

Through the Bible in 24 Months, Teacher's Guide



WEEK 93 OF 104

Known and Kept

THIS WEEK'S READINGS	
General Old Testament	Ezekiel 41-45
Wisdom Literature	Psalms 138-140
Gospels	John 10
General New Testament	2 John

TEACHING AIM AND ORIENTATION

Your aim this week is to give the class a settled confidence that they belong to God and are known by Him, and then to show them that belonging has a shape. The glory of God returns to a house He measures Himself. David is searched and known before birth. Jesus calls His sheep by name and lays down His life for them. And John writes a brief, affectionate letter to say that people who belong to Christ do not open the door to teaching that denies Him. Being known by God and being careful about the truth are the same life, not two competing instincts.

Doctrinally, the load this week falls on Ezekiel and on John 10. The temple vision must be taught as symbol rather than as a blueprint for a future building, and the sacrifices in it must be handled honestly: Hebrews says Christ's one offering ended them, so a literal reinstatement would undo the cross. In John 10, verses 28 and 29 must be taught as they read, that no outside power can snatch a sheep away, without sliding into unconditional security. Verse 16 gives you the one flock, one shepherd, and one body of Ephesians 2, over against religious division.

Formationally, the thread is voice recognition. Sheep know their shepherd because they have heard him every day, and a Christian tells the difference between the Shepherd and a stranger the same way. That is why John can expect an ordinary woman with children in her house to spot a false teacher at her door. Put this question to the class: when a teaching sounds impressive and you cannot immediately say what is wrong with it, what do you actually do next, and is that a habit you have practiced or one you are only describing?

SUGGESTED PLAN FOR THE TWO SESSIONS

First session: Take up John 10. It is the week's warmest text and its clearest picture of being known, and it pairs directly with Ezekiel 34 in the background. Give the hour to the door, the shepherd, and verse 16, and leave ten minutes for the claim of verse 30 and what it cost Him to make it.

Second session: Take up Ezekiel 41-45, because it needs a teacher more than any other reading this week. Read a representative section rather than all five chapters aloud, spend the bulk of the time on the returning glory of chapter 43, and settle the interpretive question about the sacrifices before the class leaves.

The other two readings: Psalm 139 nearly teaches itself, so commend it and warn the class only that the closing verses turn fierce and that David submits himself to the same searchlight. For 2 John, ask everyone to read all thirteen verses twice and to come with one sentence on how verses 10 and 11 apply and how they do not.

The Glory Returns**PASSAGE OVERVIEW**

These five chapters are architecture, and a class will feel the weight of that. Do not try to make every cubit interesting. The measuring itself carries the message: after a book full of ruin, God shows a priest in exile a house that is exact, ordered, symmetrical, and permanent. Nothing about it is improvised. To a man whose temple lay in rubble and whose nation lay scattered, the endless precision of the vision is the comfort. God has not lost the plan.

Chapter 43 is the heart of the passage and the hinge of the whole vision. Ezekiel had watched, in chapters 8 through 11, the glory of God rise from the cherubim, move to the threshold, move to the east gate, and finally leave the city and stand on the mountain east of it. That is the most terrible thing in the book. Now the glory comes back from the east, the earth shines with it, and a voice says, “This is the place of My throne, the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever.”

Then decide out loud how you will read the vision, because your class will ask. The returning exiles had this vision in hand and never built this building. The land allotments of chapters 47 and 48 do not match the geography of Palestine. A river runs out from under the threshold and becomes an uncrossable flood in a few thousand feet. And the sacrifices cannot be literal, because Hebrews says Christ ended them. This is a symbolic vision of God’s presence restored among His people, fulfilled in Christ and His church, where God now dwells (2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21–22).

