

LIVING ON THE EDGE "ON THE EDGE OF FREEDOM" ISAIAH 58:1-14

Isaiah 58:1-14 and James 1:26-27 are sisters from different mothers, an Old Testament mother and a New Testament mother respectively. In the vein of Deuteronomy 28, which promised blessings for obedience to the Mosaic Covenant and curses for disobedience, the prophet Isaiah passed this word from the LORD along to his hypocritical peers: "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? . . . 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" (vv. 6-7, 9b-10).

James captures the same sentiment in different words: "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless," he tells his readers, is "to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (v. 27). In so doing, the apostle stands in the tradition of other Old Testament prophets like Moses, who told God's people: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your

*The Israelite's religion was as cold
as the north side of a tombstone in
January.*

— J. Vernon McGee

soul, and to observe the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" And like Micah who told them: "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (6:8).

And while Deuteronomy 28 does not define the terms of blessing for new covenant believers, hypocrisy is hypocrisy and repugnant in any age.

This Week's Core Competency

Compassion – I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Compassion fatigue is indifference to charitable appeals of all kinds on behalf of those who are suffering, experienced as a result of the frequency or number of such appeals. Are you suffering from it? Do you find yourself blaming others for their suffering or feeling powerless to do anything about it?

No doubt, many reasons underlie this malady, some individual and some related to the size of the various seemingly intractable problems. Take the issue of *poverty*, for example. One in four children in Tarrant County lives with food insecurity. More than 7,400 under the age of six are homeless and more than 14,000 lack health care coverage. That being the case, it comes as no surprise that Tarrant County has the highest rate of confirmed infant and toddler abuse and neglect cases among the major metro areas in Texas.

And then there's the issue of *injustice*. Slavery and human trafficking are worldwide problems. The International Justice Mission reports that more than 40 million people are enslaved globally. A particularly heinous aspect of the problem relates to child sex trafficking, prevalent even in America. Traffick911, a local organization dedicated to freeing youth from sex

cont. pg. 2

trafficking, reports: "The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that 98% of sex trafficking victims across the globe are women and children."

And then there's the issue of *abortion*. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) reports that 53,940 abortions took place in Texas during 2015. In 2015 nearly 12% of pregnancies in Texas ended in abortion.

And then there are the problems of *sexual assault, family violence, hunger*, all sorts of *prejudice*, and the list goes on. So what are people concerned with poverty, social justice, the sanctity of life, as well as these other issues, to do to combat compassion fatigue? The answer is two-fold: 1) *do the next best thing*, and 2) *do something rather than nothing at all*. No one can do anything that will undo the Fall and consequent human condition. Likewise, no one can do anything that will eliminate the problems of homelessness, child sex trafficking, and unplanned pregnancy. No one can do anything to undo the foolish decisions others made or anything to undo the wrongs done to them. But everyone can do the next best thing to mitigate whatever problem exists. What's more, while no one can do everything, everyone can do at least one thing. Pantego Bible Church partners with eight different organizations empowered to address these social/spiritual problems: Mission Arlington/Metroplex, Traffick911, Metroplex Women's Clinic, Oakcrest Family Church, 6 Stones, World Relief Fort Worth, Safe Haven, and Carson Cares (pantego.org/compassion-partners). The next best thing that you can do is to educate yourself regarding these organizations, pray for their leaders, volunteer yourself or with your community, and donate to their ministries.

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Isaiah 58:1-14

"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.

2 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.

3 "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.

4 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.

5 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?

6 "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?

7 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?

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.

9 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,

10 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.

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.

12 Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins
and will raise up the age-old foundations;

you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls,
Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.

13 "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,

if you call the Sabbath a delight
and the LORD's holy day honorable,

and if you honor it by not going your own way
and not doing as you please or speaking idle words,

14 then you will find your joy in the LORD,
and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights

of the land

and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob."

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Box "like" indicating *comparison* in vv. 1, 5, 8, 10, 11.
- * Circle "seem" and "as if" in v. 2.
- * Box "yet" indicating *contrast* in v. 3.
- * Circle "fast/ed/ing" in vv. 3-6.
- * Underline "exploit," "injustice," and "oppress/ed/ion" in vv. 3-10.
- * Highlight "do/ing as you please" in vv. 3, 13.
- * Number the rhetorical questions in vv. 5, 6.
- * Draw a line from "that" in v. 5 to "this" in v. 6 implying contrast.
- * Bracket "to" in vv. 6, 7.
- * Box "if" and "then" marking conditional statements in vv. 8-14.
- * In the margin next to v. 9 write, "Cf. v. 3."
- * Put parentheses around "Sabbath" and "holy day" in v. 13.

day 2 EXPLORE – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What do you infer about the people from their description in verse 2?
2. They questioned the value of fasting. How come?
3. Explain the *contrast* introduced in verse 3.
4. God faulted the people's fasting. How so?
5. Some questions are veiled statements, e.g., "Are you crazy?" = "You are crazy!" Turn the three *rhetorical* questions in verse 5 into their respective veiled statements.
6. Describe the kind of fasting God has chosen.
7. Put the consequences of that kind of fasting in your own words.
8. How do "pointing the finger" and "malicious talk" fit in the list of conditions in verses 9b-10?
9. Explain the *comparison* in verse 11.
10. **Discussion:** In what sense does the teaching about the Sabbath apply today?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Mirrors reflect the appearance of the body, not the condition of the soul, except in the movies where they reveal all sorts of unseen things—or in the case of vampires, nothing at all. Take the comedy *All of Me* starring Steve Martin and Lily Tomlin, for example. In it terminally ill Edwina Cutwaters, played by Tomlin, believes she can have a second chance at life if only her soul can be transported into the body of another woman—the beautiful young daughter of her stable hand. Too bad the guru-in-charge goofs, and it winds up in Roger Cobb, played by Martin. Now every time Roger looks in a mirror he sees Edwina, a side of himself he'd not seen before. In one particularly funny scene, talking to himself—that is, Edwina—in the mirror he says, "Let's get this one thing straight. I never liked you when you were in your body; I certainly don't like you in mine!"

