31 and 32 finish the oracles against Egypt with two remarkable poems. The first remembers Assyria as a cedar in Lebanon, taller and fairer than any tree in the garden of God, with birds nesting in its boughs and nations living under its shadow, and then records that strangers cut it down and left it lying on the mountains. The message to Pharaoh is simple: whom are you like? The second takes Pharaoh down to the pit and pictures the graves of the great powers already there, Assyria, Elam, Meshech, Tubal, Edom, the princes of the north, each with its multitude around it.

Then chapter 33 turns the book. The watchman charge from chapter 3 is renewed on the eve of the news everyone has been dreading, and the terms are sobering. If the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, the blood of the one who dies is required at the watchman's hand. If he blows and the man will not heed, the man dies in his iniquity and the watchman has delivered his soul. Then, in verse 21, a man who escaped from Jerusalem arrives and says, "The city has been captured." Ezekiel's mouth is opened, and he is no longer mute.

Chapter 34 is one of the great chapters of the Old Testament. The shepherds of Israel fed themselves and not the flock. They did not strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back what was driven away, or seek what was lost, and the sheep were scattered on every mountain. So God says, "I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out." He will bring them back, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick, judge between sheep and sheep, and set over them one shepherd, His servant David. Chapter 35 then turns briefly to Edom, whose lasting hatred is answered at last.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The dates in these chapters place chapters 31 and 32 shortly before and after the fall of Jerusalem, and 33:21 in the twelfth year, when the news finally reached the exiles in Babylon.
- Ezekiel had been struck mute in 3:26 and was told in 24:25–27 that his mouth would be opened when a fugitive came. Chapter 33:21–22 is that moment, and the book turns from judgment to restoration.
- The pit imagery of chapter 32 is poetic, describing the grave and the common fate of proud nations. It is not a systematic teaching about the afterlife.
- "Shepherd" was standard ancient language for a king. Chapter 34 is therefore an indictment of Judah's kings and leaders, not a general complaint about pastoral care.
- "My servant David" (34:23–24) is spoken four centuries after David's death. It refers to the promised Son of David, fulfilled in Christ (Luke 1:32–33; John 10:11; Acts 2:29–36).
- Edom, the descendants of Esau, had a long history of hostility toward Israel, and Obadiah addresses the same offense: standing by and cheering when Jerusalem fell.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In 33:1–9 God explains the watchman's job in the bluntest language in the book, including blood required at the watchman's hand. Work through what a watchman owes and what he does not owe, and talk about where that responsibility rests on ordinary Christians.*

The watchman owes the warning. He does not owe the outcome, and he cannot supply it. Verses 4 and 5 make the hearer responsible: if he heard the trumpet and did not take warning, his blood is on his own head. Verse 6 makes the watchman responsible for the trumpet: if he saw the sword and did not blow, the blood of the one taken away is required at his hand. This distinction rescues faithful Christians from a crushing burden and takes away every excuse for silence in the same breath.

Apply it carefully. Ordinary Christians are not appointed prophets, but the New Testament assigns the same duty: speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15), exhort one another daily (Hebrews 3:13), restore the one overtaken in a fault (Galatians 6:1), and turn a wanderer back (James 5:19–20). Ask the class what usually stops them. Most will say they do not want to seem judgmental, and that is worth respecting; but verse 6 says a watchman who keeps quiet out of concern for the mood has still not sounded the trumpet. Talk about how to say it: privately, early, once, and with evident affection.

Question 2. *In 33:30–33 the exiles come to hear Ezekiel the way people come to hear a beautiful singer, and then go home and do nothing. Describe what that looks like in a congregation today, and what would actually have to change in us for it to stop.*

Verses 30 through 32 are painfully modern. The exiles talk about Ezekiel by the walls and in the doorways, they say to one another, “Come and hear what the word is that comes from the Lord,” they sit before him as God’s people sit, and they hear his words. And then: “you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.” The preacher has become entertainment. The sermon is evaluated the way a concert is evaluated.

In a congregation now it looks like this: we compliment the lesson at the door, we discuss whether the teacher was interesting, we have opinions about the singing, and nothing in the week is different. What would have to change? Mostly one thing: going into the assembly asking what God intends to change rather than what we are going to receive. James 1:22–25 is the parallel passage, and the mirror image is exact. Ask the class to name one thing they heard in this room in the last month and actually did. If the room goes quiet, do not rescue it too quickly.

