



**ADVENT
A PROMISED SAVIOR**

**LIFE GROUPS
LEADER GUIDE
NOVEMBER 28 - DECEMBER 19, 2021**

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>A Promised Savior</i>
	NOVEMBER 28	21

THE PROMISED LIGHT

ISAIAH 9:1-7

NOVEMBER 28, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Isaiah 8:19-22 and 9:1-7. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: THROUGH THE PROPHET ISAIAH, GOD URGED HIS PEOPLE TO TURN TO HIM FOR LIGHT IN DARK TIMES. HE PROMISED TO SEND LIGHT THAT WOULD PROVIDE HOPE FOR ETERNITY.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: TURN TO GOD AND HIS WORD TO BRING LIGHT TO THE DARKNESS IN YOUR LIFE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS MESSIAH SPOKEN OF BY ISAIAH.

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 When was a time you were in need of a flashlight?
- 2 What feelings do you associate with darkness?

Our world seems to be a dark place these days. We live each day under the clouds of threats to our families, our homes, and our futures. How can we find our way through all this and more? God wants us to find light for living through His Word, and ultimately, through His Son. Only then can we have a genuine and trustworthy hope for the eventual end of despair.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 8:19-22.

The Israelites feared destruction at the hands of their enemies. Isaiah preached during a time when the king of Israel (Pekah) had made a pact with the king of Aram (Rezin). They both wanted to overthrow the king of Judah, Ahaz (Isaiah 7:1-9). Isaiah prophesied to Ahaz that he should not fear these two, but should look for God's deliverance (Isaiah 7:10-25). The plot of Israel and Aram against Judah led God to bring judgment upon them through the attack of the Assyrians (Isaiah 8:1-17). Because many people did not want to hear the truth of God's judgment, they turned to spiritists and the occult to tell them the message they wanted to hear (Isaiah 8:18-22).

Israel's problem, and ours, was like a man standing at his refrigerator. Opening the refrigerator door lightens the dark kitchen at night, but unless that man drinks or eats, he won't get what he came for—he'll stay hungry or thirsty. We need light to shine in our darkness, but we also need to ingest spiritual sustenance in our lives.

- What marks those who walk in the light?
- What marks those who walk in darkness?
- What could the people expect if they did not turn to God for direction?

Because the people did not turn to God for direction and hope, their dark times would continue. Only God can bring light.

- How would the behavior of those described in verses 8:21-22 have been different if they had walked in the light? What impact might that have made on the people and circumstances around them?
- What do people often look toward to try and find hope for the future? When and how can these things lead to darkness?

Notes:

Placing hope in our own abilities, earthly relationships, the assumed pleasures of disobedience, empty philosophies, or other ideas that do not line up with the truth of God's Word ultimately lead people into uncertainty and despair. Turning to the Lord during times of fear and uncertainty, rather than to some other source of promised security apart from Him, is the sign of a vibrant faith. A worldview shaped by ungodly or purely humanistic influences offers no such hope, only further darkness and gloom. Only a worldview shaped by the truth of God's Word sheds the inextinguishable light of hope on those who obey the truth of that Word.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 9:1.

- The end of chapter 8 presents a distressing and dark picture. As a result, what does the word "Nevertheless" in verse 9:1 indicate instead?
- What did God promise in verse 1?

Despite their sinful disregard for God, He promised to show great kindness to the Israelites, bringing light to His people who were lingering in or continually returning to darkness. Through the prophet Isaiah, God promised His people that

the gloom of their distressed land would come to an end and that God would ultimately bring honor to the whole land. Here Isaiah fixed his eyes toward the hope of the future and away from Assyria's imminent attack. Isaiah saw a reversal in circumstances that God's grace would one day work for His people.

Notes:

God had humbled Zebulun and Naphtali because of their sin. However, despite that sin, their future would be redeemed. God would bring honor to the lands that experienced the gloom of dishonor in their defeat and deportation by the Assyrians.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 9:2-5.

In these verses, Isaiah saw the present dire circumstances reversed. He looked past the present despair of the people and saw God and His sovereign plan to bless His people. Living in God's light produces a joyous hope that enables believers to meet all of life's circumstances with submission, obedience, and trust that stem from their knowledge of and belief in His faithfulness and character.

- Read Matthew 4:13-16 to see how Jesus's ministry in Galilee perfectly fulfilled this prophecy.

Any Jew familiar with his Bible would have recognized Matthew's quote of Isaiah 9:1-2 and made the connection to the remaining unquoted portion in 9:3-7, including the promised birth of the child whose name would be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (v. 6). By quoting Isaiah 9:1-2, Matthew clearly identified Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.

- Read Jesus's declaration in John 8:12. According to John 8:12, who will never walk in darkness, but instead have light? What does it mean to follow Christ?

If we follow Jesus Christ, we can be certain our future will be bright with His light, regardless of our circumstances.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 9:6-7.

