



ISAIAH Session 4/5  
Isaiah chapter 58  
Faithworks

## To begin

Share your experiences with one another of how the teaching from last week has shaped your thoughts & actions in the past week.

## Opening prayer

- You might want to light a candle and then open this time together with the prayer below, or use your own.

God of all comfort,  
where we are stuck, release us,  
where we have given up hope, inspire us.  
Where we focus only on ourselves,  
help us to see the needs of others;  
transform us by your Spirit to be the people you have called us to be,  
spreading your love and proclaiming your presence throughout the world.  
We ask this through your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

## Hearing and understanding God's word

- **Ask someone in the group to read, or share the reading of Isaiah chapter 58**

The Israelites at this time were not slow to worship. They kept fasts and times of prayer. But, so they complained, God had not honoured their fast by answering their prayers (58.3). The prophet responds by pointing out the inadequacy of their fast. True worship demands more than words and ritual. God only accepts worship from people who strive for the wellbeing of the poor. The Israelites' fast has not had the desired result because they have oppressed their workers, quarrelled and committed acts of violence. They have used the courts to enslave the poor, as verses 6 and 9 are best understood. All of these acts were committed while they were keeping a fast to God.

The kind of self-denial that God desires is self-denial on behalf of others. God wants the people of Israel to free the oppressed and share their food with the hungry, their shelter with the homeless and their clothing with the poor. If they will do this, God will bless them and bring about their restoration.

Why do our prayers so often go unanswered? Why do our churches so often lack spiritual vitality? This passage provides an answer which may be difficult for Western people to accept. We may not be openly involved in exploiting the poor, but we, like our culture, practise self-indulgence. We do not make significant sacrifices for God, much less for the poor. Too often our gifts and acts of charity stop short of meaningful self-sacrifice. We give gifts so long as they do not jeopardize our lifestyle. We do not become involved in freeing the oppressed and feeding the hungry to the point that it damages our self-interest.

Isaiah is laying out a vision for a good society. His wisdom reminds us that our own fulfilment is bound up with our neighbours' wellbeing and how everyone in the community can become more healthy, healed and whole.

Other Bible passages relating to this theme which you might like to look at:

**Micah 6.8; Zechariah 7.10-11; Psalm 146.7-9; Jeremiah 29.7; James 2.14-16**

## Word and Spirit

In this study of Isaiah you are invited to let the Holy Spirit be your teacher, asking the Spirit to

1. highlight the scriptures
2. show you what you need to do
3. give you his strength to fulfil what he shows you

- **Reread Isaiah 58 ready to answer the following questions**

- How does the passage challenge our culture and the world we live in today?
- What does the passage reveal about God and the Gospel?
- How does this shape my understanding of what it means to be a disciple?
- Reading this in the light of where I have been today/this week

What do I notice? How am I challenged? How does it shape me?

Thinking together about this passage makes me want to pray that....and

- In the light of the discussion do I need to take any specific actions?

## Praying and acting on God's word

Who do you think is your neighbour in need? Can you think of an example both locally and further afield (overseas)? Or do you need to seek God's face as to whom He wants you to care for?

What action as an individual or as a group do you feel you need to take having discerned who it is God wants you to care for?

Spend some time in silence or out loud bringing to God in prayer the people or things you have just been talking about.

You might want to say together the prayer you began with and then blow the candle out to end the session.

## A reminder of suggestions for follow-up

Here are some ideas .....

Let Isaiah (who was so creative and imaginative) inspire a written prayer, a song or some instrumental music, a picture, painting, drawing, a poster or banner design, a card to give to someone to encourage them .... You might want to share it in your group.

A website to inspire: [www.craftivist-collective.com](http://www.craftivist-collective.com)

Films that catch something of the whole of Isaiah's message: 'Babette's feast' & 'It's a wonderful life'