



## 2021 Kindred Series | Isaiah 54-60

### INTRODUCTION

The theme of our Kindred Series for this year is the gospel. Yes, the Gospel is a general theme, and all topics about our Christian faith are under this. However, it is different in this year's situation. After a one year global pandemic, the changes of our worship routine and normal church lives, the social unrest caused by racial conflicts, and the political storms related to the presidential election, our society is so divided. We are losing peace and unity by these dissensions, and, as Christians, our faith and body life is challenged. Now, people are tired, discouraged, and depressed, and we need healing. The gospel is the only solution, and returning to God's heart is the only choice that we have. The seven chapters of the book of Isaiah are just like the prophet shouting aloud to us today with the timely messages of God. In times of quarreling, it is hard for people to reach an agreement in any topic. However, this is also an opportunity to let us unite in the Word of God. When we put away our own agendas and listen to God, we will be healed, earn strength, and be able to witness the unity in this divided world.

– Pastor Alex Cui and Sean Liu

### STUDY GUIDE TEAM

The study guide for this year was prepared by a team composed of representatives for each of the partner churches. Equipped with notes and reflections on the Isaiah text and its themes generously provided by each of the Kindred pastors who will be preaching in this series, the team crafted a guide we hope will lead to deep, meaningful conversations about the challenges and opportunities of this time in the hope that we will face them together as brothers and sisters united in the sanctifying blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Our hope is that everyone who engages in this study will respond to the Holy Spirit's leading to draw closer to one another and to face the community in which we live with a renewed hope and desire to make a difference.

Jim Garras, Study Guide Team Facilitator (UPC), Angelique Collins (DIF), Sean Lui (ECC), Eckhart Chan (ECC) and Kristie Garras (UPC)



# KiNDRED INTERCHURH SMALL GROUP AGREEMENT

As a small group, we commit to follow these five practices as we participate in this Kindred Interchurch small group:

**Study the Word** We are transformed as we reflect and respond to the scriptures together. God's word prunes us and shapes us into people who will bear fruit.

**Worship the Lord** Worship is our grateful response to God's relationship with us. In small groups, we can worship by sharing how God is working in our lives, praying together, and even responding to God together.

**Care for each other** By caring, we can be a healing agent of the Lord. Listen with love. Pray for each other.

**Love our neighbors** "...for I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me..." Matthew 25:35. God invites us into His work by considering how we serve and love people beyond our group.

**Relate as friends** Celebrate life together, and cheer each other on in our spiritual growth and life milestones.

Meetings: Day of week \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm to \_\_\_\_\_ am/pm

We agree to help create a welcoming, safe atmosphere for fellowship by:

- **Maintaining confidentiality**
- **Listening well to one another, giving each person equal time to speak and to be heard**
- **Affirming each other and not correcting someone's comments**
- **Speaking respectfully of others**
- **Providing advice or accountability only if invited to do so, and then gently**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_





## **WEEK 1**

# **A FIRM PROMISE FROM A GRACIOUS GOD**

**Isaiah 54 | Pastor Alex Cui (ECC) | April 11, 2021**

## **INTRODUCTION**

After the humiliating adversity of being captured, the returned Israelites needed to heal and earn strength to rebuild the Holy City and move forward to a new era. The loving Lord promised His people with His healing and deliverance just as talking to a barren woman, a widow, or a deserted wife. He promised to be their husband, and His love would be with them forever. God promised that the Holy City would be decorated fabulously and would enlarge its territory to prepare for greater worship, because He is the God of all nations and worthy of worship from all peoples.

Today, we have experienced a whole year of suffering, just like the people of Israel after their trauma. The loving promise is also to heal us and build our faith. In human history, how many times have people seemed to enter dead ends without hope, but only to be delivered by God and see a new dawn? This is not by our own wisdom or luck, but rather by the grace of God.

## **READ ISAIAH 54**

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. How do you feel after experiencing the one-year pandemic, social unrests, and political storms? What are the scripture verses in chapter 54 that you find promising, comforting, and encouraging?
2. With the metaphors in vv. 16-17, how does the Lord assure us for the future? How do you earn your confidence from this assurance in our current situation?
3. How does verse 14 talk about righteousness/justice, tyranny/oppression, and terror/fear? What should be our goal for living out a godly righteous life in this unjust world?