Notes:

Isaiah 9:6 provides the answer to how God's promises in Isaiah 9:1-5 would be accomplished. The verse provides the answer as to what the great light (v. 2) would be—He would come in the form of a child. “Child is born” points to His humanity; and “the son is given” points to His deity. God promised an end to Israel's despair—not through powerful armies, but through a Child! Jesus was the ultimate fulfillment of Isaiah's Immanuel sign (7:14).

- What titles are given for the Messiah in verse 6?

- What do His four titles signify for us today?

Use the commentary to help explain what each title means. Wonderful Counselor reveals that His wisdom transcends mere human wisdom. He is independent of anyone else for advice. As Mighty God, He possesses all the power of God and acts for the good of His people. This Child is not just another Israelite king; He is the Everlasting Father whose reign lasts forever. As the Prince of Peace, He brings peace between God and people. Peace is more than cessation of war. The Hebrew word translated peace means to be both safe and sound. Thus the word refers to prosperity in general, as opposed to sorrow and war. In biblical thought, a person's name implies the basic character of that individual. Jesus would be called these names because He would actually be this kind of person.

- Which of the titles is the most meaningful to you now and why?

- Read verse 7 again. What kind of ruler would this Child be? How does this affect our future?

Notes:

- How do the implications of these verses in Isaiah extend beyond just the promise of the Child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas? How do they encourage and comfort us today?

God gave the amazing promise in these verses to Israel, despite their disobedience and their deserved rejection. God would bring Israel a King to secure their full and lasting blessing. This child would conquer and rule over all. The people of Israel surely rejoiced at Isaiah's words. Consider how much more we can rejoice as we look back knowing Jesus has come! He died, rose, and brought salvation for all who trust in Him. Ultimately, Christ will reign as Lord over all, and every tongue will acknowledge Him as Lord (Philippians 2:11). In response, we are called to live in His light, not in darkness, trusting and hoping in His sovereignty, glory, and goodness.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

We celebrate Christmas because God entered our world in the form of a man—Jesus. The meaning of Christmas becomes personal and real to us when we allow Jesus to enter our lives as Savior and Lord.

- Is Christ at the center of your Christmas celebration this year?
- More importantly, are Christ and the advancement of His kingdom the most important things in your life right now?
- If so, what evidence could you give to support your answer based on words, priorities, and actions? Would others say the same? If He's not, what needs to change?

PRAY

Lead your group in prayer that Jesus would be at the center of our celebrations and remain the center of our lives.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - What evidence do you see that Jesus's reign is increasing in your life?
 - How are you keeping Jesus at the center of your Christmas celebrations?
 - What can you do to point others toward the greatest news and excitement of the season—that God is with us here on earth?

 - > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

 - > The challenge to memorize Isaiah 9:6.

 - > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Isaiah 11:1-9.
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ISAIAH 9:1-7

9:1. This verse is in prose and concludes chapter 8 in the Hebrew text, while verses 2-7 are poetry and begin a new section with hope as the theme. The first verse joins the previous picture of darkness with the light that follows. To do so, it contrasts the former situation with the new hope. The Assyrians had annexed both the northeastern (Naphtali—Josh. 19:32-39) and the northwestern (Zebulun—Josh. 19:10-16) portions of the Northern Kingdom in 732 B.C. The prophet, stepping out of his Jerusalem context for a moment, spoke a word of hope to the North. A new day was coming. Isaiah used Assyrian geographical divisions—way of the sea, land beyond/along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles (nations)—to depict a new glory. The basis of this glory is explained in verses 2-7. Geoffrey W. Grogan notes: “These lands, the first to feel the ominous tread of the warrior’s boot (v. 5), would be the first to see the new and great light God would focus on Israel (cp. 60:1-3). Matthew rightly saw the fulfillment of this in the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (Matt. 4:15-16; cp. Luke 1:79; John 8:12; cp. John 7:52 with its reference to Galilee)” (Grogan, EBC, commentary on Isaiah 9:1).

Notes:

9:2-5. A song of thanksgiving joins harvest and military language to praise a new act of God. The reason for rejoicing is not just military victory, but eternal peace, because uniforms become fuel for the fire. This future act is guaranteed by the event that has actually happened—the birth of a son.

9:6-7. These verses contain a royal birth announcement. For once the prophet and king stood together, rejoicing over the happy event. A touch of irony appeared in the prophet’s voice as he looked at the baby and described Israel’s hope for peace. Such hope lay not in the baby’s royal father. Nor did the hope of the nation lie in the baby as the father hoped. Even in joining the royal family’s thanksgiving, the prophet succeeded in condemning Ahaz.