Question 3. *Read Ezekiel 34:1–16. Go through the charges against the shepherds, then through what God says He will do Himself. What does that contrast ask of the people who lead, and what does it ask of the people who are led?*

The indictment is specific: they ate the fat, clothed themselves with the wool, and slaughtered the fatlings, but they did not feed the flock. They did not strengthen the weak, heal the sick, bind up the broken, bring back the driven away, or seek the lost, and they ruled with force and cruelty. Then God takes over the verbs Himself: I will search, I will seek out, I will deliver, I will bring out, I will gather, I will feed, I will make them lie down, I will seek the lost, bring back the driven away, bind up the broken, strengthen the sick. What the shepherds refused, God does personally.

For those who lead, the standard is now impossible to miss; 1 Peter 5:2–3, which the class studied three weeks ago, says the same thing in New Testament terms. But notice verses 17 through 22, which are addressed to the sheep: God also judges between sheep and sheep, between the fat ones who shoved with side and shoulder and pushed the weak away, and the ones who got pushed. A congregation is not made healthy by its elders alone. Ask what the class does with the person who is weak, sick, broken, or drifting, and whether anyone in the room is doing the shoving.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Compare the watchman charge of 33:1–9 with the first one in 3:16–21. Note what is repeated word for word and what is new, and consider why this charge is renewed at this particular moment in the book.*

Both passages use the same trumpet, the same blood at the watchman’s hand, and the same distinction between warning given and warning refused. Chapter 33 adds a preliminary illustration in verses 2 through 6, in which the people themselves appoint the watchman, and it adds the hearers’ despairing complaint in verse 10, “our transgressions and our sins lie upon us, and we pine away in them,” followed by God’s reply that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. The timing matters enormously: the charge is renewed just before the news of the city’s fall, which means the watchman’s work is not finished when judgment arrives. It shifts from warning to calling people back.

2. In 33:12–20 God repeats the teaching of chapter 18. Write out the two cases He gives, then state the governing principle in one sentence of your own.

First, the righteousness of the righteous will not deliver him in the day of his transgression, and if he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, all his righteousness will not be remembered. Second, if the wicked turns from his wickedness and does what is lawful and right, he shall live because of it. The principle in one sentence: God judges a man by the direction he is going, not by the reputation he has accumulated. That is the same teaching as chapter 18, and the class heard it three weeks ago; repetition in the book is deliberate, because the exiles kept arguing that the Lord's way was not fair.

3. Ezekiel 34:23–24 promises one shepherd, “My servant David.” Read John 10:11–16 and Hebrews 13:20, and explain who this shepherd is and when the promise was kept.

The shepherd is Jesus Christ, the promised Son of David. John 10:11 says, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep,” and 10:16 adds other sheep not of this fold, so that there will be one flock and one shepherd, which is the church made of Jew and Gentile (Ephesians 2:13–16). Hebrews 13:20 calls Him that great Shepherd of the sheep, brought again from the dead through the blood of the everlasting covenant. The promise was kept when Christ came, died, rose, and was seated on David's throne (Acts 2:29–36), not in some later political arrangement.

4. Trace how the flock was scattered in 34:1–6 and how it is gathered in 34:11–16. Write down every verb God uses of His own action in those verses.

Scattered: they were scattered because there was no shepherd, they became food for every beast, they wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill, they were scattered over the face of the earth, and no one sought or searched for them. Gathered: God says I will search, I will seek them out, I will deliver, I will bring them out from the peoples, I will gather them, I will bring them to their own land, I will feed them, I will make them lie down, I will seek the lost, I will bring back the driven away, I will bind up the broken, I will strengthen the sick. Twelve verbs, all first person, all initiated by God. Compare Luke 15:4 and Luke 19:10.

5. Being a watchman begins with one honest conversation. Name the person God has already put in front of you, decide what you will say, and set the day you will say it.