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The vision is dated to the twenty fifth year of the captivity, about 573 B.C., fourteen years after Jerusalem and its temple were destroyed.
- Ezekiel was a priest by training, which is why the vision runs on measurements, courses of service, holy and common, clean and unclean. God speaks to him in his own professional vocabulary.
- The closing vision has a clear structure: the house measured (40–42), the glory returning (43), worship and ministry ordered (44–46), and the river and the land (47–48).
- The genre is symbolic vision, the same family as the measured city of Revelation 21, where measurement communicates perfection and permanence rather than construction specifications.
- The sons of Zadok were the priestly line kept in office under Solomon (1 Kings 2:35) and are commended here for faithfulness when the Levites generally went astray.
- The temple actually rebuilt after the exile, under Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 3–6), followed nothing of this plan, and no one since has built it.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *In Ezekiel 43:1–5 the glory of God returns by the same east gate through which it departed in chapter 10. Why does the vision make so much of that arrival, and what would it have meant to people who had watched God leave?*

To feel the return you have to feel the departure. In chapters 8 through 11 Ezekiel is shown the idolatry happening inside the temple itself, and then the glory of God leaves in slow, deliberate stages, as though reluctant. That is the theological catastrophe behind the political one. Jerusalem did not merely lose a war; it lost the presence of God. Every exile knew it.

So when the glory comes back by the very gate it left by, and the house is filled, and God says this is the place of His throne forever, the vision is answering the deepest fear of the exile: that God had written them off. Ask your

class where they have quietly assumed God has left: a marriage, a wayward child, a congregation that has shrunk. The return of the glory is God's answer to the fear that He does not come back.

Question 2. *The vision includes an altar, sin offerings, and a working priesthood, and yet Hebrews 10:11–18 says Christ's one sacrifice ended those offerings for good. How should we read a vision whose details could never be reinstated without undoing the cross?*

Deal with this directly, because it is the most consequential interpretive question in Ezekiel. Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, and 10:1–18 say that Christ offered one sacrifice for sins forever, that the old offerings could never take away sin, and that where there is remission of sins there is no longer an offering for sin. A future age with a rebuilt temple, a restored Levitical priesthood, and animal sacrifices would not be a fulfillment of Ezekiel; it would be a reversal of Calvary.

So the vision speaks in the vocabulary Ezekiel and his hearers possessed. God pictures His restored presence in the only language a priest in exile could receive: a house, an altar, a priesthood, a holy district. The reality arrives in Christ, in whom the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), and in His church, which is the temple of the living God (1 Corinthians 3:16; Ephesians 2:21–22). Let the class see that the symbolic reading is not a dodge; it is the reading that honors what Hebrews says Christ accomplished.

Question 3. *Ezekiel 44:23 makes it the priests' job to teach people the difference between the holy and the common. Where have those lines blurred in your own week, and what would it actually take to mark them again?*

Start with what the words mean. The holy is what has been set apart for God; the common is everything ordinary and permitted. The priest's job was not to declare ordinary things evil but to teach people which is which, so that they did not treat God's things casually or treat ordinary things as though God had no say over them. When that teaching failed, worship became whatever people preferred.

Now press it into the week. Most of us do not deny the distinction; we simply let it erode. The Lord's Day becomes one more option. The hour of the assembly competes with the travel schedule. What we watch at home would embarrass us if a brother walked in. Ask each person for one specific line that has moved, and one specific way he will move it back this week. Naming it is most of the work.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Trace the movement of the glory of the Lord through Ezekiel 8:4, 9:3, 10:4, 10:18–19, 11:22–23, and 43:1–5. Write out the shape of that whole story in three sentences.*

The glory is first seen in the temple (8:4), then moves to the threshold of the house (9:3; 10:4), then departs with the cherubim to the east gate (10:18–19), then leaves the city entirely and stands on the mountain east of it (11:22–23), and finally returns from the east and fills the house (43:1–5). The story is God present, God grieved, God departing by stages, and God coming back. He does not leave in haste, and He does not stay away forever.

2. *Read Ezekiel 43:10–11, where God states why Israel is being shown this house. Which effect was the vision supposed to have on the people who heard it described?*

God says to show the house to the house of Israel "that they may be ashamed of their iniquities," and if they are ashamed, to make known the design and the laws of it. The vision was meant to produce repentance, not blueprints. That single verse is a good guard against turning these chapters into a construction project.

3. *Set Ezekiel 43:7 beside 2 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 2:19–22. Where does God say He now dwells, and what is being built out of what materials?*

Ezekiel 43:7 says God will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that we are the temple of the living God, quoting the promise that God will dwell in them and walk among them. Ephesians 2:19–22 says the household of God is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ as the chief cornerstone, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. The materials are people.