The psalms show us that the names used for the new baby belong to the Judean understanding of kingship. The king devised plans and counsel which were too wonderful for men, almost like God (cp. 2 Sam. 16:23), because ultimately God is the Wonderful in counsel. Mighty God or “heroic God” (author’s translation) reflects the thinking behind Psalm 45:6, where the Hebrew text addresses the king as “god.” This reflects the respect and authority due the king as distinguished from other men and his closeness to Yahweh, the only God. Psalm 2:7 shows that the king was adopted as son of God when he ascended the throne (see Ps. 89:26-27). Thus Mighty God, which belongs only to God in its real meaning, can be transferred to the obedient king. Everlasting Father is yet another divine attribute used among the traditional royal titles. Prince of Peace reflects the role of the king in all areas of the nation’s life. Peace is more than the opposite of war. It is a sense of personal well-being. It is also material prosperity. It is the complete life of fulfillment and hope. Would this baby, the new king, truly be the Father of his country rather than the servant of Assyria? The king and people certainly hoped so, and they heard the prophet saying so.

Notes:

But the prophet had a longer view. This baby might improve greatly on the work his father was doing, but he would not live up to God’s expectations of his king. “The description of his reign makes it absolutely clear that his role is messianic. There is no end to his rule upon the throne of David, and he will reign with justice and righteousness forever.... The language is not just of a wishful thinking for a better time, but the confession of Israel’s belief in a divine rule who will replace once and for all the unfaithful kings like Ahaz” (Childs, Brevard. *Isaiah*. OTL. Westminster/John Knox, 2001, p. 81).

9:7. Such lasting peace was dependent upon a king whose chief goals are justice and righteousness. Justice is the center of the prophetic demand on the people of God. But the same Hebrew word also means the law which establishes justice (Isa. 26:9), the correct teaching (28:26), and the judgment which enforces the law (4:4). Justice ultimately does not rest on human law or judgment, but

upon the nature of God (5:16). The prophetic hope rests not on the power of the new king, but upon the zeal of the Lord Almighty.

Ahaz's new baby did not fill the prophetic demands. Nor did any other occupant of David's throne. The people of God had to wait over seven hundred years for Jesus of Nazareth, who did fulfill and even surpass such expectations. He did not bring all to immediate fulfillment, but he set his followers on a course of expectation, looking to the final coming of the Prince of Peace. These events were backed by the zeal of a jealous God who would defeat all his end-time enemies and establish justice and righteousness forever.

Notes:

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>A Promised Savior</i>
	December 5	21

TO CHANGE THE WORLD

ISAIAH 11:1-9

DECEMBER 5, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Isaiah 11:1-9. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: JESUS, THE PROMISED MESSIAH, CAME TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD AND RESTORE GOD'S PEOPLE.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: WE RECOGNIZE THE WORLD NEEDS CHANGE BUT SOMETIMES LOSE HOPE THAT CHANGE WILL EVER TAKE PLACE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS THE SHOOT FROM THE STUMP OF JESSE, THE PROMISED SAVIOR OF THE WORLD (ROMANS 15:8-12).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 What is one change in the world you would like to see take place, but don't think it will?
- 2 What would have to happen for that change to take place?
- 3 What is something you have personally seen or experienced that you had previously considered a long shot? What happened?

After living just a short time on this earth, many of us learn to lower our expectations. Circumstances disappoint us, people disappoint us, and even many of our own convictions turn out to be misplaced.

Isaiah 10 and the beginning of Isaiah 11, then, make sense to us, because we see a picture of a forest full of tree stumps made by God cutting the lofty down low including even His own people. It is a picture of crushed expectations. Any sort of change looked like a long shot, but there was one stump, the stump of Jesse that would make a spectacular comeback. Israel would produce a shoot through whom the entire tree would flourish. This is the reason we can have hope and expectation: Jesus has come and will come again to change the world.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 11:1-5.

- What expectations did Isaiah have for the shoot of Jesse?
- What do you think is significant about the “shoot,” “stump,” and “branch” language within the book of Isaiah?
- Read Isaiah 61:1 and Luke 4:18. Who did Jesus see as the fulfillment of Isaiah 11:1?

Jesse was David’s father (see 1 Samuel 16:1-13), so a reference to Jesse identified the figure to come from the same family as David. The Davidic covenant is important because in it God promised that a son of David would build the Lord’s house and his throne would last forever (2 Samuel 7:8-16). Throughout the Bible, a connection to David is synonymous with a connection to the Messiah. In Isaiah 10:33-34, Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would “chop off branches,” cut down “tall trees,” and clear “the thickets of the forest with an ax.” What was left after God’s judgment of the larger brush was the shoot, stump, or branch representing a faithful minority, the remnant, from which the Messiah would eventually emerge.

- Which of these characteristics listed in Isaiah 11:1-5 stand out to you the most? Why?

- Consider each quality one by one. Why do we need these in the world today?

Notes:

- What about in our individual lives? Based on these descriptions, what changes does Jesus bring to our lives?

With wisdom and understanding, counsel and might, knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the shoot of Jesse would have all the qualities needed to bring the stump back to life, back from its rebellion to right relationship with God. Because Christ's delight is in the Lord and not in man, He is just, not basing His judgments on appearance or the opinions of others. In Isaiah 11, we see references to both the first (v. 1-4a) and second (v. 4b) coming of Christ (see also 2 Thessalonians 2:8).

