



Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions on page 3.

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE
for the sermon preached on January 23, 2022
“Bad Religion – Heart Change – Promise Fulfilled”—Isaiah 58



We're all living in an in-between time right now—as families, as a nation, as a church. We're in-between a pre- and post-pandemic world. The life we used to know isn't coming back, but the new reality hasn't arrived yet—and we don't know when it will. This winter, we're looking back to another in-between time for God's people—the Babylonian exile—and remembering God's promises to them and to us through the prophet Isaiah. In a teaching series called Promiseland, we're learning that God's promises can not only see us through this in-between time, but prepare the way for better times to come.

Group Discussion Questions

Q – Pastor Tim began by referring to times when people have told him that they don't want anything to do with the church because of past bad experiences: “They might tell you that the place is really full of hypocrites. Or share a story where they were terribly judged. Or any number of stories that point to examples of bad religion.”

- Have you had similar conversations? Do you know people who have given up on church because of experiences of bad religion?
- How do you respond when people tell you about the ways they have been hurt or disappointed by the church? How do you *want* to respond?

Q – This week we're looking at Isaiah 58, and exploring the space between religion and grace. Start by inviting a member of the group to read Isaiah 58:1-2 out loud:

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.
 For day after day they seek me out;
 they seem eager to know my ways,
 as if they were a nation that does what is right
 and has not forsaken the commands of its God.
 They ask me for just decisions
 and seem eager for God to come near them”

- What stands out to you about these two verses? What is God saying about his people, Israel?

Q – Invite someone else to read Isaiah 58:3-5:

“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,
 ‘and you have not seen it?
 Why have we humbled ourselves,
 and you have not noticed?’

“Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please
 and exploit all your workers.
 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
 and in striking each other with wicked fists.
 You cannot fast as you do today
 and expect your voice to be heard on high.
 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
 only a day for people to humble themselves?
 Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
 and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
 Is that what you call a fast,
 a day acceptable to the Lord?”

- In v. 3, what does Isaiah says Israel does to express their faith in God?
- In vv. 4-5, what does God say is the problem? What are the specific behaviors God calls out?
- What is the result of these behaviors, in terms of the people’s relationship with God? What’s the heart of the matter?

Q – Now ask someone to read Isaiah 58:6-7 aloud for the group:

“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?
 Is it not to share your food with the hungry
 and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
 when you see the naked, to clothe them,
 and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

- Tim noted that “What God is calling for in Isaiah 58 is true heart change.” What does true heart change look like, according to these verses?
- What personal qualities should characterize the speech, behavior, and relationships of someone whose life has been transformed by Christ?
- What would a changed heart look like for you personally? As you listen to these verses from the prophet Isaiah, what might God be showing you in regard to living out your faith more authentically?

Q – Verses 8-14 contain a series of promises for what God will do if his people humble themselves and love others. Let’s read a few of these together:

v. 8: “Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.”

vv. 9-10: “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.
If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,
then your light will rise in the darkness,
and your night will become like the noonday.”

v. 11: “The Lord will guide you always;
he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land
and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden,
like a spring whose waters never fail.”

- What is God promising us here? How can you take comfort in these promises during times when you struggle to live out your faith in the way you would hope to?

How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.
- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don’t feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
 - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.