

# explore

For your daily walk with God

April—June 2022



*“This is what the Lord says—I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God. All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless.”*

Isaiah 44:6,9

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# How to use Explore



## Issue 98

The 91 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

## It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

## We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

**1**  
Find a time you can read the Bible each day

**2**  
Find a place where you can be quiet and think

**3**  
Ask God to help you understand

**4**  
Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

**5**  
Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

**6**  
Pray about what you have read

**the goodbook**  
COMPANY

*Opening up the Bible*

# Welcome to Explore

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Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like carpentry or flower arranging. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because many Christians view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy, modern lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the one who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☑ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing

at night or a mid-morning break might suit you. Whatever works for you is right for you.

☑ *Place:* Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see *Matthew 6:5-6*), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.

☑ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

☑ *Share:* As the saying goes: *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts*: better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything, because it's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Tim Thornborough  
Editor



# Grasping in the dark

You may have heard it said that the person who is closest to God is the one who is most aware of their own sinfulness. That thought seems a long way away from David.

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## Read Psalm 26

- ❓ *What does David say about his own commitment to God?*
- ❓ *What is the big claim he makes (v 11)?*

It seems as if he's boasting to God about: how much he trusts him (v 1); his (not God's) faithfulness (v 2-3); his hatred of wrong and wrongdoers (v 4-6); and his love of God, and God's house (v 7-8). In a word, he describes himself as "blameless" (v 11). This is the kind of language that would cause people to stare at you in horror if you came out with it at a prayer meeting.

- ❓ *How do you react to this confident attitude?*

## What's the question?

The key to understanding the psalm is working out the question he is wrestling with. He has strived to live a life that honours God. He has avoided evil. He has attended diligently to his spiritual life.

- ❓ *So what's his problem (v 9, 10)?*

David is worried that, despite all his efforts to be righteous, God will judge him along with all the evildoers, and sweep them both away. Verses 4-5 echo the marks of the "blessed man" in Psalm 1:1. David has believed the first half of the psalm, but doesn't seem to believe God's promise at the end (see Psalm 1:6).

His problem is that, despite his apparent righteousness, he sees that God's judgment will cut through every pretence of righteousness for the filthy rags that they are. Is it worth following God if I am swept away with the rest of the rubbish when judgment comes?

## Apply

These kinds of doubts can torture ordinary believers too. *Can I really be forgiven?* Despite my outward show of godliness, I know the blackness of my heart, so the Lord my Judge must see it too.

- ❓ *What might you say to a believer who struggles with these thoughts?*

## What's the answer?

David is grasping in the dark for the answer to his question—he cannot see Christ clearly. But along the way he grabs hold of some good things:

- ❓ *What are they (Psalm 26:11-12)?*

## Pray

Praise God that, in Christ, your feet stand on solid, level ground.

Ask the Lord to draw near to those who struggle with assurance, with the promise and guarantee of his redeeming love.

# State your case

*We've seen God on trial. We've seen the false gods of the nations on trial. Now it's our own turn.*

## Read Isaiah 43:14-28

❓ *What does God promise (v 14)?*

Verses 16-17 are a description of the parting of the Red Sea. Verse 20 refers to the provision of water for the people in Exodus 15 and 17. Once again, we are reading about a new exodus.

But God goes further in Isaiah 43:18-19. “See, I am doing a new thing!” God is saying, *Never mind the exodus from Egypt; I'm going to do something bigger, something better.*

## Humanity on trial

❓ *Who does God turn to accuse in verse 22?*

❓ *What have they failed to do (v 22-23)?*

God's demands are not heavy (v 23); it's the people's actions that are burdensome (v 24). God invites the people to state the case for their innocence (v 26). But they have no hope of proving it.

## Pray

Imagine yourself standing in the dock in this trial. What would you say? It's striking that God's people here can't even be bothered to ask for God's help (v 22). Are there ways in which you may be guilty of the same thing? Are there other ways in which you have failed to honour or serve God (v 23)? Spend some time in confession before the Lord.