- Why do you think there is an emphasis on the Spirit of the Lord in the passage? How does this relate to the title "Messiah"?

- Why is having the Lord's presence crucial for doing the Lord's work of bringing change to the world?

The word *Messiah* means "anointed one," which connotes the Spirit empowering someone for a particular office or task. David, for instance, was anointed with the Spirit in 1 Samuel 16:13 when Samuel affirmed him as Israel's next king. The "Spirit of the LORD" is also said to come upon others appointed to office or specific tasks (see Exodus 31:1-6; Numbers 11:17, 25-29; Judges. 14:6, 19; 15:14; 1 Samuel 10:10; 11:6). After the Spirit of the Lord is introduced in verse 2, the rest of the verse presents a threefold repetition about the Spirit's competence to empower the Messiah for His task of ruling in righteousness.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 11:6-9.

- What do you find most striking about the behavior of the various animals described in verses 6-9?
- Beyond all the symbolic language, what was Isaiah's greater point?
- In what ways can the statement in verse 9, "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea," be considered God's purpose throughout the entire Bible? Where else is this thread woven through Scripture?

Notes:

God's mission for humanity and the world was for His image bearers to bear fruit, multiply, and fill the earth (Genesis 1:26-28). In turn, by ruling and filling the earth they would reflect God's character and spread the knowledge of Him across the whole creation over which God has given them dominion. In the Messiah—who possesses the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord (Isaiah 11:2)—we see God's purposes for humanity perfectly fulfilled when His rule reaches the entire world. He is the central focus of the grand narrative of Scripture.

- How might readers of Isaiah have misunderstood his words as applying to military peace? How might we misunderstand the peace Jesus brings today?
- Read Isaiah 65:17, 25. When will the events of Isaiah 11:6-9 take place?

- How does verse 9 inform you of the reason for this radically new earth, where destructive forces are gone?

Notes:

These verses beautifully illustrate the pervasive peace of Christ's global kingdom. When the earth is filled with the knowledge of God, even animals will behave according to that knowledge. The reign of the King, as evidenced by the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord, is such a powerful force that it changes everything.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- How might you pursue the peace Christ offers in the turmoil of life this week?
- In light of Isaiah 11, what sort of change should we embody in the world as followers of Jesus?
- Why should the promise that the Messiah will reign over the nations motivate us all the more to take the gospel message to the nations?

PRAY

Thank God for being bigger than our expectations. Thank Him for sending Jesus, the promised Savior, to bring the change in this world we so desperately need. Ask Him to give you opportunities to share this hope you have with others this week.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - How does Isaiah 11 change your perspective this Christmas season?
 - Who is someone you know whose hopes and expectations about life have been crushed? How can you use those circumstances to share the hope of the gospel with him or her?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize John 14:27.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Isaiah 42:1-9.

ISAIAH 11:1-9

11:1. Judgment in Isaiah is often described as a cutting down of trees (6:13; 10:33-34). The stump of Jesse indicates that the Davidic line has also been cut down, but the tree is yet living. The shoot that springs up shows that David's line will have new life. It will be restored and will once again bear fruit. The association of the stump with Jesse rather than David indicates that there is a new beginning here, a going back to origins, and a distancing from the later corrupt kings of Judah. The continuation of the Davidic line is an indication of the grace of God based on the covenant of kingship with David: "Your house and kingdom will endure before Me forever, and your throne will be established forever" (2Sam 7:16). As redemptive history progressed, the new Davidic dynasty was not realized in later Davidic descendants like Zerubbabel (Ezr 3; Zech 4), but in Jesus Christ.

Notes:

11:2. The shoot is different in character than other descendants of David, most of whom were self-seeking, fearful, and cruel. The Spirit of the Lord will characterize this descendant. The Spirit will fill this leader with wisdom: the ability to rule, and strength: the power to rule. Scripture makes it clear that the Spirit brings wisdom (Ex 31:3; Dt 34:9) and that wisdom leads to productive and just rule (1Ki 4:29; Pr 8:15-16).

11:3. The fear of the Lord is the basic characteristic of a wise, godly person (Pr 1:7). The fear described here is not terror but awe. This wise, Spirit-filled person will not judge according to external appearances, but he will cut to the heart of the truth.

11:4. The wicked kings of Israel and the Near East exploited and took advantage of the weak (the poor and the oppressed), but this king will rule with justice and protect their rights.

11:5. The term translated belt (Hb 'ezor) refers to an intimate piece of apparel. The idea is that these two fundamental characteristics of covenant fidelity will be an integral part of the future Davidic king's character.

11:6-9. The future rule is described in Edenic terms where there is no animosity among God's creatures. The knowledge of the Lord will permeate this future ideal world ushered in by the shoot of the stump of Jesse.