Answers will vary, and it is worth making the assignment small enough to be done. A watchman's conversation is usually one sentence long and takes ten seconds of courage: I have missed you; I am worried about you; can we talk. Listen for someone naming a person and a day. Also listen for the person who wants to warn the whole world and no one in particular; that is not the assignment either.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- The watchman is responsible for sounding the warning, not for the hearer's response. Do not let a class leave carrying guilt for another person's choice, and do not let anyone use that comfort as an excuse for silence.
- “My servant David” in 34:23–24 is Christ. The promise is fulfilled in His reign, which began at His ascension (Acts 2:29–36; Colossians 1:13). It does not predict a future earthly monarchy in Jerusalem.
- The blessings of 34:25–31, the covenant of peace and showers of blessing, are realized in Christ and His church. Avoid reading them as a timetable for modern events.
- Chapter 32's pit imagery is poetic language about the grave and the downfall of nations. Do not build a doctrine of the afterlife from it; use Luke 16:19–31 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 for that.

The Oath God Kept

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 132 is the longest of the Songs of Ascents and the most theological. It begins with David's consuming desire to bring the ark to a resting place, quoting his oath that he would not go into his house or climb into his bed until he found a place for the Mighty One of Jacob. Then in verse 11 the direction reverses. The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body." The rest of the psalm is the blessing that follows from that oath, including the promise to make the horn of David grow and to prepare a lamp for His Anointed.

Psalm 133 is thirty seconds long and unforgettable. Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Then two images, both of them liquid and both of them coming down: the anointing oil poured on Aaron's head until it ran down his beard and onto the edge of his garments, and the dew of Hermon descending on the mountains of Zion. Unity is not manufactured in the middle of the group; it descends, and then it spreads, and where it is, the Lord commanded the blessing.

Psalm 134 is a brief exchange at the end of a pilgrimage: bless the Lord, all you servants who by night stand in the house of the Lord, and then the answer from the temple, the Lord bless you from Zion. Psalm 135 closes the set with straightforward praise. Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases; He makes lightning for the rain and brings wind out of His treasuries. And then the contrast: the idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands, with mouths that do not speak and eyes that do not see. Those who make them are like them.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Psalms 132 through 134 close the Songs of Ascents along with Psalm 135, and Psalm 132 was likely used in connection with the ark and with the temple liturgy (compare 2 Chronicles 6:41–42, which quotes it).
- David's vow in 132:2–5 refers to the events of 2 Samuel 6 and 1 Chronicles 13 and 15. The Lord's oath in 132:11 refers to 2 Samuel 7:12–16.
- Peter quotes this oath at Pentecost (Acts 2:30) and says David, being a prophet, knew God had sworn to seat one of his descendants on his throne, and spoke of the resurrection of Christ. The apostle settles its meaning for us.
- The anointing oil of Psalm 133:2 was made by a specific recipe and poured generously at the consecration of the high priest (Exodus 30:22–33; Leviticus 8:12). The image is of abundance, not a drop.
- Mount Hermon in the far north is famous for heavy dew. Dew on the dry hills of Zion would be a picture of unlikely, life-giving refreshment.
- Psalm 135:15–18 is nearly identical to Psalm 115:4–8 and reflects a standing Israelite polemic against idols (Isaiah 44; Jeremiah 10).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 132 records David's vow to find a place for the Lord and then God's oath in return. Read verses 11 and 12, then read Acts 2:29–36. According to Peter, when and how was that oath kept?*

Peter answers the question directly in Acts 2:29–36. David is dead and buried and his tomb is still in Jerusalem, but being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ. Therefore, Peter says, God has raised up this Jesus, He has been exalted to the right hand of God, and God has made Him both Lord and Christ. The oath was kept at the resurrection and enthronement of Jesus, and Pentecost is the announcement.

This is one of the clearest places in Scripture to settle the kingdom question, so take the time. The throne of David is occupied now, by Christ, at the right hand of God. Colossians 1:13 says Christians have already been conveyed into His kingdom. First Corinthians 15:24–25 says He must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet, and then delivers the kingdom to the Father. There is no unoccupied throne waiting for a future earthly reign. Ask the class how they would explain that to a friend using only Psalm 132 and Acts 2.

Question 2. *Psalm 133 pictures unity among brethren as oil running down and dew coming down. Both images fall from above. Talk about what that says about where real unity comes from, and about what our own part in it is.*

Both images fall. The oil is poured on the head and runs down the beard, down to the edges of the garments. The dew descends on the mountains. Unity is not something a committee generates; it comes down, and then it spreads from the top of a person to the hem. Ephesians 4:3 says the same thing from the other side: endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We do not create it. We keep what God supplies, and we can certainly break it.