## The verdict

### Re-read Isaiah 43:25

This trial has a twist, and the twist is Jesus. 800 years after Isaiah, John the Baptist saw Jesus and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). The evidence is presented. The verdict is clear. But Jesus steps in and takes our place. As a result, God “blots out your transgressions ... and remembers your sins no more”.

Why does God do this? It's for us. But also for his own sake (Isaiah 43:25)—that is, to reveal his glory and grace.

### Read Isaiah 44:1-5

Here's the result of the trial. God will bring his people home. By his Spirit, he will lead us from slavery to sonship.

In the future Jesus will lead us to a new home in a new heaven and a new earth. But already he has led us home to God. If you're in Christ by faith, you can say, “I belong to the LORD” (44:5). You belong in God's family, in God's presence, in God's future. You can kick your shoes off, put your feet on the sofa and feel at home.

## Pray

Use the words of 44:1-5 to help you celebrate what God has done for you in Christ.



# Best-laid plans

The book of Isaiah has powerful things to say to us about our spiritual state and why Jesus came. But it also reveals how God worked in history long before Jesus' birth.

- ❓ *In what situations might people find it particularly hard to trust God?*
- ❓ *Why do you think it's sometimes hard to understand what God is doing?*

- ❓ *What does the clay say to the potter (v 9) and the child to its parents (v 10)?*
- ❓ *What would be the equivalent things to say to God?*
- ❓ *What are people saying to God (v 11)?*

## True promises

### Read Isaiah 44:24 – 45:13

44:24-26 may seem familiar. We've already seen how God alone can fulfil predictions of the future because only he is "the LORD, the Maker of all things" (see 41:21-27; 43:10-13).

- ❓ *What specific predictions is God making here (Isaiah 44:26-28)?*

Isaiah is looking ahead to the time when the people's exile in Babylon will end. Babylon will fall to the Persians. The Persian king, Cyrus, and his successors will allow God's people to return. Sure enough, we can now read of this return and the rebuilding of Jerusalem in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

- ❓ *What does God say he will help Cyrus to do (45:1-2)?*
- ❓ *Why might it be surprising that God uses Cyrus in this way (v 4)?*
- ❓ *But what does God say will happen as a result (v 6-7)?*

Once again we are seeing God's "strange work" (see Isaiah 28:21). It seemed strange that God sent his people into exile. Now it seems strange that he is using someone who isn't even part of his people to bring them out of exile.

Perhaps this is why Isaiah says, "Truly you are a God who has been hiding himself" (45:15). God's ways are hidden and they seem strange.

### Read Isaiah 45:15-19

- ❓ *What will happen if we trust in God, even if his ways seem strange or hidden?*

## Apply

God does not tell us to seek him in vain (v 19). Jesus promises, "Seek and you will find" (Matthew 7:7).

- ❓ *How can you seek God today?*
- ❓ *Are you facing difficult or strange things? How can you express trust in him even when his ways seem hidden to you?*

## Pot and potter

- ❓ *Who do you think the "potsherd" of verse 9 represent?*

# The fall of Babylon

Today we look at two final passages from Isaiah 40 – 48.

## Read Isaiah 47:1-11

Here Babylon, the nation which would take God's people into captivity, is personified as a great queen.

- ❓ *How has God used Babylon (v 6)?*
- ❓ *What lesson do you think Babylon should have learned?*
- ❓ *What has Babylon said about herself (v 7, 8, 10)?*

It's a parody of what God says about himself (see 45:18; 46:5, 9-10). Babylon has grown arrogant. She is putting herself in God's place.