4. *Ezekiel 45:9–12 interrupts sanctuary measurements with honest scales and fair weights. Why would a vision about worship stop to talk about a man's business practices?*

Because worship that leaves a man's scales dishonest is not worship. The prophets refuse to let a holy sanctuary coexist with a crooked shop (Amos 8:4–6; Micah 6:10–11). God's presence among His people governs the whole of life, and the section on weights sits inside the section on offerings precisely so no one misses it.

5. *The sons of Zadok are honored because they kept charge of the sanctuary when everyone else drifted (44:15). Name one responsibility in the Lord's church you have quietly let slide, and take it back up before Sunday.*

Answers will vary. Listen for something concrete and unglamorous: a class to teach, a widow to visit, a card to send, a building to clean, a young family to greet. Zadok's sons are honored for keeping charge when it would have been easy to drift, which is exactly the kind of faithfulness that never gets announced from the pulpit.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Do not teach these chapters as a literal temple to be built in a future millennial age. Teach them as a symbolic vision of God's restored presence among His people, fulfilled in Christ and in His church. Give your reasons plainly so the class is equipped, not merely instructed.
- Be honest about the sacrifices. They cannot be literal in any future age, because Hebrews 7:27, 9:12, and 10:1–18 say Christ's one offering ended them. A restored animal sacrifice system would undo what the cross accomplished. This point alone settles the question for most thoughtful students.
- The prince of chapters 44 through 46 is not Christ. He offers a sin offering for himself (45:22) and has sons who inherit (46:16–18). Let him be a figure within the vision's ordered polity and resist the urge to identify him.
- Do not lose the hour in cubits and courtyards. Read a representative section, name the pattern, and give the class the point: order, holiness, and God at the center.

Searched and Known

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

Psalm 138 is a personal thanksgiving with a wide horizon. David praises with his whole heart, before the gods, meaning in open defiance of every rival claim to deity. Then comes a line worth sitting with: “You have magnified Your word above all Your name.” God has staked His reputation on what He has said. The psalm ends with a promise your class will want to carry home, that the Lord will perfect what concerns him, and a prayer that God will not forsake the work of His own hands.

Psalm 139 is one of the summits of the Psalter. Its four movements walk through God’s knowledge, God’s presence, God’s creative work, and finally the psalmist’s response. What holds it together is that this is not abstract theology. Every statement is in the second person. It is not that God knows everything; it is that You know me. The famous verses about being fashioned in the womb are not a lecture on embryology. They are a man overwhelmed that God was attending to him before anyone else knew he existed.

Then the psalm turns startling. Verses 19 through 22 pray for the death of the wicked and declare a perfect hatred of those who hate God. Do not skip it, and do not soften it into nothing. Note instead where David goes next: having asked God to deal with the wicked, he immediately invites God to examine him. The man who prays verse 19 is not exempting himself in verse 23. That order is the safeguard, and it is the difference between zeal and self righteousness.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- All three psalms are ascribed to David. Psalm 139 and Psalm 140 are addressed to the chief musician, which means they were written for public, congregational use, not just private reflection.
- Psalm 138 is an individual thanksgiving; Psalm 139 is a meditation or hymn of confidence; Psalm 140 is an individual lament with imprecatory elements. Naming the genre helps the class read each one on its own terms.
- The theological vocabulary scholars use for Psalm 139 is simple to explain: God knows all (verses 1–6), God is everywhere (7–12), and God made me (13–18). The psalm teaches doctrine by way of relationship.
- Sheol in 139:8 is the realm of the dead as the Old Testament pictures it, not a developed doctrine of hell. David’s point is that no location whatever is outside God’s reach.
- Psalm 140 sits in a cluster of psalms about the tongue and about deliverance from violent men, and it reflects the long years when David was hunted.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Psalm 139:1–6 says God knows when you sit down and stand up and knows your words before you say them. Is that comforting to you, unsettling, or both, and what does your honest answer reveal?*

Let the class answer honestly, because both answers are true to the text. Being fully known is the deepest comfort available to a human being: nothing about you has to be managed, explained, or hidden, and you are loved by One who already has all the information. It is also the end of every private arrangement. A God who knows my words before I speak them knows the sentence I have been rehearsing about my coworker.