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>A Promised Savior</i>
	December 12	21

TO ESTABLISH JUSTICE

ISAIAH 42:1-9

DECEMBER 12, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Isaiah 42:1-9. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: GOD'S PROMISED SAVIOR, EMPOWERED BY THE DIVINE SPIRIT, COMES TO MAKE RIGHTEOUSNESS AND JUSTICE PREVAIL FOR THE NATIONS.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: THOSE WHO BELONG TO CHRIST DESPERATELY NEED TO REMEMBER HIS PURPOSES IN THE WORLD AND, BY HIS POWER, LIVE THEM OUT.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS CHRIST CAME TO BRING LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES, OPEN EYES THAT ARE BLIND, AND FREE CAPTIVES FROM PRISON (LUKE 4:18).

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 What injustice in the world breaks your heart?
- 2 How do you deal with it when you are confronted by injustice: try to do something to help, feel helpless, try not to dwell on it because it's overwhelming, pray, or something else?
- 3 Why should a Christian approach the topic of social justice differently than a non-Christian?

As a church community, we believe that the power behind us is greater than the task ahead. Isaiah 42 gives us a glimpse of this power as it points to Jesus, the promised Savior, who came to establish righteousness and justice for all people.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 42:1-4.

- Who is the servant God referenced in this passage?

Bible scholars have debated about Isaiah's understanding of the identity of the Lord's servant (42:1). Some believe he understood it to be the people of Israel, a purified remnant of that people, a king, or the prophet himself. However, New Testament writers affirm that whether or not Isaiah was fully aware of it in his day, the servant's character, activity, reception, and mission were fulfilled ultimately in Jesus Christ.

- How is Jesus described here?

Notes:

- Which of these descriptors stands out to you the most? Why?
- How has Jesus begun the work of restoration in the world?

The first coming of the Messiah looked much different than what people expected. Matthew quoted these verses in Matthew 12:18-21 in the context of two healings. In the first, Jesus restored the withered hand of a man on the Sabbath (Matthew 12:9-14). In the second, He cast a demon out of a blind and mute man, allowing him to speak and see (v. 22). Jesus's compassion on these men illustrates the calm meekness of the Messiah who brings justice. His compassionate demeanor reflects the quality of His justice. His perseverance in establishing justice over the whole earth also reflects the quality of that justice. This is our hope as we pursue justice today. We have no need to rise and fall with the issues that confront us. Jesus Himself, the risen Christ, will bring justice to the nations. He will not rest until true justice is established.

What great comfort we can take in trusting that God will "faithfully bring forth justice." He won't brush aside the bruised and the hurting. He won't disregard the small and insignificant. He won't be stopped. He will steadily and firmly set things right! As those who know the brokenness of the world well, we can expectantly wait for the fulfillment of His promise that has already begun in His servant.

- How should the coming justice of Christ impact our view of and engagement in social justice now?

- How much would you say you believe a few people can change the world by God's power? How does your life reflect this?

Notes:

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 42:5-7.

- What do we learn about God in verse 5?

- Why do we need this reminder today?

Isaiah quoted a familiar hymn that praised God as Creator of the heavens and the earth as well as the only source for breath and life for all people. This confirmed the promised Savior's power and importance for all people everywhere.

We can be sure that the God who created the world and gives breath to those in it will one day execute His justice once and for all, and He will not be ignored (Isaiah 42:11-14). But for a time, God's justice is administered through the quiet and restrained King. The Messiah's work is indescribably good, yet undeniably just (Matthew 21:44).

- Which of the promises about Jesus in verses 6-7 stand out to you the most personally? Why?

When Jesus came to earth as a man, fully human, He knew the ministry to which God had called Him and lived to fulfill that ministry. As He did, He had certain promises from God upon which He could find courage to continue, even when circumstances were most difficult. Isaiah 42:6-7 is one such promise from God to Jesus, made hundreds of years before Jesus ever left heaven to come to earth.

Throughout Jesus's ministry on earth, God would be with Him, holding His hand in every moment. God would lead Jesus in righteousness to fulfill the purpose to which He had called Him—to bring salvation to all people. He would use Jesus to do miraculous works of physical and spiritual healing, bringing sight, restoration, and freedom to those who felt the bondage of sin and darkness.

Notes:

- What does it mean that God called Jesus “in righteousness”?
- Where do you see God's promise of justice in verses 6-7?
- What does righteousness have to do with justice?
- How would Isaiah's message give hope to Jews who lived their entire adult lives as a captive people in Babylon?

God's promise to send His servant would be a welcome message for the people of Israel who would endure 70 years as captives in Babylon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. In Psalm 137:1-4, we get an idea of the grief and discouragement the people would experience during the Babylonian exile. The Lord's chosen servant would be empowered by the Spirit to “bring justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). His cause would be righteous (42:6), and he would bring deliverance to the captives (42:7).

And Jesus did live out those promises! Each one was fulfilled in the life and work of Jesus; furthermore, they are meant to also be fulfilled in us today (John 17:18).

- In what ways is God's calling on our lives the same as His calling for Jesus?