- ❓ *Why does Babylon feel so good about herself (Isaiah 47:1, 5, 8, 10)?*
- ❓ *But what will happen to her (v 1-3, 9, 11)?*

## Apply

This picture of Babylon is a warning to those of us today who feel comfortable and secure. Do we feel superior because we are well off or successful? Do we trust in our own wisdom and knowledge and assume that nothing can touch us? We need to recognize that God is the Lord, and there is no other. "Our Redeemer—the LORD Almighty is his name—is the Holy One of Israel" (v 4). We are entirely dependent on him.

## If only

### Read Isaiah 48:1-11, 17-22

God used Babylon to chastise his people, but she failed to learn the very lessons she was dispensing. In Isaiah 48, we see how God's people have themselves failed to listen properly.

- ❓ *What did God tell them in the past, and why (v 3-6)?*
- ❓ *How did they respond (v 8)?*
- ❓ *What would have happened if they'd listened properly (v 18-19)?*
- ❓ *What has been the effect on them of the exile (v 10)?*
- ❓ *What will God communicate now (v 6b-7)?*
- ❓ *What should the people do (v 20)?*

## Pray

Ask God to help you to learn the lessons Babylon and Israel failed to learn. Ask him to show you where you are not paying attention to his word, or where you are claiming to be more faithful to him than you really are (48:1-2). Confess your sins and ask for the help of God's Holy Spirit in listening to him and obeying his word more fully in the future. Thank him that in Christ there is forgiveness for when you fail to be faithful.



# What's it worth?

*One way or another that's a question we often ask. Imagine someone asked that about the cross of Christ. What would you say? In Isaiah 49 we find the true answer.*

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We've already read one of Isaiah's "servant songs" (42:1-9). Today's passage is another. We're listening in to a dialogue between the LORD and his Servant.

## Read Isaiah 49:1-7

❓ *Who is the Servant and what is his job (v 3)?*

Isaiah here was looking ahead to a time when Israel would be in exile in Babylon. Instead of attracting the nations to the ways of the Lord, Israel had been attracted to the ways of the nations. They had failed to honour God's name. This is why the Servant says, "I have laboured in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all" (v 4). The land lies desolate, the king is a captive and the temple is in ruins. Israel has failed to be the Servant of the LORD.

## A true servant

But in 49:5 the Servant is someone other than Israel, because he is going to gather Israel back to God—and be the light of the world that Israel was supposed to have been. A few hundred years later, the Lord Jesus stood up and declared, "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12). Jesus is the promised true and faithful Servant.

In 49:3 the Lord says, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendour", and Jesus perfectly displays the splendour of God (Hebrews 1:3). If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. It's

in Jesus that we see the true holiness, grace, wisdom, justice, compassion, power and love of God. God's honour has been brought into question by the defeat of his people (Isaiah 52:3-6), but Jesus, the Servant, will restore God's reputation.

## Worth more

To honour the Servant's obedience, God will restore his people Israel (Isaiah 49:5). But that is not enough. "It is too small a thing" (v 6). The cross deserves more and achieves more.

- ❓ *Why might Jesus' work have appeared to be in vain (v 4)? When was he "despised and abhorred" (v 7)?*
- ❓ *But what does Isaiah tell us about the Servant's reward (v 4, 7)?*

God's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth. That is what Jesus' obedience is worth.

## Apply

Every step we make in mission is a step towards the moment when people from every nation, tribe, language and tongue bow down before Jesus' throne. It is too small a thing to be concerned just for your family or local community. Christ is worth more than that. The cross of Christ deserves the nations.

- ❓ *What is one small thing you can do to contribute to God's worldwide mission?*

# Watch them come

*Much of the time, evangelism seems like hard work. We wonder whether anyone really wants to hear our message. Isaiah 49 gives us the confidence boost we need.*

The first part of Isaiah 49 establishes that the obedience of Jesus merits the nations as a reward. The rest of the chapter describes how Jesus will receive his reward.

## Read Isaiah 49:8-26

Once again Isaiah promises a new exodus. This whole passage is addressed to the “islands” (v 1), which is Isaiah’s way of talking about the Gentiles or non-Jews.