Then point out that David does not flinch from either side. He calls the knowledge too wonderful for him, and then in verse 23 he asks for more of it. That is the mark of a man who has made peace with being known. Ask the class what specifically they would rather God not see, and whether they have ever actually brought that thing to Him rather than assuming He would look away.

Question 2. Read Psalm 139:13–16 aloud, slowly. How does David describe God’s involvement with a life before birth, and what bearing does that have on how we regard the unborn?

David says God formed his inward parts, covered him in his mother’s womb, that he was made in secret and skillfully wrought, and that God’s eyes saw his substance while it was yet unformed. The language is personal throughout. It is not “a fetus was developing” but “You covered me.” Scripture speaks the same way elsewhere: God knew Jeremiah before He formed him in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), and John leaped in Elizabeth’s womb (Luke 1:41, 44).

The application is unavoidable, and it should be made plainly and without cruelty. If God is personally at work forming a life before birth, then that life is not a matter of convenience or private preference. Make the argument from the text and let it stand. Then remember who is in the room. Some have had abortions; some have lost children; some have carried that grief silently for decades. Say clearly that the same God who forms life also forgives, completely, anyone who comes to Him. Do not let this become a political speech.

Question 3. Psalm 139 prays fiercely against God’s enemies and then immediately asks God to search the psalmist’s own heart (139:19–24). Why might those two prayers belong side by side, and what happens when a person prays only the first one?

The two prayers belong together because the second one is what keeps the first one honest. David is not asking permission to do anything; he is handing over his outrage. His complaint is that these men speak wickedly against God and take His name in vain, so his indignation is on God’s behalf, not his own. Then, immediately, he turns the searchlight around: search me, know my heart, see if there is any wicked way in me.

What happens when people pray only the first prayer is on display in every era of church history: zeal for God that never examines itself curdles into contempt for people. Christians have a further word, that vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19) and that we are to pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44). Ask the class to notice who they have been praying against lately, and whether they have ever prayed verse 23 in the same sitting.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. Psalm 139 falls into four movements (verses 1–6, 7–12, 13–18, and 19–24). Give each movement a title of your own, and note how the psalm builds from one to the next.

Titles will vary; the movements are God knows me completely, God is present everywhere I could go, God made me deliberately, and God is welcome to examine me. The build matters: knowledge, presence, and creation together establish that God has every right and every qualification to search a man, so the closing prayer is the only reasonable response. David does not begin with self examination; he arrives at it.

2. Psalm 138:2 says God has magnified His word above all His name. Compare Isaiah 55:10–11 and John 12:48, and write down the weight Scripture puts on God’s spoken word.

Isaiah 55:10–11 says God’s word does not return to Him void but accomplishes what He pleases. John 12:48 says the word Jesus spoke will judge a man in the last day. Together with Psalm 138:2 they establish that God’s word is not a description of His will but the instrument of it, and that we will be measured by it. That is why a Christian’s highest question about any practice is whether God has spoken.

3. Read Psalm 139:7–12 beside Jonah 1:3 and Jeremiah 23:23–24. Where did Jonah learn the same truth, and why did it feel so different to him than it does to David?

Jonah learned it running. He rose up to flee from the presence of the Lord to Tarshish, and discovered on a ship and then in the sea that there is no such direction. Jeremiah 23:23–24 says God fills heaven and earth and no one can hide in secret places. The difference is not in the doctrine but in the man. To David, being unable to escape God is a comfort, because God’s hand leads him. To a man in rebellion, the same fact is a terror.

4. Trace every reference to speech and tongues in Psalm 140, then read James 3:5–10. Which things do the two passages agree on about the damage words can do?

Psalm 140 speaks of men who plan evil in their hearts, sharpen their tongues like a serpent, hide a net, and whose lips are full of the poison of asps, and it asks that the evil of their own lips cover them. James says the tongue is a

small member that boasts great things, a fire, set on fire by hell, full of deadly poison, and that with it we bless God and curse men made in God's likeness. Both treat speech as a weapon capable of real destruction, and both insist that words reveal what is already in the heart.