So what is our part? Verses 4 and 5 of Ephesians 4 give the basis, one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father. Unity rests on shared truth, not on agreeing to stop caring about it. And the keeping is daily and personal: lowliness, gentleness, longsuffering, bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2). Ask the class what unity costs them personally in a given month. Usually it costs the pleasure of being right out loud, the last word, and the freedom to repeat something unflattering that happens to be true.

Question 3. *Psalm 135:15–18 says that those who make idols become like them. Work out how that actually happens to a person, and name what someone becomes like who gives himself to something that cannot speak, see, or hear.*

Follow the logic of the psalm. The idols have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear, and there is no breath in their mouths. Then verse 18: those who make them are like them, and so is everyone who trusts in them. We become like what we worship. A person who gives himself to something that cannot hear gradually loses the ability to listen. A person who serves something with no eyes loses the capacity to see what is happening to the people around him. Idolatry hollows a man out to match the thing he serves.

Name the modern versions carefully, without cheap shots. Money cannot see your family. A career cannot hear your children. A screen cannot speak a word of forgiveness to you. Ask what happens to people who spend twenty years serving one of those: not moral collapse, usually, but a slow flattening, an inability to be moved. Then give the other half, which is Scripture's good news on the same principle: beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image (2 Corinthians 3:18). We become like what we look at, and that works in both directions.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Write out the two oaths in Psalm 132: David's in verses 2 through 5 and the Lord's in verses 11 through 18. Note carefully which one has a condition attached and which one does not.*

David swore that he would not go into his house, climb into his bed, give sleep to his eyes or slumber to his eyelids, until he found a place for the Lord, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob. The Lord swore in truth to David and will not turn from it: "I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body." Verse 12 attaches a condition to the continuation of the earthly dynasty: if your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony, their sons also shall sit upon your throne forevermore. But verses 13 through 18, God's choice of Zion and the promise to make the horn of David grow, are unconditional, and that is the part the New Testament says was fulfilled in Christ.

2. *Psalm 133 uses two pictures. Look up Exodus 30:22–33 for the first, and note how much oil was involved and which direction it ran.*

The oil was a holy anointing compound of myrrh, sweet cinnamon, sweet cane, cassia, and olive oil, made by a precise recipe and reserved for consecration; imitating it was forbidden. It was poured on the head of the high priest generously enough to run down his beard and onto the collar of his robes. The direction is entirely downward, from

the head to the edges, which is why the psalm works as a picture: unity begins above and reaches the extremities. The oil also consecrated a man for service, which suggests that unity is not just pleasant but holy.

3. *Psalm 134 is three verses and is addressed to those who serve by night in the house of the Lord. Read 1 Chronicles 9:27 and 9:33, and describe who these people were and what their nights were like.*

They were Levites and priests who lodged around the house of God because they had charge of it, who opened it every morning, and who were on duty day and night. First Chronicles 9:33 notes that the singers were free from other duty because they were employed in that work day and night. Their nights were quiet, unwitnessed, and entirely necessary, which is exactly why Psalm 134 exists. The pilgrims leaving for home stop and bless the men who stay and do the unglamorous work in the dark, and the answer comes back from the house: the Lord bless you from Zion. Every congregation has people who serve at night in this sense.

4. *Make two columns from Psalm 135:5–7 and 135:15–18: what the living God does, and what idols cannot do. Then read Isaiah 44:14–20 and add to the second column.*

The living God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases, in heaven and earth, in the seas and all deep places; He raises the vapors from the ends of the earth, makes lightning for the rain, and brings wind out of His treasures. The idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands; they have mouths but do not speak, eyes but do not see, ears but do not hear, and no breath in their mouths. Isaiah 44:14–20 adds the devastating detail: a man cuts down a tree, burns half of it to roast his meat and warm himself, and makes a god of the rest and bows to it, and no one stops to ask, is there not a lie in my right hand?