- ❓ *What similarities can you spot between this passage and the story of the exodus from Egypt?*

## A new people

- ❓ *Where are people coming from (v 12)?*
- ❓ *What will happen when they all reach the promised land (v 19-21)?*

Isaiah is speaking to God’s people in exile with their children far from home. For Isaiah’s readers in Babylon, that meant the prospect of their children heading home to a renewed homeland—a powerfully evocative idea for any refugee. But Isaiah is looking beyond exile in Babylon to the work of Christ and the mission of the church. So “your children” are God’s people, perhaps especially God’s people waiting to be gathered into Christ’s kingdom—waiting to become God’s children in response to the proclamation of the gospel.

- ❓ *How does God think about his children (v 15-16)?*

Not one of God’s people gets forgotten or left behind. God’s chosen people will respond when they hear the gospel—and be gathered in by God.

- ❓ *How might that influence the way we think about evangelism?*

## Vindication

- ❓ *Who will bring these children (v 22-23)?*

We rarely think of governments and authorities nurturing the church! At the moment in the West, Christianity is marginalised. Elsewhere in the world things are much tougher. But one day God’s people will be vindicated and every knee will bow before Jesus.

## Liberation

- ❓ *How does Isaiah describe the power of Satan to trap people (v 24)?*
- ❓ *Do you ever feel this way about the people around you?*
- ❓ *How does God respond (v 25-26)?*

## Pray

This passage should give us great confidence in God’s power and determination to save. Respond by praying for those you know who are not yet Christians. Use the imagery from this passage to help you pray.



# A chip off the old block?

*Are you similar to your parents? In Isaiah 51 God reminds Israel of their ancestors, Abraham and Sarah.*

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But the most important thing about them isn't their own characteristics—it's God's.

## Wives and children

### Read Isaiah 50:1-3

- ❓ *With what tone of voice do you imagine the questions in verses 1-2 being said?*
- ❓ *What is the reason for God's people being sent away—and what isn't the reason?*
- ❓ *What is scary about this metaphor of a mother being divorced and a child being sent away?*
- ❓ *What is hopeful about it?*

We skip past 50:4-11 for now, but we'll return to it in two studies' time.

## Stones in a quarry

### Read Isaiah 51:1-3

- ❓ *What are the people told to remember about Abraham and Sarah (v 2)?*
- ❓ *What does this remind them about God?*
- ❓ *What does it remind them about themselves (v 1)?*
- ❓ *How do you think those in exile would have felt to hear this—and then to hear the promise in verse 3?*

## You and me

In the remainder of Isaiah 51, God explains that the salvation he is bringing will last for

ever (v 6, 8). People die and the earth wears out, but God's righteousness and salvation will never fail (v 6-8). Ancient monsters representing primordial chaos (and perhaps pointing to Satan and his angels) will be defeated (v 9-10).

We pick up the passage again in verse 12.

### Read Isaiah 51:12-16

- ❓ *What are human beings like (v 12)?*
- ❓ *What is God like (v 15-16)?*
- ❓ *But what does God say about those he has chosen (v 16)?*
- ❓ *So how should we think about "mere mortals" (v 12) and "the wrath of the oppressor" (v 13)?*

## Pray

The New Testament tells us that all who trust in Jesus Christ are Abraham's children (Galatians 3:29). We are those to whom God says, "You are my people" (Isaiah 51:16).

How do you respond to this? Spend some time in prayer and thanksgiving.

Then take some time to pray for those you know of who are living in fear—for any reason. Ask God to remind them of his power (v 13) and to set them free (v 14). Ask him to give them faith like Abraham, who trusted in God's promises.