## WEEK 2

### A COUNTERINTUITIVE INVITATION

Isaiah 55 | Pastor Chipo S. Johnson (DIF) | April 18, 2021

#### INTRODUCTION

Against the backdrop of an international pandemic, our nation has experienced a series of unsettling situations that have taken place in the last year—civil and social unrest; racial violence; economic instability; physical and mental turmoil. Many are overwhelmed by the vagueness and illusiveness of a permanent solution to address the multitude of calamities that have come upon us. Finding resolution for these problems becomes even more daunting when faced with the reality that ethnicity, culture, race, and historical systemic injustice continue to push the finish line further and further out of reach. God's invitation is an invitation to do that which is counterintuitive to us. Where we think we know the solution, we are being called to "Seek the Lord..." (Isaiah 55:6a) whose ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8).

#### READ ISAIAH 55

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is God offering in this scripture? Who is he offering these things to? What qualifies a person to receive these good things?
2. What 'us vs. them' separations are part of your identity? How can we avoid the traps of 'us vs. them' divisions even when we have the best intentions? See Luke 18:11 How has seeking to understand God's ways changed how you see yourself and others?
3. How can you be a part of restructuring conditions in our society that cause harm?



## WEEK 3

### ALL ARE WELCOME!

Isaiah 56 | Pastor James P. Broughton (DIF) | April 25, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 56 opens up the altar for all people to make an offering and emphasizes that all who believe are welcome. The conversation will be centered on the challenges to creating the church as envisioned in Isaiah, and our individual roles in bringing this vision to life.

Isaiah 56 is first about the inclusiveness Yahweh has created in the community of faith. Yahweh promises to bring the foreigner to the holy mountain, make them joyful in the house of prayer and deem their offerings and sacrifices as acceptable (56:7). Everyone's offering may look different, but the purpose is the same.

## READ ISAIAH 56

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Isaiah 56:7 begins with "Even those I will bring to My holy mountain...." What are some attributes of a mountain? Do you see those attributes/characteristics in your congregation? What distinguishes your congregation/sets it apart? Read Isaiah 1:17. What does this say about community engagement? How does the metaphor of the church as the 'mountain' fit into this?
2. Isaiah 56 grants all believers access to the innermost part of the temple to take sacrifices and offerings to the altar, effectively removing barriers. Today, we bring sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving. What barriers exist in today's church? How can we overcome these barriers and make it a place for all to praise? What barriers do we personally have to connecting with other believers?
3. Look at 1 Corinthians 10:4, 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Romans 1:16. How do each of these references line up with Isaiah 56? How do these scriptures inform how we operate as a church? How do they influence your actions as an individual?

**Scripture Cross-References:** Exodus 23:1-3, 6-8; Deuteronomy 19:18, 24:17; Micah 6:8; Matthew 19:11-12; 21:12-13; Galatians 3:27-29

**Resources:** Brueggemann, W. (1993). *Using Yahweh's Resources Wisely: Isaiah and Urban Possibility*. Presbyterian Publishing; Brueggemann, W. (1998). *Isaiah 40-66* (Westminster Bible Companion). Westminster/John Knox Press; Hanson, P. (1995) *Isaiah 40-66: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. John Knox Press; Motyer, A. (1993). *Isaiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*. InterVarsity Press; Oswalt, J. (2003). *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*. Zondervan Publisher



## WEEK 4

# THE OBSTRUCTION IN ME

Isaiah 57 | Pastor George Hinman (UPC) | May 2, 2021

## INTRODUCTION

Our own path to spiritual peace and to social peace leaves us crushed with exhaustion. After the spirituality of the culture leaves God's people lifeless, the true God promises to act decisively in a way that brings life to crushed hearts and to remove obstacles from people's way. Jesus breaks down the dividing wall between us and God and between all people and brings peace to the nations. Those who return to their redeemer find a humility that allows them to surrender their own (false and self-created) security and remove obstacles others face to peace (shalom).

## READ ISAIAH 57

The Hebrew word shalom is frequently translated into English as peace. However, our everyday sense of peace often just means an absence of violence, strife, or hostility. While the Hebrew notion of shalom certainly includes an absence of violence, strife, or hostility, shalom also means much more than this. In English, shalom is perhaps better translated as flourishing. This is because shalom is concerned with the wellbeing of all creation. It is the flourishing of all peoples, all creatures, and all creation in complete harmony with God, for shalom points beyond our obstructions to the way things ought to be.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The word "peace," or shalom, is mentioned three times in Isaiah 57 (vv. 2, 19, 21). How does the Hebrew notion of shalom differ from our everyday notions of "peace"?
2. What is the difference between racial diversity and racial justice? How can the difference between racial diversity and racial justice inform our understanding of shalom?
3. What things in your life do you hold on to for a sense of security? How might your walls of security be obstacles to racial justice?
4. Specifically, in the context of racial justice, what would it mean for your life to be oriented towards God's shalom?