5. *Psalm 133 calls unity good and pleasant. Name the relationship in your congregation or family that is not at peace right now, and take the first step toward it this week rather than waiting for the other person to move.*

Answers will vary, and the phrase to press is "rather than waiting for the other person." Matthew 5:23–24 says if you remember your brother has something against you, go; Matthew 18:15 says if your brother sins against you, go. Scripture assigns the first move to whoever thinks of it first. Listen for a name and a specific action, and warn gently against the letter that explains why the other person was wrong. The step is usually a phone call or a visit, and it is usually shorter than we fear.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 132:11–18 is fulfilled in Christ, as Peter says explicitly in Acts 2:29–36. Do not allow the class to read it as a promise still awaiting an earthly throne in Jerusalem. This is one of your best opportunities in the whole program to settle the kingdom question from the Old Testament.
- Psalm 133 celebrates unity among God's people, not unity purchased by setting truth aside. Keep Ephesians 4:3–6 beside it, where the one faith and the one baptism are part of the same paragraph as the bond of peace.
- Psalm 135:8–12 recounts the destruction of Egypt and the Canaanite kings as covenant history. Teach it as the record of God keeping His promise to a specific people at a specific time, not as a model for national conduct now.
- Zion in these psalms is the literal city and temple. The New Testament applies the language to the church (Hebrews 12:22–23), which is where the application belongs today.

The Truth That Sets Free

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Verse 30 says many believed in Him, and verse 31 addresses “those Jews who believed Him.” That is the context for one of the most misquoted verses in the Bible. Jesus does not say the truth will set you free, full stop. He says if you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Abiding comes first, knowing comes second, and freedom comes third. Belief that does not continue does not arrive at the promise, and the rest of the chapter shows how quickly a crowd can move from believing to throwing rocks.

The offense begins at the word freedom. We are Abraham’s descendants, they say, and have never been in bondage to anyone, which is a remarkable claim from people standing in an occupied country whose ancestors were slaves in Egypt. Jesus locates the slavery where it actually is: whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. Then He draws the household picture. A slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.

From there the conversation moves to parentage and gets steadily harder. They claim Abraham; He answers that if they were Abraham’s children they would do the works of Abraham. They claim God as their Father; He answers that if God were their Father they would love Him, since He came from God. Then the sentence that has been misused for centuries and must be handled carefully: you are of your father the devil. He is speaking of allegiance and conduct, not ancestry, and He says so by pointing to what they are attempting to do to Him. It ends with Abraham rejoicing to see His day, and with the words “before Abraham was, I AM,” and with stones.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The setting is still the temple treasury during or just after the Feast of Tabernacles (8:20), with the same crowd and the same leaders from chapter 7.
- “Abide” (meno) is one of John’s key words, appearing over forty times in his Gospel and letters. It means to remain, to stay put, to keep living there.
- The claim “we have never been in bondage to anyone” overlooks Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and the Roman soldiers within walking distance. Physical descent from Abraham had become a substitute for faith like Abraham’s (compare Matthew 3:9; Romans 9:6–8).
- “You are of your father the devil” (8:44) is a statement about moral likeness and allegiance, addressed to specific men attempting a specific murder. It has been shamefully misused against Jewish people; guard against that plainly.
- “Before Abraham was, I AM” uses the words of Exodus 3:14. The reaction in verse 59 shows they understood it as a claim to deity, since stoning was the penalty for blasphemy (Leviticus 24:16).
- Abraham “rejoiced to see My day” (8:56) likely refers to the promise of Genesis 22:18 and to Abraham’s forward-looking faith (Hebrews 11:13).

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus speaks 8:31–32 to people who had just believed Him, and He attaches a condition: “If you abide in My word.” Why is that condition there, and how does it change the way this verse is usually quoted?*

The condition is there because Jesus is not interested in a moment of agreement; He is after disciples. The Greek word behind abide means to stay, to keep living in the word rather than visiting it. The promise is chained to it: abide, then you are disciples indeed, then you shall know the truth, then the truth shall make you free. Verses 37

through 59 show exactly why the condition was necessary, because the same people who believed in verse 30 are picking up stones by verse 59.

The verse is usually quoted as though truth in general liberates: honesty in relationships, facing facts, being authentic. Those are good things, and they are not what Jesus said. The truth that frees is His word, abided in, and the freedom is from sin (8:34–36). Ask the class where they have heard this verse used, and then ask what it would mean to actually abide: not a season of interest, not a study that ended, but a life lived inside His teaching. Second John 9 gives the same warning from the other end: whoever does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God.

Question 2. *The moment freedom is mentioned, they insist they have never been in bondage to anyone (8:33), and Jesus answers in 8:34. Describe the bondage He is naming, and talk about why people who are in it are usually the last to admit it.*

They are claiming political and spiritual independence, and both claims are absurd. Rome held the city. Their fathers had been slaves in Egypt, which they commemorated every Passover. But Jesus names a deeper bondage: whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. That is the servitude nobody chooses and everybody underestimates, and Paul describes it in detail in Romans 6:16–20 and Romans 7. Sin does not arrive announcing itself as a master. It comes as an option, and it stays as an owner.