# One thing

*The difficulties of Psalm 26 seem to be in the past now, as this song breathes a new-found confidence in God's faithfulness*

## Nothing can touch me

### Read Psalm 27:1-3

- ❓ *What is David confident of (v 1)?*
- ❓ *How does it affect his approach to life?*

David has discovered the liberating effect that entrusting your life into God's hands can bring. He's afraid of nothing, because he knows that God is his stronghold. Paul knew this: he organised a picnic in the middle of a shipwreck (see Acts 27:32-37). The apostles knew this: they stood fearless before the great men of their day with their simple message of faith in Christ (see Acts 5:29-33). Stephen knew this: he asked forgiveness for his persecutors as they murdered him (see Acts 7:54-60).

- ❓ *Do you have the same liberating confidence in God's sovereign love?*
- ❓ *If not, why do you think that is?*

## Desiring God

### Read Psalm 27:4-6

When we feel unsafe, our natural instinct is to run to wherever we call "home".

- ❓ *Where is David's "home"?*
- ❓ *Where is yours?*

For David, "home" is the temple—where God lived in the middle of his people.

- ❓ *Why is David so desperate to be with God in verses 4-6?*

The key to his confidence is that he desires God. He wants to be with God more than anything else in the world. David is in love with him, and, of the many things he could ask God for, like Mary (see Luke 10:38-42), there's only one thing David really wants—to be with him.

## Apply

This is not some kind of religious fervour that we can work up in ourselves. It's the result of understanding the truth, and being ruthless with the alternatives. So how do you score on this quick test of how much you love God: which of these options would you prefer:

- To talk to God in prayer, or to talk to friends on the phone?
- To read the Bible, or to watch TV?
- To be with other believers, or to be with other friends?
- To be in heaven with him, or to enjoy life on earth?

## Holding on

### Read Psalm 27:7-12

David's love for God isn't unrealistic. He knows that the problems are real (v 12).

- ❓ *So what keeps David going? What does he tell himself to do (v 14)?*
- ❓ *What do you think that means for you?*



# Daughter Zion

*If your city or nation were depicted as a male or female figure, what do you think their character would be like?*

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## Read Isaiah 51:17-23

As in 50:1, God's people are being personified—and it's not a flattering portrait.

- ❓ *Jerusalem is drunk and staggering—but what has she drunk (Isaiah 51:17, 21)?*
- ❓ *How have her children (the people) failed her (v 18-20)?*
- ❓ *How does she feel (v 19)?*

The cup of God's wrath is a picture of receiving his judgment. But now God is going to take away this cup. "Awake, awake!" he cries (v 17). The people are no longer captive and no longer in a drunken sleep.

### TIME OUT

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## Read Mark 10:38 and 14:32-36

God's promise in Isaiah 51:22 was partially fulfilled when the Jews had spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon. But it was ultimately fulfilled when Jesus took God's judgment in our place. He drank the cup of wrath fully so that now there is no wrath left for us.

## Awake, awake!

### Read Isaiah 52:1-12

- ❓ *How has the personified Jerusalem changed now (v 1-3)?*
- ❓ *Why was she "sold" (look back at 50:1)?*
- ❓ *What does this "selling" actually mean (Isaiah 52:4)?*

Now Jerusalem will be "redeemed" or bought back—not with money but with the blood of the Saviour (as we'll discover in the following chapter).

- ❓ *What are God's people called to do now that they are free (v 1)?*
- ❓ *What else are they able to do (v 7-9)?*
- ❓ *Why do you think Isaiah describes this as "beautiful" (v 7)?*

## Pray

Spend some time praising God for the way he redeems and rescues, and praying for those you know who do not yet believe.

## Apply

- ❓ *In what ways can people today "bring good news ... proclaim peace ... bring good tidings ... [and] proclaim salvation"?*
- ❓ *Again, practically, what does it mean to say to people, "God reigns!"?*
- ❓ *How can you embody this message in the way you live?*
- ❓ *Who could you share this message with verbally this week?*

# Shame and glory

We backpedal now for a last look at Isaiah 50—which leads us into one of Isaiah's most famous passages.