5. *Pray Psalm 139:23–24 slowly this week and write down the one wicked way God shows you. Then name the first concrete step out of it and take that step before the week ends.*

Answers will vary. The point is the honesty of the exercise, so encourage writing it down rather than thinking it over. Listen in follow up for the first step, which is usually a conversation, a confession, or an app deleted. David prays this as a man who has already accepted that God knows anyway; there is nothing to protect.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Psalm 139:19–22 is imprecatory. Teach it as David's appeal to God's justice over men who defy God openly, note that he immediately submits himself to the same scrutiny, and set Romans 12:19 and Matthew 5:44 beside it as the Christian's own rule.
- Psalm 139:13–16 rightly bears on the value of unborn life, and you should say so. Say it with the room in mind. Someone present has likely had an abortion or lost a pregnancy. Teach the text, then say plainly that God forgives completely and that grief is welcome in the Lord's house.
- Do not turn 139:16 into a doctrine of individual predestination. God's knowledge of a life is not a decree fixing that person's eternal destiny. Scripture consistently holds God's full knowledge and human responsibility together (Acts 17:30–31; 2 Peter 3:9).
- Psalm 138:2 is a strong statement about the authority of God's word. Use it positively rather than polemically, and let it set up the coming weeks in Daniel and Revelation, where God's word proves reliable against empires.

One Flock, One Shepherd

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

The imagery would have been transparent to the first audience, and it is loaded with Old Testament freight. Israel's leaders had been called shepherds, and Ezekiel 34 is a thundering indictment of shepherds who fed themselves instead of the flock, ending with God's promise to come and shepherd the sheep Himself. John 10 follows immediately on chapter 9, where the religious leaders had just thrown a healed man out of the synagogue. Jesus is not choosing a pleasant metaphor. He is identifying Himself as the Shepherd God promised, and identifying them as the hirelings.

He uses two pictures for Himself and both matter. He is the door, which means access to God is not a matter of climbing in some other way; there is an entrance, and He is it. He is the good shepherd, which means the relationship does not end at the entrance. The shepherd knows the sheep by name, leads them out, goes before them, and lays down His life for them. Verse 16 widens the fold to include Gentiles, and the result is not many flocks under many shepherds but one flock and one shepherd.

The final scene, at the Feast of Dedication, sharpens everything. They demand a plain answer, and He gives them one: "I and My Father are one." They understand exactly what He has claimed, which is why they reach for stones and say He is making Himself God (10:33). Jesus does not retreat from the claim; He points them to the works. Then He walks away to the place where John had first baptized, and many believed on Him there.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- John 10:1–21 continues the confrontation of chapter 9 without a break, so the healed man cast out of the synagogue is still the backdrop for talk about a shepherd who does not lose His sheep.
- Sheepfolds in that setting were walled enclosures, sometimes shared by several flocks, with a single opening where a keeper slept. A shepherd calling his own sheep out of a mixed fold is an ordinary scene, not a literary invention.
- Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23:1–6 are the background texts. God had already condemned Israel's shepherds and promised to shepherd His people Himself through David's descendant.
- The Feast of Dedication (10:22) commemorated the cleansing of the temple in the second century B.C. under the Maccabees. It was not a feast commanded by the Law of Moses, and John mentions it mainly to set the season and the scene.
- Jesus quotes Psalm 82:6 in 10:34 in an argument from the lesser to the greater, addressed to men trained to argue from Scripture.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Jesus calls Himself both the door of the sheep and the good shepherd (10:7, 11). What do the two pictures each say about how a person comes to God, and why does He need both of them?*

The door speaks of access and exclusivity. There is a way in, it is open, and anyone may come through it, but it is the only one; the man who climbs in another way is by definition a thief. That is the same claim as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12, put in agricultural terms. It answers the question of how a person gets in.

The shepherd speaks of ongoing care and personal knowledge. Sheep are not admitted and then left; they are led, fed, called by name, and defended at cost. If Jesus were only the door, Christianity would be an entrance requirement. If He were only the shepherd, we might imagine many ways into the fold. Together they say that there is one way in and a lifetime of being known once you are through it. Ask which half your class tends to forget.

