

The Year of Discipleship in 3-D

(Further Developing Devoted Followers of Christ)



Welcome! Growing into more fully-devoted followers of Christ, may this time help all: **Grow Upward** into a more mature personal relationship and commitment to Christ Jesus faithful to God's Word!

Grow Outward to neighbor and world around, learning how to love well and to lead in what matters to God - guided by God's Word, by Jesus Himself, and by the Holy Spirit!

And, **Grow Inward** to discover a more contemplative faith, enhanced by both silence and prayer!

The Scripture for Sunday, December 12, 2021

[STUDY LESSON 14]

THE OLD TESTAMENT READING:

Isaiah 55:1-13

- {1} Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.
- {2} Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.
- {3} Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live.
I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.
- {4} See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.
- {5} See, you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you.
- {6} Seek the LORD while he may be found, call upon him while he is near;
- {7} let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;
let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.
- {8} For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.
- {9} For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
- {10} For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
- {11} so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.
- {12} For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
- {13} Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

DISCUSSION GUIDANCE AND QUESTIONS:

For an overview of Isaiah consider watching: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/isaiah/>

1. Open (*or have someone in the group open*) with a prayer inviting the work of the Holy Spirit to open up the hearts and lives of any and all to shape believers into more fully devoted following of Christ.
2. Read (*or have one or more persons read*) the passage printed above (*or from a bible*).
3. BACKGROUND NOTES: Isaiah, in its current form, challenges contemporary scholars in a multitude of ways, particularly in the expansive history encompassed by his writings. Beginning from the Syro-Ephraimite war (battle between Judah in south against the allied forces of Syria and Ephraim/Israel in the north), to the eventual Assyrian conquest of Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple, and Judah at the hands of the Babylonians, the exile, and finally, the return, this span of time extends from around 745 BCE to somewhere near 539 BCE with the Persian conquest of Babylon. Isaiah, an 8th century prophet, focuses on a number of themes, namely how God is behind all historical events, along with the centrality of Jerusalem, and also emphasizing both kingship and worship. To this should be added the deepening of the concept of “messiah,” and how this anointed ruler comes out of the Davidic line of Judean rulers. Finally, adding to the complexity, some scholars have posed arranging the book into three sections (1st, 2nd, and 3rd Isaiah): 1-39; 40-55; 56-66. The above text would appear to speak of the later period of restoration and repentance.
4. What words or phrases caught your attention as you heard this passage read? Put another way, were you to choose to memorize a verse and cherish it from this text, what verse might that be and why? Take note within what sort of feelings arise for you in that word, phrase, or verse.
5. Survey the text to highlight what images, metaphors, or verses convey a sense of hopefulness. Among them, which ones do you resonate with most? Why?
 - a. Thirsty - waters.....Penniless - free wine and milk
 - b. Listen and live - everlasting covenant and steadfast love.....Seek the Lord - found
 - c. God’s word expressed - not returning empty, accomplishing purpose
 - d. Depart in joy - led back in peace.....Mountains singing - frees clapping
 - e. Cypress and myrtle replacing thorn and brier
6. Much is infused in this passage. Hope, prosperity, a call to listen well, promise, unity, prayer, repentance, mercy, forgiveness, the mystery/majesty of God, joy and peace, and steadfast love. What aspect brings the most assurance and encouragement to your faith at this time?
7. Much judgment is declared throughout this book and most is directed at God’s people and leaders. By the time of our text the people are already in exile. Imagine, were God to examine us as a nation today, where might God find reason for judgment?
8. Spend some moments contemplating (and sharing) some of that which can seem unfathomable regarding the character and nature of God. (*See Isaiah 55:8-9*)
9. What word from God do you need to hear now. A word of purpose which will succeed in you having heard it?
10. Find a word or phrase that most informs your discipleship and following of Christ from this passage.
11. Can you identify any particular ways your Christian faith and following might be inspired to change in light of this passage from Isaiah (and any discussion and/or reflection that may have taken place)?
12. Read the passage once more. Then, take some time to close (or have someone close) with a prayer.