Notes:

The Creator God who controls history has sent His Servant to create a righteous community that cares for the feeble and forgotten. Those who belong to Christ are called to fulfill God's purposes on earth through the ministries He sets before us. As we walk in that calling, we can also find strength, courage, and confidence from God's promises.

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Notes:

- Why do you think the Messiah's justice is an often overlooked promise among those looking forward to the full establishment of His reign?
- Does the Messiah's justice comfort you? Frighten you? Encourage you? Challenge you? Explain.
- What would it look like for God's people to be committed to His righteousness and justice in the world? How can we as a group do better in this?

PRAY

Thank Jesus for coming to establish justice and righteousness for all people. Thank Him for His promise to equip you with His power and presence to carry out His purposes in the world. Ask the Spirit to remind you daily of these promises so you might faithfully walk in Christ's righteousness.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - How is the picture of justice in Isaiah 42 different from what most people typically understand a person of justice to be?
 - What might hold some believers back from leading out on issues of social justice? How does this week's passage speak to those hangups?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize Isaiah 42:1.

- > The text for next week's study, so group members can read it in anticipation of next weekend: Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

ISAIAH 42

42:1. This is the first of four “Servant Songs” in Isaiah 40-55 (49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). Here God formally presented the servant to an audience, although both the name of the servant and the nature of the audience remain mysteriously unclear. We do not have to find answers to all our questions about the servant. We need to understand that he is God’s chosen one, God takes great delight in him, and God upholds or supports him.

Notes:

The servant’s mission surprised Israel and it surprises us. His mission was not to deliver Israel from captivity and exile. The mission was for the nations. The servant gained power for his mission from the divine Spirit just as earlier rulers and prophets had. The servant’s task was to bring justice to the nations. Justice involves a much broader meaning than the English term. In verse 4 it stands parallel to Torah, law or teaching. It is the verdict handed down by a judge (2 Kings 25:6); the whole court process (Isaiah 3:14); the gracious and merciful judgment of God (Isaiah 30:18); or the natural right and order claimed by a person or group of persons (Exodus 23:6).

In our text, the term for the servant’s mission apparently encompasses a broad meaning. It refers to the natural world order and the rights expected by the nations of the earth within that order. God restores that order with its natural rights through his gracious and merciful judgment on the basis of his law or teaching.

42:2-4. The way the servant was to accomplish his task is also surprising. He would not be a street preacher or political rebel inciting the population, nor a royal messenger reading the king’s proclamations. The servant had been given royal power by the divine King. Yet he would exercise that power in such a way that he would not damage anything—not even a broken reed that appears useless or a wick so used up it could no longer produce fire.

Still, the servant would succeed. The word for faithfulness should be translated “he will bring to reality” with an

undertone of “lasting, enduring,” implied. Justice would prevail! The servant would not suffer the fate of the useless utensils of verse 3. He would report to his King, “Mission accomplished.” Matthew saw the fulfillment of the first servant song in the healing ministry of Jesus (Matthew 12:17-21). The meek and mild Savior showed the world the meaning and hope of world justice even as he suffered under the injustice of his own people and a foreign government.

Notes:

42:5. Having introduced the servant to the audience, God spoke directly to the servant through a prophetic oracle. He began by quoting a familiar hymn that praised him as Creator of the heavens and the earth as well as the only source for breath and life among earth’s inhabitants. This confirmed the servant’s power and importance for all people everywhere.

42:6-7. God then confirmed his servant in the high office. This was done in righteousness. Such a statement does not repeat the obvious—that God is righteous. Rather, it defines the power given to the new official. God gave him the power to restore the right in the world—that is, to bring salvation. He could do this because God will take hold of your hand. The translation and meaning of keep you remains uncertain. It may mean “I have formed you” (NAB, REB), “shaped you” (NJB), or “created you” (JPS). Or more likely it may simply mean “will watch over you” (NASB). God’s purpose for the newly installed servant was clear. He represented God’s covenant, God’s promise to the nations to bring light into their darkness. This is help for the helpless—sight for the blind, freedom for the prisoner.

42:8-9. The tone changes suddenly. God reminded the newly installed servant that he had limits. Yahweh alone must receive proper honor and praise. Worship of other gods or their images was forbidden. Why? Because God had proven himself to be God through his acts in history and he would do so again through the servant. He had done former things, including the exodus from Egypt, and he would do new things, such as the delivery from

exile. The you of verse 9 is plural, not singular, so that God's announcement and warning (v. 8) are applied not just to the servant but to a larger audience—the people of God who have sung the hymn of verse 5 in their worship for many years.

The major question remains unanswered: Who was this servant commissioned by Yahweh? At one time, it may have had a definite historical reference. Commentators have often thought of Cyrus (44:28) and of the nation Israel or a remnant within the nation. But within the written Scripture it became a promise of God's future actions through a people or an individual who would accept the commission of God. Jesus of Nazareth is the God-man who has taken such a commission seriously and brought it into reality. For Christ's followers, the Servant Songs are challenges again to be the people of God, using Jesus as the model servant whom we are to follow.