Question 2. *In John 10:16 Jesus speaks of other sheep and promises one flock with one shepherd. Who are those other sheep, and what does that verse say to a religious world full of competing bodies?*

The other sheep are the Gentiles, who were not part of the fold of Israel. Jesus says He must bring them also, they will hear His voice, and there will be one flock and one shepherd. Paul explains the same thing in Ephesians 2:13–16: Christ broke down the middle wall of separation and made the two into one new man, reconciling both to God in one body. There are not two peoples of God running on separate tracks. There is one body.

Apply it carefully in two directions. First, this verse leaves no room for party spirit or for glorying in human names; the church wears the name of the One who bought it (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:10–13). Second, it does not mean that everything calling itself a flock is the flock. The one flock is defined by one shepherd whose voice they hear, and hearing His voice means obeying His word (10:27; John 14:15). Unity in the New Testament is unity in truth, not unity instead of truth.

Question 3. *Jesus says His sheep hear His voice and follow Him and will not follow a stranger (10:4–5, 27). How does a person actually learn to tell his Shepherd's voice from a stranger's, and what habit does that require of you this week?*

The practical answer is recognition through exposure. A shepherd's sheep know his voice because they have heard it every day of their lives. There is no shortcut, no technique, and no special inner impression that substitutes for it. A Christian who reads and hears the Lord's words steadily develops an ear, and when a stranger speaks he notices that something is off before he can articulate why. A Christian who has not been listening is defenseless against a confident stranger.

So make the habit specific. Not "read more," but a time, a place, and a plan; this program is already handing them one. Ask who in the room has a settled daily time in the word, and for those who do not, ask what the next seven days will look like. Then add the other half: the voice is recognized in the assembly too, where the word is taught among the flock (Acts 20:28–32).

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *List everything the good shepherd does for the sheep in John 10:1–18, and everything the thief and the hireling do. Where exactly is the dividing line between them?*

The shepherd enters by the door, is known by the doorkeeper, calls his own sheep by name, leads them out, goes before them, gives them abundant life, lays down his life for them, knows them as the Father knows Him, and brings in other sheep. The thief comes only to steal, kill, and destroy; the hireling sees the wolf coming, leaves the sheep, and flees, because he does not care about them. The dividing line is cost. The shepherd pays; the hireling collects.

2. *Read Ezekiel 34:1–16, then read John 10:11–14 again. Which claim about Himself is Jesus making by taking up this particular image?*

He is claiming to be God come to shepherd His people. Ezekiel 34 has God saying, "I will search for My sheep and seek them out," and, "I will set up one shepherd over them, My servant David." When Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd," He is placing Himself in the sentence where God had put Himself. His hearers knew the passage far better than most modern readers do.

3. *John 10:17–18 says no one takes His life from Him but He lays it down of Himself. How should that statement change the way you read the arrest, the trial, and the cross?*

It removes any sense that the cross happened to Jesus. He was not overtaken by Judas, outmaneuvered by the Sanhedrin, or sentenced by Pilate in any ultimate sense; He said He had authority to lay His life down and authority to take it again, and He told them so months in advance. Read the arrest again and you notice Him controlling it (John 18:4–8), and the same reading turns the resurrection from a rescue into a keeping of His word.

4. *Trace the reasons Jesus gives in 10:25–38 for why they ought to believe Him. Which reason does He say should persuade even a man unwilling to trust His words?*

He points to His works: "The works that I do in My Father's name, they bear witness of Me," and later, "though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him." The

signs were given precisely so that a man who would not take His word could still not escape the evidence. That is exactly why John wrote his book the way he did (John 20:30–31).

5. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Name one member of the congregation for whom you will spend something real this week, time, money, or comfort, with no expectation of anything in return.

Answers will vary. Push past general goodwill to a named person and a dated act. Listen for the kind of thing nobody will hear about: an afternoon of yard work, a meal delivered, a ride to a medical appointment, a phone call every evening for a week. The shepherd's love in this chapter is measured by what it costs him, not by what it feels like.