Free people deny it first for the simplest of reasons: admitting slavery means admitting you cannot fix yourself. Every addiction, every temper, every habit that has outlived every resolution to end it is a case in point. Ask the class, without asking anyone to answer aloud, how many things they have promised themselves they would stop and have not. Then read verse 36 slowly: if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. Romans 6:17–18 tells how that freedom is received: you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine delivered to you, and having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Question 3. *Read 8:56–59. Jesus says that before Abraham was, I AM, and they immediately pick up stones. What is He claiming, and why did they understand Him instantly when so many people today manage not to?*

He is claiming to exist before Abraham and to bear the divine name. He does not say “before Abraham was, I was,” which would have claimed only preexistence; He says “I AM,” the words God gave Moses at the burning bush. John has been building to this all through the Gospel, and his readers have already heard the phrase on a stormy sea in chapter 6 and twice in chapter 8. The men listening understood perfectly, which is why they reached for stones; blasphemy was the one charge that carried that penalty.

People today manage not to hear it because the claim has been softened into something safer: a great teacher, a moral example, a man ahead of his time. None of those would get a man killed. Give your class the question to take home and use with a neighbor: what did Jesus say that made them try to stone Him on the spot? The answer is not His ethics. It is His identity. And if He is who He said, John 8:24 is not an overstatement; it is simply the truth of the matter.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the word “father” through this passage. Whom do they claim, whom does Jesus claim, and what does He say actually identifies a person’s real father?*

They claim Abraham as their father (8:33, 39) and then God as their Father (8:41). Jesus says God is His Father (8:49, 54) and that they are of their father the devil (8:44). What identifies a person’s real father, according to Jesus, is what he does: if you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham (8:39); if God were your Father, you would love Me (8:42); the desires of your father you want to do (8:44). Ancestry proves nothing; conduct reveals everything. Compare Romans 2:28–29 and Galatians 3:7, where those of faith are Abraham’s true sons.

2. *8:44 describes the devil in three ways. List them, then read Genesis 3:1–5 and show where each one appears in that scene.*

Jesus says the devil was a murderer from the beginning, that he does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him, and that he is a liar and the father of lies. All three appear in Genesis 3:1–5. The murder is there in the

outcome, since the choice brought death into the world. The departure from truth is there in the twisted question, "Has God indeed said?" And the outright lie is there in "you will not surely die," a flat contradiction of what God had spoken. His methods have not changed, which is why Genesis 3 keeps being useful.

3. Compare 8:31–32 with 1 John 2:24 and Colossians 1:22–23. Write out what all three passages say about continuing, and what each attaches to it.

John 8:31 says if you abide in My word you are My disciples indeed. First John 2:24 says let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning; if what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. Colossians 1:22–23 says He will present you holy and blameless, if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel. All three attach a condition to a promise, and all three use a word that means keeping on. The New Testament's doctrine of assurance is the assurance of the one who continues.

4. In 8:46 Jesus asks, "Which of you convicts Me of sin?" and no one answers. Read Hebrews 7:26 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, and describe why that silence matters so much.

No one answers, standing in a crowd that wanted badly to answer. Hebrews 7:26 says He is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens. Second Corinthians 5:21 says God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. The silence matters because a sinless life is what makes the sacrifice valid; a lamb without blemish (1 Peter 1:19). It also matters for His claims, since a man who tells you he always does what pleases God (8:29) is either right or is the most self-deceived person who ever lived, and His enemies could not produce a single counterexample.

5. 8:31 makes discipleship a matter of remaining. Identify the point where you are most tempted to stop abiding, and put one specific safeguard in place this week.

Answers will vary. The common places where abiding stops are predictable: a long stretch with no Bible reading, a friendship that quietly sets the standards, an unresolved offense that keeps a person away from the assembly, a season of prosperity when God feels unnecessary. Listen for a real safeguard rather than a wish: a reading time on the calendar, a person who checks in weekly, a decision made in advance about a recurring situation.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- "You are of your father the devil" (8:44) is about allegiance and conduct, spoken to particular men plotting His death. It is not a statement about the Jewish people, and it has been used wickedly in history. Say so plainly in class.
- 8:31–32 is conditional. Freedom and knowledge of the truth are promised to those who abide. Do not let the verse be quoted as a slogan about truth in general, and do not let it be used to support the idea that a believer is permanently secure regardless of whether he continues.
- 8:58 is a direct claim to deity and should be taught as such. The reaction in verse 59 is the best commentary available.
- Freedom from sin comes through obeying the gospel (Romans 6:17–18), not through a feeling of release. Keep that connection clear when you discuss verse 36.