We have seen repeatedly how God's people have failed to be faithful. Time for another portrait of the Servant who *was* faithful.

## Read Isaiah 50:4-9

- ❓ *What is the relationship like between the Servant and the LORD?*
- ❓ *When the Servant listens, what does he hear (v 4)?*
- ❓ *Why (v 5)?*
- ❓ *But what has happened—how have people treated the Servant (v 6)?*

## Shame and spitting

### Re-read Isaiah 50:1 and 51:17-23

- ❓ *What disgrace have God's people experienced? Why?*

The Servant also experiences mockery—but he says, “I will not be disgraced” (50:7).

- ❓ *Why not (v 8-9)?*
- ❓ *How does he show his confidence in God's vindication (Isaiah 51:7-9)?*

## Marred and disfigured

### Read Isaiah 52:13-15

These verses lead up to what is perhaps the most famous passage in the book of Isaiah and one of the most famous passages in the entire Old Testament—Isaiah 53, the fourth and final “servant song”. This introductory stanza contains hints of the climax of the song, which we'll look at tomorrow.

- ❓ *How does 50:4-9 help us to understand what it means that the Servant “will act wisely” and “be raised and lifted up” (52:13)?*
- ❓ *How does 52:14 help us to understand why the Servant is mocked and spat at (50:6)?*

Think of Jesus hanging on the cross. The whips have pulled away his flesh until his bone is exposed. The crown of thorns has sent trickles of blood down his face. His weakened frame has collapsed under the weight of the cross. His face is harrowed by the inner anguish of his soul. As a result, he looks less than human.

Yet God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted him to the highest place.

## Salvation

In Isaiah 6:9 we learned that Isaiah's message would be preached to those who would hear, but not understand. But now that message kicks into reverse. People who have not heard will understand (52:15). People who never knew about God at all will be saved.

## Pray

Praise God for Jesus—who endured disgrace, not because of his own sins, but because of ours, and who was raised to life for our salvation (Romans 4:25).



# By his wounds

We've heard a lot about the faithful Servant who would redeem God's people. But how? Isaiah 53 makes it clear at last.

## Read Isaiah 53:1-12

The song is in five stanzas or sections. We already read the first stanza in Isaiah 52:13-15.

- ❓ *What would you say is the main theme of the second stanza (53:1-3)?*

Jesus was a human being just like any of us. There seemed to be nothing special about him. People despised him for it. They hung him on the cross, and the sight was so appalling that people hid their faces (v 3).

- ❓ *Why does it seem so unbelievable (v 1) that God's Servant should be like this?*

## Substitution

It looks like Jesus is being punished by God (v 4). But right at the heart of this song is this amazing truth: while it is true that Jesus is being punished by God, it is not for his sins but for ours (v 4-6).

- ❓ *How many times does Isaiah use the word "our" in these verses?*
- ❓ *What overall impression do you get of what we are like?*
- ❓ *What do we gain because of Jesus' suffering?*

The act these verses describe is the centre-piece of the Bible story, of our salvation, of the course of human history, of the hope of God's people. Everything turns on Jesus' amazing act of substitution at the cross.

## Like a lamb

- ❓ *What do verses 7-9 show about what the servant is like?*

Humanly speaking, Jesus' death was a blatant act of injustice. But in verse 10 it turns out it was the Lord's will—and therefore an act of perfect justice. Jesus wasn't taken unawares—this was the plan he and the Father made together, from the beginning (v 10). The resurrection is the glorious sign that the plan has worked and that justice has been served: our sins have been fully dealt with, and the innocent Jesus returns to life.

- ❓ *In what ways will the Servant be rewarded (v 10-12)?*
- ❓ *Why is Jesus' death on the cross an act of justice?*

## Pray

Read Isaiah 53 again.

- ❓ *What does each part of this passage tell you about yourself?*
- ❓ *What does it tell you about God?*

Spend time responding in prayer—confessing your sins and worshipping Jesus.

