

## Reading Schedule for November 26 – December 2, 2018

We are in the heart of Isaiah's message to Israel, offering them comfort, but also the consequences of their sins. There are several well-known verses in these chapters which I find very inspiring. Welcome to another contemplative week in the Book of Isaiah.

**November 26 – Isaiah 56:** “. . . to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever.” (v.5) If you ever wondered about how inclusive our God is, wonder no longer. There is a sense in the Old Testament that the Lord is specific in his promises to the Hebrews, and there's language that seems exclusive to them. But this is not true in the heart of God. Isaiah clearly proclaims the radical message that God's blessings are for all people. Whatever the race, social position, work or financial status of any person, God offers his blessings to those who receive his covenant. God has a yes, and anyone can match it with their yes and be a recipient of the grace of God. Isn't that how you understand it? God's arms are open wide to all who respond to him. How inclusive are you to the people you meet?

**November 27 – Isaiah 57:** “For this is what the high and exalted One says—he who lives forever, whose name is holy: ‘I live in a high and holy place, but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.’” (v.15) This is one of my favorites. It reminds me that God is drawn to those who are humble before him. Whenever I read about humility in the Bible, I always think of Moses. In Numbers 12:3 it says that Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth. But Moses was incredible and used by God in such amazing ways. Our God loves to lift up the lowly. He says that he binds up the brokenhearted. The Lord is for the underdog. The Bible encourages us to humble ourselves before God. How do you respond to this affirmation of humility?

**November 28 – Isaiah 58:** “‘Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?’” (v.6) This chapter is about the meaning of true fasting. True worship is more than religious ritual, or missing out on a meal, or having knowledge without love. Fasting had turned into a spiritual pecking order. Several times he talks about the meaninglessness of sacrifices without a true heart. This is the message that highlights this chapter. We do not impress God with our religious activity if it is void of genuine love and care for others. God says he wants our service to go beyond our personal growth, to acts of kindness, charity, justice and generosity. The kind of fasting he elevates is the fasting that gives up something for others, stands up for the broken, and serves the needy. Less of me and more for him, is the idea. How do you understand true fasting according to this chapter?

**November 29 – Isaiah 59:** “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” (v.2) I've known this verse since the beginning of my Christian life. It clearly states that my sin becomes a barrier to God's work in my life. An aspect of putting our faith in Jesus Christ is to confess our sins. Without his forgiveness, we remain indebted to sin. Separation from God is the issue, and will last forever apart from the grace of

Jesus Christ. Romans 3:9-20 reminds us that no one does good, not even one. We all are equal in our need. And apart from the cleansing work of Jesus Christ through his shed blood, we are hopeless. Let's not miss the importance of confession in our journey with Christ. Sin has a way of creating an obstacle, even for the believer. Let me remind you of 1 John 1:9 and the importance of confession and spiritual growth. I encourage you to slow down, ask the Holy Spirit to direct your thoughts, and to see if anything is getting in the way of your relationship with God.

**November 30 – Isaiah 60:** “Foreigners will rebuild your walls, and their kings will serve you. Though in anger I struck you, in favor I will show you compassion.” (v.10) Beginning in verse 6 we read about various people who represent obscure tribes, often hundreds of miles away from Israel. The promise is that the people would come to Jerusalem because God would be living there, and they would be attracted to his light. The promise to Abraham comes to mind, as we read in Genesis 12:3, “I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” The message of verse 11 says “Your gates will always stand open,” which again reminds us of the open door policy of our God. What aspect of this chapter encourages you? Why?

**December 1 – Isaiah 61:** “The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor . . .” (v.1) This is a very recognizable part of the Book of Isaiah. Jesus quotes these very words in Luke 4 as a reflection of his mission while on earth. I often mention the phrase, “bind up the broken-hearted,” but I'm also drawn to the statement, “they will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.” That is a very hopeful vision of people being established in the Lord so deeply, and with such great strength that they will not be moved. Oaks of righteousness means grand, fruitful, lasting and strong. Let me refer to Psalm 1:3, “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever he does prospers.” I love this passage because it does describe a life overflowing with joy, grace and compassion. It is our vision at New Harvest to be used by God so that many will overflow with the hopeful life that Christ offers. What inspires you in this chapter?

**December 2 – Isaiah 62:** “As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.” (v.5) I have read this phrase before, and I've always been inspired by it. God will rejoice over you with singing. God says his delight in his people will be like that of a bridegroom's delight in his bride. Isaiah explains that in God's great plan of salvation, he not only forgives his people, protects them, heals them, provides for them, restores them to their home, reconciles them to each other, transforms them so they are righteous, honors them, exalts them above all nations, and makes them a blessing to all nations as he called them to be . . . but more than all these things, he actually delights in his people. The love and grace of God is evident from Genesis through Revelation. It is who he is. What phrase or verse stood out to you the most in this chapter?

**PRAYER: Pray for this Advent season, that it truly would be a time of pursuing God and living by generosity and simplicity.**