Walking in the Light

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

John opens like a witness under oath. That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life. Four verbs, each one more physical than the last. He is writing against people who were teaching that Christ only seemed to be human, and his answer is that they touched Him. And the purpose is stated twice: that you may have fellowship with us, and that your joy may be full.

Then the first great theme: God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. Notice that walking in the light is not sinlessness, because the next sentence says that anyone who claims to have no sin deceives himself. Walking in the light is living honestly before God, with nothing hidden, so that the cleansing keeps working.

Chapter 2 gives the tests. Do we keep His commandments? Do we walk as He walked? Do we love our brother or hate him? Do we love the world or the Father? John writes to little children, young men, and fathers, each with a word suited to them. The world is passing away along with its lust, he says, but the one who does the will of God abides forever. Then he warns about the antichrists who went out from them. The letter is warm and unsparing at once, which is the hardest combination to write and the most useful to read.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John writes as an eyewitness, most likely late in the first century, to Christians troubled by early forms of the error that denied Christ had truly come in the flesh (see 4:2–3; 2 John 7).
- The letter has no greeting, no named recipients, and no closing salutation, which suggests it circulated among congregations John knew well.
- “Fellowship” (koinonia) means shared life and partnership, not merely friendliness. It is shared with the Father and the Son and, because of that, with one another.
- The word rendered “Advocate” in 2:1 (parakletos) is the same word Jesus used of the Holy Spirit in John 14:16. It pictures one called alongside to help, and here it is legal: Jesus pleads our case.
- “Propitiation” (2:2) means the sacrifice that satisfies God’s righteous requirement and turns away wrath. John adds “and not for ours only but also for the whole world,” which rules out a limited atonement.
- The “anointing” of 2:20 and 2:27 refers to the apostolic word they had received, which they already had and which no new teacher needed to replace. It is not a claim of private revelation apart from Scripture.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *1 John 1:7 says that if we walk in the light we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus goes on cleansing us. Read verses 8 through 10 immediately after. What does walking in the light actually involve, and what does it clearly not mean?*

Walking in the light is not walking without sin; verse 8 forbids that reading and verse 10 calls it making God a liar. The light in this letter is the character of God, and walking in it means living openly before Him, with the honesty that keeps confessing rather than hiding. The tense of “cleanses” in verse 7 is continuous: the blood keeps on cleansing the Christian who keeps on walking there. That is one of the most comforting sentences in the New Testament.

Notice also that fellowship with one another shows up in the same verse as fellowship with God. You cannot walk in the light alone. Darkness is where things stay hidden, and hidden things are always hidden from people, not

only from God. Ask the class what happens to a Christian who begins keeping a secret area: prayer thins out, assembling becomes harder, and honest friendships get avoided. Then read verse 9 again, with its two remarkable adjectives. God is faithful, which means He keeps His promise, and just, which means the debt has genuinely been paid.

Question 2. *In 2:1 John says he writes these things so that we will not sin, and in the same breath says that if anyone sins we have an Advocate with the Father. Talk about how those two statements belong together, and what goes wrong in a Christian who keeps only one of them.*

They belong together because grace aims at holiness and never at permission. John writes so that we may not sin; that is the goal, stated plainly, and no honest reading of this letter allows a casual attitude toward sin. But he immediately refuses to leave a failing Christian without hope: if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He is the propitiation for our sins. Both halves in two verses.

Take only the first and you get a Christian who is exhausted and secretly despairing, who hides failures because he thinks the relationship depends on his record. Take only the second and you get a Christian who presumes, who sins with an eye already on the forgiveness, which Romans 6:1–2 answers directly. Ask the class which error they lean toward personally. Most people know within a second, and the answer usually explains a good deal about how they pray.