# The great reward

*Human beings don't get a good write-up in Isaiah 53. We're sinners, transgressors, rejecters. But look more closely and you start to see yourself in a different way altogether.*

## Re-read Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:10-12

At the end, the song circles back to where it started. Jesus is vindicated—"raised and lifted up and highly exalted" (52:13). He takes his seat on his throne at the right hand of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). He is victorious.

The result? The justification of many.

- ❓ *Who are the "many" in Isaiah 52:13-15 and 53:10-12?*
- ❓ *What do the "many" do? What happens to them?*

Sprinkling in Isaiah 52:15 is an act of purification (see Numbers 8:6-7). It means being saved and cleansed from sin.

## Jesus' portion

The word "great" in Isaiah 53:12 is a bit misleading. While the word can mean "great", it can also mean "many" or "numerous" (Exodus 1:7). That is what it has meant so far in this song. So this is not about the Servant cosying up to the great and the good. The "many" are "his offspring" and those whom he has justified (Isaiah 53:10-11). It also helps to realise that the words "give", "portion" and "divide" are all the same word in Hebrew. Put this all together and we get this more literal translation of 53:12:

"Therefore I will allocate many  
as an allocation to him  
and he will allocate the strong as plunder."

God does the allocating in the first half; the Servant's reward is us: God's people—you and me. God gives many people to Jesus.

## Our portion

The Servant does the allocating in the second half of the verse. Just like a triumphant king distributing the fruit of his success among his loyal retainers, Jesus distributes the rewards of his success among his people. Jesus invites us to share his victory.

What's our reward? At the moment we're besieged and beset by the world around us. In the West we're mocked and marginalised. Elsewhere in the world Christians are persecuted and imprisoned. But the strong don't win. We win! In fact, we've already won because Jesus has risen from the dead. The enemies of God did their worst, and it was not enough to overcome Jesus. They can do their worst to us, but nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35-39).

## Pray

- ❓ *What impact does it have on you to see that you are not just part of the reason for the cross, but also part of Jesus' reward for his suffering?*

Ask God to help you see yourself in the way he sees you. Pray for others too who may need to hear this message.



# A city and a bride

*What makes you feel beautiful, strong, secure or peaceful?*

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## Read Isaiah 54:1-17

Chapters 54 – 55 extend the idea of the “many” who are made Jesus’ “offspring”. In 54:1 Isaiah calls on a barren woman to sing because she is about to bear many children. It’s a picture of God’s barren people about to see many converts.

- ❓ *Why do you think God uses the image of a woman who has never had children? How does this image make you feel?*
- ❓ *What will God’s people need to do (v 2)?*

## My beloved

In verses 4-10 the metaphor of the barren woman is developed. Now God is addressing his people as his wife.

- ❓ *What is the history of this wife and husband (v 6-8)?*
- ❓ *What does that correspond to in the history of God’s people?*
- ❓ *But what does God promise his bride (v 4, 6, 8, 9-10)?*
- ❓ *How can God’s people be sure that he will keep this promise (v 9)?*

## A city of turquoise

Now the metaphor changes and God’s people are described as a city.

- ❓ *Where do we see the following themes in verses 11-17?*
  - Security

- Beauty
- Peace

## TIME OUT

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## Read Revelation 21:1-4, 9-11, 18-21, 22-27

- ❓ *How does the writer of Revelation pick up these same images and themes?*
- ❓ *What new promises are added?*

This passage in Revelation is describing our future. The church is God’s bride, the Holy City. The promises which God makes to his people in Isaiah 54 are also promises to us today. Jesus is preparing us as his bride to live with him for ever—and no one can take us away from him.