Notes:

LIFE GROUPS	TEACHING PLAN	
	FW	<i>A Promised Savior</i>
	DECEMBER 19	21

THE SUFFERING KING

ISAIAH 52:13–53:12

DECEMBER 19, 2021

TEACHING PLAN

PREPARATION

- > Spend the week reading through and studying Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Consult the commentary provided and any additional study tools (such as a concordance or Bible dictionary) to enhance your preparation.
- > Determine which discussion points and questions will work best with your group.
- > Pray for your pastors, the upcoming group meeting, your teaching, your group members, and their receptivity to the study.

HIGHLIGHTS

TAKEAWAY: ISAIAH PRESENTED TWO COMPLEMENTARY PORTRAITS OF THE COMING MESSIAH—HE WOULD BE AN EXALTED RULER WITH UNPARALLELED POWER AND WISDOM AND A HUMBLE SERVANT WHO WOULD BEAR THE GRIEF AND SORROW OF SINNERS. THOUGH THESE TWO REPRESENTATIONS MAY SEEM CONTRADICTORY, THE BIBLE HOLDS THEM TOGETHER IN UNITY.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT: THE EXALTED KING OF THE UNIVERSE WAS ALSO A SERVANT WHO STOOPED TO SERVE HIS PEOPLE.

GOSPEL CONNECTION: JESUS IS THE KING WHO SUFFERED IN OUR PLACE

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to help get the conversation going.

Notes:

- 1 Do you have a boss, or do you work for yourself? How did you or your supervisor reach their position?
- 2 What degree of appreciation does your boss have for what you do, or what degree of appreciation do you have for people working under you if you are a supervisor? How did you grow this sense of appreciation?
- 3 What does it mean when someone says a job is “below their pay grade”? What attitude does this convey?

One of the pressures felt in American culture is the disconnect between working people and their—at times distant and disconnected—supervisors. That’s not to say this describes all workers, managers, and workplaces, but it does highlight the need to dialogue and reach a common understanding.

One of the unique aspects of the Christian gospel is that the disconnect between leader and servant does not exist because Jesus filled both roles. One of the controversies about the Christian gospel is that Jesus was a different kind of Messiah than the Jewish leaders expected. They wished for a political ruler and felt as though Jesus did not live up to this calling. Yet the same prophet who predicted Jesus would be a powerful ruler also predicted He would be a humble servant.

UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Notes:

The book of Isaiah is somewhat of a mini-Bible within itself. Of course, the Bible contains 66 books, 39 from the Old Testament and 27 from the New Testament. In similar fashion, the book of Isaiah begins with chapters 1-39, which focus on God confronting His people with sin, pride, and unfaithfulness, while chapters 40-66 contain accounts of God consoling His people with the promises of His servant's work.

> HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ ISAIAH 52:13–53:12.

- Who is the servant described in verse 13?
- To what does the phrase, “he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted” refer?

The same Child who was all of the titles in Isaiah 9 is the humble, suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Jesus experienced what it feels like to be overlooked, despised, and rejected. Hebrews 4:15 says, “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.” Because He loves us, Jesus took on pain and loss. Jesus willingly took our place and did for us what we could never do for ourselves.

This poem begins with the end point—the exaltation of the servant. Before detailing the incalculable work and sacrifice of His servant, God declared the glorious victory of His Son. Christ's resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father are envisioned in this passage in addition to the eternal praise He will receive in the new heaven and the new earth. Glory will be the end point of His suffering, but suffering came first.

Jesus's suffering was so extreme that He no longer resembled a human being. This is a difficult truth to contemplate, but it's very necessary to do so because it was the price of our salvation. This passage makes it clear that God's way of salvation is substitution, rather than supplementation. Jesus didn't come to show us the way, but to be the Way.

Notes:

- When the people of Israel longed for a Messiah, do you think their expectations were more aligned with the suffering Servant we see here, or an exalted ruler?
- What about your expectations? How is the promised Messiah both different and better than what you hoped for?
- Even during intense suffering, how did Jesus respond (v. 7)? What does Isaiah's prophecy teach us about the sacrifice of the promised Messiah?

What we frequently see in the Gospels is that Jesus was not the Messiah the people expected. He was not a mighty military or political leader; He was a humble servant. Yet it is through this humble servant that God established His unending kingdom. Through Jesus's suffering, we see that God keeps His promises; is holy, righteous, and good; and has the power to do anything. All these truths come together in the sacrifice of the Messiah. God knew exactly what He was doing the whole time, and He used the unexpected Messiah to bring blessing to all who would approach Him by grace through faith.

This passage sheds great light on the ugliness and pervasiveness of sin. To sin is to value something more than we value Jesus. He truly was the suffering servant in every sense.

- Re-read Isaiah 53:10. Who does it say initiated this plan? What does that reveal about God's power?