Question 3. *2:15–17 names three things the world offers. Identify each one from the verse, and then name a place where each one showed up in your own week.*

The three are the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life: the appetite for physical gratification, the craving for what we see and want to possess, and the arrogance that comes from position, security, and status. Genesis 3:6 has all three in one verse, when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desirable to make one wise. The temptation of Christ in Matthew 4 answers all three.

Get concrete about the week just past. The lust of the flesh is the extra hour of something, the second helping of whatever numbs. The lust of the eyes is the browsing that turns into wanting, the comparison with a neighbor's house or a coworker's life. The pride of life is the small speech we give about our own accomplishments, the satisfaction of being consulted. Then land verse 17: the world is passing away, and the lust of it, but he who does the will of God abides forever. Ask what each person is spending his attention on that will be gone in thirty years.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything in 1:1–4 that John says the apostles heard, saw, looked at, and handled. Why would he open a letter that way, and what were people evidently denying?*

He says they heard it, saw it with their eyes, looked upon it, and handled it with their hands, and that the life was manifested and they have seen it and bear witness. He opens a letter that way because people were denying that the Son of God had actually come in a real human body. John's answer is not philosophical; it is testimonial. We touched Him. The same concern appears in 4:2–3 and in 2 John 7, and it explains why John also insists on the water and the blood in 5:6. Christianity rests on events that happened in public to witnesses who could be questioned.

2. *1:9 is a promise with a condition. Write out what we do and what God does, and note the two words John uses to describe God in that verse.*

We confess our sins; He forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness. The two words describing God are faithful and just. Faithful means He does what He promised, so forgiveness is not a matter of catching Him in a good mood. Just means the forgiveness is righteous, because the price has been paid by the Advocate of 2:1 and 2:2. Confession here means agreeing with God about what we have done, specifically and honestly, which is why walking in the light and confessing sins are joined in the same paragraph.

3. *In 2:3–6 John gives tests of whether we really know God. List them, and write out the standard he sets in verse 6.*

The tests are these: we know that we know Him if we keep His commandments (2:3); the one who says "I know Him" and does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him (2:4); whoever keeps His word truly has the love of God perfected in him (2:5). The standard in verse 6 is the highest imaginable: he who says he abides in Him

ought himself also to walk just as He walked. John does not offer a lower bar for ordinary Christians. He offers an Advocate for the days we fall short of the only bar there is.

4. *2:19 says of those who left, “they went out from us, but they were not of us.” Compare Hebrews 3:12–14 and 2 Peter 2:20–22, and explain how these passages fit together.*

John is describing teachers who left the fellowship and whose departure revealed that they had never truly belonged; their leaving made it plain. Hebrews 3:12–14 warns brethren against an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God and conditions our partaking of Christ on holding our confidence steadfast to the end. Second Peter 2:20–22 describes people who genuinely escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of Christ and were entangled again, ending worse than they began. Together they say that some who leave were never genuine, and that some who leave were genuine and are now lost. Neither passage supports the idea that a Christian cannot fall; both call for continuing.

5. *1:7 makes fellowship with one another part of walking in the light. Name one relationship in the church where you are keeping something in the dark, and bring it into the light before next Sunday.*

Answers will vary, and this question should not be answered out loud. Keeping something in the dark within the church looks like an unconfessed offense, a resentment nobody knows about, a financial or moral secret, or simply a friendship that has gone cold and is being avoided. Bringing it into the light usually means one conversation. Point the class to James 5:16 and Matthew 5:23–24, and remind them that light is not exposure for its own sake; it is the condition in which the cleansing of 1:7 keeps working.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- 1:8–10 rules out sinless perfectionism, and 1:7 rules out casual sin. Hold both. Walking in the light is honest, ongoing repentance, not a claim to have stopped sinning.
- 2:2 says Christ is the propitiation for the whole world, not for our sins only. That plainly contradicts any doctrine of limited atonement, and it is worth pointing out.
- The “anointing” of 2:20 and 2:27 does not mean Christians need no teachers; John is teaching them as he writes it, and Ephesians 4:11 and 2 Timothy 2:2 assume teachers. It means the apostolic message they already received is sufficient and needs no supplement from the men who had left. Use it to settle the question of new revelation today.
- 2:19 should not be used to prove that anyone who falls away was never saved. Compare 2 Peter 2:20–22 and Hebrews 3:12–14, and let the whole New Testament speak.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezekiel 36–40 · Psalm 136–137 · John 9 · 1 John 2:28–5:21

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