## Apply

- ❓ *How do you respond to this idea of being God’s bride? Does it make you see yourself any differently? Does it make you see God any differently?*
- ❓ *Is there anything you feel ashamed about? How does this passage help you not to be ashamed?*
- ❓ *Is there anything you feel afraid of? How does this passage help you not to be afraid?*

# Come to the waters

*It's not just you and me. One day the whole of creation will be joining in with God's redemption plan.*

Jesus took “the punishment that brought us peace” (Isaiah 53:5). In Isaiah 55 we see even more about what Jesus' death achieved—and it's joyful.

## Read Isaiah 55:1-2

- ❓ *What invitation goes out (v 1)?*
- ❓ *What is special about this purchase (v 1)?*
- ❓ *What's the alternative thing to buy (v 2)?*

## True satisfaction

Isaiah is calling us to turn from our empty, unsatisfying ways and find true satisfaction in God.

- ❓ *What things do you think people today seek satisfaction in? Why?*
- ❓ *How long do those things last?*

## Read Isaiah 55:3-13

- ❓ *What promises does God make (v 3-7, 12-13)?*
- ❓ *Compare those things to other potential sources of satisfaction. Why is God more satisfying than anything else?*

This is the call that comes to us today in the gospel. Jesus has paid the price for sin. Now we can freely take God's gifts to us, without cost. It's not just water, wine, milk and bread—it's life itself he offers us (v 3). He even promises to endow us with splendour so that people from all across the world will come running to us. As a result of Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection, we can now represent his rule in such a way that

it attracts those who aren't yet part of God's people.

## Fruitful words

### Read Isaiah 55:8-11

- ❓ *What is special about God's ways and thoughts?*
- ❓ *In what way are God's words like snow or rain (v 10)?*
- ❓ *How does this help us to trust in him?*
- ❓ *How does this link to the theme of satisfaction we saw earlier in this chapter?*

## Joy for ever

### Re-read Isaiah 55:12-13

There is so much joy in the redemption of humanity that even the created world will be caught up in it. This is the kind of world we are part of, thanks to Jesus—a world of joy, peace, and singing; a world of fruitfulness instead of hard thorns.

## Apply

- ❓ *Where do you tend to look for joy, peace, or satisfaction?*
- ❓ *What do you think it looks like to find those things in Jesus instead?*
- ❓ *What can you do practically to help yourself seek those things in him?*



# The prayers of faith

There are two prayers in this psalm that are intimately linked together. Let's get to grips with the first before we see how it produces the second.

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## Read Psalm 28:1-5

### Real praying

- ❓ *What is David's worry (v 1-2)?*
- ❓ *What's his remarkably honest plea (v 3-5)?*
- ❓ *But what is God most concerned with (v 5a)?*

It's easy to read the way David calls down judgment on his enemies as sheer vindictiveness, but that is to misunderstand it completely. David is the Lord's anointed one. So opposition to him is by definition opposition to the living God. And verse 4 outlines the basis of his call for judgment: it is what they deserve for their acts of evil.

### ▼ Apply

We often have to deal with frustrating people who seem to be out to wreck our purposes—whether that's the garage badly repairing your car, or those people at church who seem to hold back progress.

- ❓ *In what circumstances might it be legitimate to pray about them as David does in verses 4-5?*

## Just leave it

### Read Psalm 28:6-9

- ❓ *What is David absolutely convinced of (v 6)?*
- ❓ *So what is the nature of his prayer now?*
- ❓ *And how exactly does he feel now? How would you describe his mood?*

You've heard of a prayer of faith. This is a praise of faith. David's circumstances may not have changed—the smiling, polite, but malicious enemies of verse 3 are still there—but he praises God in trust that, having committed the matter to him, God will deal with it.

### ^ Pray

In practice, we find it less easy to “leave things with the Lord”. But continued worry about things we have prayed over can just be faithlessness in the power, intention and sovereignty of the living Lord, who holds both you and all evildoers in his hand.

Spend some time now in prayer for those who oppose the gospel.

Encourage yourself with the truth of verse 5, then—well, *you know what to do, don't you?*