

WARM-UP

- Share about a memory you have of a power outage. What happened?
- Tell us about a person who helped you through a challenging time. How did it make you feel?
- Share about a time that you were not able to help a person or community out, but ended up regretting it. What happened?

WORD *“Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”*

ISAIAH 58:6-7

(Read also **ISAIAH 58:8-12; MATTHEW 5:13-16.**)

The Israelites thought fasting would give them some leverage against God: “If we fast, then You must answer our prayers.” God, through the prophet Isaiah, challenges this view. With His own “if-then” statements, God shows how fasting is the action of a righteous people living out their faith. When believers live out their faith, they are salt and light to the world, and it is felt and experienced by those around them. Today, let us look at three truths from Isaiah 58 about God’s call to His people.

1 | God calls His people to turn away from wickedness and oppressing one another.

"Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?" **ISAIAH 58:6**

At the time this was written, God's people were oppressing their workers and doing violence against each other. This is why God called His people to repentance—He did not just want them to avoid food, He wanted them to turn away from evil. So far, how have you obeyed the call of God to turn away from wickedness? How is this not about works leading to salvation, but an outflow of our faith in God?

2 | God calls His people to show compassion to the needy and oppressed.

"Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard." **ISAIAH 58:7-8**

God did not just want His people to turn away from evil; He wanted them to show compassion to the needy and oppressed. Aside from not eating, Scripture shows that fasting is about using one's time, effort, food, shelter, and resources to serve others. If we obey, then God promises that He will turn our darkness into light. Read Isaiah 58:8-10. Enumerate His promises for His people.

3

Responding to God's call results in societal restoration and transformation.

11"And the LORD will guide you continually and satisfy your desire in scorched places and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail. 12And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in." **ISAIAH 58:11-12**

When God's people live their lives and fast according to His ways—humbly seeking God and praying for His will to be done, turning away from wickedness, and doing good, especially to the poor and helpless—then He will bring societal transformation. We will experience God's continual guidance, be satisfied and strengthened, flourish, and be fruitful. What does Isaiah 58:12 say about God's promise of restoration and how can we take heart because of this?

APPLICATION

- Think about a time you last fasted or did an act of service for someone else. Ask God to show you your heart and motive, and to help you understand His heart for those in need.
- Read Isaiah 58:8-12. What line or passage jumps out at you? How is God asking you to respond to it this week?
- Is there an area of service or speech that God is bringing to your attention? How can you respond to a need or speak in a way that honors Him?