**Resources:** BibleProject, "Shalom - Peace": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oLYORLZOaZE> ; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "The Gospel and Shalom": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QWoJ6pAsrpl> ; Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Jesus' Love Command and Shalom": <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IxVdHOuml4U> Willie Jennings, After Whiteness Soon-Chan Rah, Prophetic Lament, Esau McCauley, Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope, Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, Public Faith in Action, Eugene Cho, Overrated: Are We More in Love with the Idea of Changing the World than Actually Changing the World?



## **WEEK 5**

### **BACK TO THE HEART OF GOD**

**Isaiah 58 | Pastor Pastor Solomon Liu (ECC) | May 9, 2021**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Lord instructed His servant to shout aloud and called His people to repent and return to His heart. In the time of Isaiah and the time in visions of the Israelites returning to the Holy Land, people seemed to piously worship in the temple and fasted strictly, but they did not understand God's heart. God wanted His people to humble themselves and seek His acceptance. He wanted them to have merciful hearts and act justly. An expositor has pointed out the situation of the returned Israelites in the time under the rule of the Persian Empire, and he says, "The people are pious, and the temple is in use, but violence, dissension, oppression, and trouble testify to a lack of peace and blessing. The people do not understand why their pious acts of worship, which God recognizes, are not rewarded." (Watts, J. D. W. (2005). Vol. 25: Isaiah 34–66 (Revised Edition). Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.)

The scriptures in Isaiah chapter 58 were speaking to the people of Isaiah's time, were speaking to the returned Israelites under the rule of Persians, and are speaking to us today as well. Its central message is to call us back to His heart. YHWH is the God of justice, and He hates oppression, violence, quarreling and acting according to our own wills. He wants us to have merciful hearts and listening ears, put away our own agendas and seek to be acceptable to Him.

#### **READ ISAIAH 58**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What does God expect His people to do and to be by practicing fasting? What is the justice that God calls upon His people?
2. Why does God rebuke His people for their fasting, but at the same time He calls them for another religious practice: keeping the Sabbath? What is the common focus between the calling of doing justice and the calling of observing the Sabbath?
3. Today, in regards to social justice, people have many controversial propositions. What should we Christians do at this time in light of what we have learned from chapter 58?



## WEEK 6

### THE SALVIFIC HAND OF GOD

Isaiah 59 | Pastor Aaron Williams (UPC) | May 16, 2021

#### INTRODUCTION

Israel has alienated herself from God and the very spiritual practices that should draw them close to the heart of God are insufficient in and of themselves. Salvation, justice, righteousness has been compartmentalized by the nation of Israel when in fact they belong together – they all imply transformation. The scope of God’s divine intent is to not only save Israel, but to transform her into a holy nation. God is more concerned about the covenant relationship that the nation of Israel has with Him. They were called to be a Holy Nation and a Royal Priesthood. They have a reputation to uphold among the nations. They had wandered far from God and they didn’t even know it. They had become spiritually blind to the things of God. They thought that something was wrong with the hands or ears of God that made him fail to act on their behalf or respond to their prayers. The salvific hand of Yahweh and the sinful hands of humanity are irreconcilable. Israel must come clean with God if they want him to intervene. They must acknowledge their corporate sinfulness as a nation and repent if they truly want divine intervention. **Salvific:** Having the intent or power to save or redeem.

#### READ ISAIAH 59

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is God’s ultimate intention for His people? (See Isaiah 59:1) What difference does that make to your life today?
2. What practices and attitudes had Israel adopted that have separated them from God? (59:2-8) How do you see comparable attitudes and practices in your life today?
3. Isaiah confesses on behalf of God’s people in 59:9-15a. Which points of Isaiah’s confession seem particularly applicable today?
4. In Isaiah 59:15b–21 God intervenes in two distinct ways in response to what He observes in His people. What lessons do you draw personally from God’s intervention? How would you apply those lessons personally, in your church and in our city?





## **WEEK 7**

### **CELEBRATE THE GLORY OF GOD**

**Isaiah 60 | Joint Pentecost Worship Celebration | May 23, 2021**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In chapters 54-59 of Isaiah, God has been calling us to come close to Him and receive the blessings He has for us. God is calling us to reform our thinking and our ways to align with His ways. God is the God of all nations. In our groups we have had the opportunity to look at these things together. Now it is time to celebrate what we have learned and how we have grown together.

Not all groups will choose to meet for this seventh week. If your group does choose to meet, we hope you will take the time to celebrate the journey God has taken you on together over these weeks. Let Isaiah 60 serve as the backdrop for your celebration together.

#### **READ ISAIAH 60**

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Over the last 6 weeks, what have you learned about God?
2. What have you learned about yourself, your church, and your city?
3. What have you learned from other members in your group?
4. What next steps is God leading you to take?