HANDLE WITH CARE

- John 10:28–29 is frequently used to teach once saved, always saved. Teach what it says: no outside power can snatch a sheep out of the Shepherd's hand. It does not say a sheep cannot stop following. The same Gospel warns of branches that do not abide and are cast out (John 15:6), and Hebrews 3:12–14, 2 Peter 2:20–22, and Galatians 5:4 warn Christians plainly.
- John 10:16 is about Jew and Gentile united in one body. Use it against party spirit and human names, and also state that the one flock is defined by hearing the one Shepherd's voice. Unity and truth are not competitors.
- John 10:30 is a plain claim to deity, and 10:33 shows that His hearers understood it that way. Do not let it be reduced to unity of purpose only. At the same time, do not let 10:34–36 be used to teach that men become gods; Jesus is arguing from a psalm about human judges to silence the charge of blasphemy.
- The Feast of Dedication is mentioned as a date, not endorsed as a pattern for adding observances to worship. If the question comes up, answer briefly and move on.

Truth at the Door

PASSAGE OVERVIEW

2 John is the shortest letter in the New Testament except for 3 John, and it is built on a single conviction: love and truth are not rivals. John greets her in the truth, loves her in the truth, rejoices over children walking in the truth, and then says that love means walking according to His commandments. Modern readers often pit warmth against doctrinal firmness. John cannot conceive of them apart, and one short letter will do more to correct that instinct than an hour of argument.

The danger is specific. Traveling teachers were moving between congregations, and some of them denied that Jesus Christ had come in the flesh. Hospitality was how such men were funded and endorsed; to take one into your home was to put your name and your congregation's name behind his work. John says do not do it. That is the force of verses 10 and 11, and it needs to be explained carefully so the class neither dilutes it nor turns it into a weapon against relatives who hold different views.

Note verse 8 as well, because it is easy to read past. "Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward." John, an apostle, tells faithful Christians to watch themselves. The New Testament never speaks of the Christian life as a state that maintains itself. It speaks of abiding, continuing, watching, and holding fast.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- The author calls himself "the elder," almost certainly the apostle John writing late in the first century from Ephesus, in the same setting and against the same error as 1 John.
- The error denied the real humanity of Jesus, an early form of what later hardened into Gnostic teaching. John treats it not as a secondary difference but as a denial of Christ Himself.
- In the first century, traveling teachers depended on hospitality from Christians in each town, so receiving a man into your home was sponsorship, not merely politeness (compare 3 John 5–8, where the same hospitality is commanded for true teachers).
- The letter is personal correspondence on a single sheet, which is why John says he would rather come and speak face to face than write with paper and ink.
- 2 John and 3 John belong together as a matched pair: one on refusing to support false teachers, the other on supporting true ones and refusing to tolerate a domineering man.

NOTES ON THE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Question 1. *Truth and love are laced through every paragraph of this short letter. Where have you watched a congregation emphasize one at the expense of the other, and what came of it?*

Let the class name both failures, because most congregations tilt one way or the other. A body that prizes doctrinal precision and neglects love becomes brittle and cold, and it loses its young people quietly, one at a time. A body that prizes warmth and refuses to say anything is wrong becomes, within a generation, a place where the gospel is no longer clearly preached, because nothing can be excluded.

John's letter is the antidote to both. He is affectionate, calls her lady and children, longs to see them face to face, and speaks of full joy. He is also unyielding about the doctrine of Christ. Ask your class which error their own congregation is more likely to fall into, and what one habit would push back against it. Handle this without letting it become a complaint session; keep the question aimed at what each person contributes.

Question 2. *Verses 10 and 11 forbid receiving a false teacher into the house or greeting him. Which specific thing is John forbidding, and which things is he not forbidding?*

John is forbidding the endorsement and support of a man whose teaching denies Christ come in the flesh. In that culture, receiving him into your house meant food, lodging, funds, and a platform among your brethren. The greeting John forbids is not ordinary courtesy but the welcome that says, we are with this man and his message. To give it is to share in his evil deeds.

Say plainly what is not forbidden. This is not a rule against being civil to an unbelieving neighbor, working with people who disagree, loving a family member in error, or hosting a relative at Thanksgiving. Jesus ate with sinners. Paul reasoned with people daily in a hall in Ephesus. The verse addresses sponsorship of a teacher propagating a denial of Christ. A class that misses this distinction can do real damage with a text meant to protect them.