Notes:

It's tempting to read the phrase, "Yet the Lord was pleased to crush Him severely," and think it's mean-spirited. But His pleasure is explained by the fact that Jesus's suffering took place to justify the sinners whom He loved. What seemed harsh turned out to be the most gracious act. The servant's suffering, pain, and death would function as a restitution offering, a sacrifice offered when there was a sin against the sacred things of God. The sins of God's people are classified as those transgressions. Jesus's willingness to suffer on our behalf results in our being restored to what was lost at the fall.

- Read Luke 1:33. How does the promise given in this verse reiterate and identify that the promises made in the Old Testament refer to the one true King, Jesus?

The ugliness of sin initiated the suffering of Christ. The servant's suffering, pain, and death would function as a restitution offering, a sacrifice offered when there was a sin against the sacredness of God. The sins of God's people are classified as such transgressions. Jesus's willingness to suffer on our behalf results in our being restored to what was lost at the fall. It is important for us to realize that this was God's "plan A." The life the promised Messiah lived would not be an easy one. It would be filled with sorrow and grief, but the reward would be the salvation of our souls.

- Verse 11 speaks of the outcome. Who will be justified?
- How does verse 12 describe the final outcome?

Verse 12 returns to the theme that began the beginning of the poem. The suffering of the servant will turn to exaltation and never ending glory. Jesus's suffering culminated in the crucifixion but resulted in the resurrection.

Notes:

The gospel teaches that we are more sinful than we could ever imagine but more loved than we could ever know. The suffering of the promised Messiah has brought us peace with God and has given Him the right to be exalted over every ruler on earth and in heaven (Philippians 2:9-11).

APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- Are you more willing to receive Jesus as Ruler and King than as suffering servant? What does that teach you about your faith? Why must you receive Him as both?
- What are some ways we can serve one another in this group or in our community?
- How does being both a ruler and a servant make Jesus uniquely qualified to save us? What might it look like to explain these truths to a new or growing believer?

Notes:

PRAY

Praise God for His tangible love found in Jesus. Thank God that the exalted ruler of the universe was also the humble baby in the manger. Pray that you would follow Jesus's example of sacrificial service to others, particularly during this Advent season. Praise God that you worship a King who gave Himself as a servant.

FOLLOW UP

Midway through this week, send a follow-up email to your group with some or all of the following information:

Notes:

- > Questions to consider as they continue to reflect on what they learned this week:
 - If there are areas in your life where you are suffering, how does this passage motivate you to approach Jesus with your areas of need?

 - Who in your community can you share the good news of the gospel with this week?

- > A note of encouragement, following up on any specific prayer requests mentioned during your group gathering.

- > The challenge to memorize Isaiah 53:5.

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

The New Testament authors recognized that the description of a Suffering Servant, who “bore the sins of many,” fit Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for the sins of His people. This chapter’s description is the most individualistic of all the Servant Songs in the book of Isaiah, and thus most clearly points to application beyond Israel.

Notes:

52:13. The poem begins with the end point—the exaltation of the Servant (53:11-12). Glory will be the end result of His suffering.

52:14. The suffering of the Servant will so disfigure Him that He will not appear human.

52:15. Much debate surrounds the meaning of the Servant sprinkling many nations. The main problem is that the verse does not specify what the Servant will use to sprinkle them. The best guess is that it refers to a ritual act like the sprinkling of blood (Lv 4:6,17; 16:14-15,19; Num 19:4) or oil (Lv 8:11). The effect of this sprinkling is either to purify or to dedicate to a holy status.

53:1. The speakers of these verses (“we”) are likely both the prophet and the community he represents. The “arm of the Lord” refers to His victorious power, ironically revealed through a Suffering Servant.

53:2-3. A young plant growing up in dry ground would be withered, thus providing an appropriate image of the man of suffering. Just like a withered plant is uprooted and thrown away, so the Suffering Servant was rejected by men.

53:4-6. For the first time, the reader learns that the Servant suffered on behalf of others. Even so, people did not recognize it, and He was rejected as One struck down by God for His own supposed sins.

53:7. Though not suffering for His own sins, the Servant suffered silently and willingly. Philip used this passage to tell the Ethiopian eunuch the good news about Jesus, who silently bore His crucifixion (Acts 8:31-35; 1 Pet. 2:23).

Notes:

53:8. For the first time, the passage reveals that the Servant's suffering culminated in death.

53:9. The Servant died unjustly and was buried as if He were an evil man. The pairing of the wicked with the rich man implies that the wealthy man got his riches by deceit. This may be confirmed by the final statement of the verse that the servant had not spoken deceitfully. Jesus was literally buried with a rich man when He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea (Luke 23:50-56).

53:10-11. That God was pleased to crush the Servant sounds mean-spirited, but His pleasure is explained by the fact that the Servant's suffering will justify many. What seems harsh will turn out to be gracious. The Servant's pain, suffering, and death will function like a restitution offering (Lev. 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10). The sin of God's people was such a transgression.

53:12. Returning to the theme at the beginning of the poem (v. 52:13), the suffering of the Servant will give way to His exaltation. Jesus' suffering culminated in the crucifixion, but gave way to the resurrection.