Question 3. *Verse 8 warns that a person can lose the things he worked for. Take that warning seriously for a moment: what would losing it look like in a life like yours, and what actually guards against it?*

Take the warning at face value, because it comes from an apostle to faithful people. The things worked for are the fruit of a life in Christ and the full reward that goes with it, and John says they can be lost. That is the consistent language of the New Testament: hold fast (Hebrews 3:14), take heed lest you fall (1 Corinthians 10:12), be diligent so you do not stumble (2 Peter 1:10). Assurance in Scripture is confidence for those who continue, never a guarantee that continuing is optional.

Then ask what loss would actually look like in their lives, because it is rarely dramatic. It looks like a man who still believes everything he always believed and has not opened a Bible in a year. It looks like attendance thinning, then service ending, then conviction quietly following. The guard, according to this letter, is abiding in the doctrine of Christ and continuing to walk in love. Ask each person which of those two he is currently neglecting.

NOTES ON THE EXTENDED QUESTIONS

1. *Count how many times the words truth and love appear in these thirteen verses, and note every place John ties one of them to the other.*

Truth appears five times in the first four verses and love appears four times across the letter, and John will not separate them: he loves in truth, all who have known the truth love her, and love is defined in verse 6 as walking according to His commandments. The letter makes truth the sphere in which love operates and obedience the shape love takes. A class that sees this in thirteen verses will never again treat doctrine and affection as opposites.

2. *Verse 7 describes deceivers who will not confess Jesus Christ coming in the flesh. Read 1 John 4:2–3 and John 1:14, and explain why the incarnation is the one line John will not let anyone cross.*

1 John 4:2–3 gives the same test: every spirit that confesses Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not is not. John 1:14 says the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. If Jesus did not truly become man, then He did not truly die, and there is no sacrifice, no mediator who is one of us (1 Timothy 2:5), and no high priest touched with the feeling of our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). The incarnation is not a detail; everything hangs from it.

3. *Verse 9 warns about going beyond the doctrine of Christ. Read Galatians 1:6–9 and Revelation 22:18–19, and write out the consistent warning these passages give about adding to what was delivered.*

Galatians 1:6–9 pronounces a curse on anyone, apostle or angel, who preaches a different gospel. Revelation 22:18–19 warns against adding to or taking from the words of the book. 2 John 9 says the man who goes beyond and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. The consistent warning is that the message was delivered once and completely (Jude 3), and that innovation in the things of God is not progress but departure.

4. *Who is the elect lady? Note the two main possibilities, a Christian woman with her family or a congregation with its members, and give the evidence for each from the letter itself.*

The letter itself supports both readings. In favor of a woman: the personal tone, the reference to her children and to the children of her elect sister in verse 13, and the natural sense of the greeting. In favor of a congregation: John shifts between singular and plural address, speaks of those who have known the truth loving her, and gives

instructions about receiving teachers that fit a church's practice. Note the evidence, hold the conclusion loosely, and observe that nothing in the letter's teaching changes either way.

5. *John says his joy is full when he finds children walking in truth. Write a short note this week to someone whose faithfulness has strengthened you, and tell them specifically what you have watched them do.*

Answers will vary, and this one is worth following up on. Specific encouragement is rare and it lasts; most Christians can name the one note somebody sent them years ago. Listen for particulars rather than compliments: not "you are such an encouragement," but "I watched you sit with that family for three hours in the hospital, and it changed what I thought a Christian does."

HANDLE WITH CARE

- Verses 10 and 11 are about sponsoring a false teacher, not about ordinary courtesy. Explain the first century practice of hospitality as funding and endorsement. Guard the class against using this verse to justify shunning relatives or refusing to speak to people in error.
- Verse 8 teaches that a Christian can lose what he has worked for. Use it with 1 John 5:13 from last week to hold both truths together: real assurance for those who abide, real danger for those who do not.
- Do not dogmatize about the elect lady. The letter's meaning does not depend on the answer, and a class can spend an entire hour on a question the text never settles.
- Do not let "love one another" be flattened into tolerance of error, and do not let "the doctrine of Christ" be used as cover for a sour spirit. John holds both, and so should the teacher.

NEXT WEEK'S READING: Ezekiel 46–48; Daniel 1–2 · Psalm 141–143 · John 11:1–27 · 3 John–Jude

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