Israel in the prophet's day needed that kind of mirror, a mirror that reflected more than external appearances, a mirror that reflected the condition of the soul. In the first part of Isaiah 58 (vv. 1-5), the prophet reveals the true condition of the nation by contrasting how it saw itself with how God saw it. According to verses 1-3a, Israel saw a religious people when it looked in the mirror. They saw a devoted people who sought after God to know his ways, a scrupulous nation that did what was right in obedience to his commands (v. 2). They saw a pious people who conscientiously fasted and afflicted themselves, and who were bewildered by the fact that God didn't notice (v. 3). Why would he not answer their prayers? (v. 4).

God, on the other hand, saw a very different people for whom religion was a "transaction," merely the means to an end. They fasted, all right, but only to get what they wanted. For them God was little more than a genie who could be manipulated by fasting. As one commentator writes: "The religion which is exposed here rests on Canaanite rather than Yahwistic principles. The essence of Canaanite religion was to put the gods under pressure to perform their functions . . . The essence of Israelite religion, however, is response. Not doing things to influence the Lord but doing them to obey him; not works looking for reward

but faith acting in obedience" (Alec J. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 486). What's more, all they while they fasted, they sinned. Listen to the prophet's indictment, "The LORD says to them, 'The truth is that at the same time as you fast, you pursue your own interests and oppress your workers. Your fasting makes you violent and you quarrel and fight. Do you think this kind of fasting will make me listen to your prayers?'" (vv. 3b, 4 TEV). God wanted to bless his people, but that blessing could not be obtained by religious or cultic manipulation. Their kind of fasting accompanied by self-indulgence, exploitation of workers, and strife was worth less than a reed blowing in the wind.

In the rest of chapter 58 (vv. 6-14), the prophet describes the kind of fasting the LORD wants and the blessings he bestows on the people who practice it. It's the kind marked by justice and compassion—the kind that sides with the oppressed (v. 6), feeds the hungry, shelters the homeless, and clothes the naked (v. 7). It's that kind of fasting that gets God's attention and attracts his presence (v. 8, 9). It's that kind that comes with a promise. The ones who do these things can expect God's abundant blessings (vv. 12) and even more so, the ones the keep the Sabbath (v. 13). The Sabbath is not a free-for-all day, a day to do as you please. It's a holy day in which to honor the LORD. Apparently, Israel had come to see Sabbath observance as a burden that interfered with doing business-as-usual, which they preferred. Instead of delighting in it they disparaged it. A change in their attitude promised to bring with it feasting and joy. Even though New Testament believers aren't expected to observe the Sabbath, much the same could be said about observing the Lord's day.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

The Message of the Passage

God's people must be careful to avoid hypocrisy by making sure that their practice of religion is marked by genuine concern for social justice and sincere expressions of compassion to the poor and oppressed.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Identify the particular issue you are passionate about, e.g., poverty, injustice, sanctity of life, etc.

Identify the compassion partner with a focused ministry on that issue (www.pantego.org/compassion-partners).

Identify the next best one thing that you can do to address your passion.

notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 1 **Shout** Lit., "call out with the throat." "To cry with the throat means to cry at the top of one's voice" (Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, NICOT, 3:415). "Shout for all you are worth, do not hold back" (NJB).

v. 2 **For** "In verses 2-5, the initial For introduces this whole paragraph as an explanation of the accusation of 'rebellion' and 'sins' (1)" (J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah*, TOTC, 360).

v. 2 **me** "The definite object me is emphatic. The worship is insulting, and the emphatic me makes clear that it is the holy God who is insulted" (Young, 416).

v. 2 **seem** The NIV adds "seem" and "as if" to clarify the interpretation and expose the implied hypocrisy of the people. "To all outward appearance there is a committed practice of religion (2) in which they approach God (2a) and want him to approach them (2f). But (with correct interpretation) NIV says that there is a seem and an as if about it all. This is spelt out as the prophet exposes their motivations (3a-d), their behaviour (3ef) and the outcome of their fast (4ab). It is mere outward show (5a-d), unacceptable to the Lord (5ef)" (Motyer, 360).

v. 3 **Why** The rhetorical questions in verse 3 indicate that the people fasted to get what they wanted. They did a right thing for a wrong reason (cf. v. 4). "Why are they engaging in this behavior? Is it to express gratitude and submission to God? No, for as their quotation in verse 3 indicates, they are engaging in the behavior for the very same reasons the pagans do, to manipulate God to act in their favor" (John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*, 625). "What seemed like eager devotion was actually aimed at earning benefit (3a-d)" (Motyer, 360). "The people complain that God has neither seen nor does He know of their actions, and thus they accuse Him of indifference. Actually God has seen and does know their action; but He has not seen it with favor, nor does He know it in the sense of accepting it inasmuch as their worship did not flow from a heart of devotion to Him, but was merely external" (Young, 417).

v. 3 **fasted** "In the Old Testament only one fast was commanded—the annual Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29, 31). Only after the fall of Jerusalem were fast days instituted (Zech. 7:3, 5; 8:19). Ironically on the other hand many specific commands were not being followed. So the Lord reminded the people that they should be just (Isa. 58:6) and openhanded with those in need—the hungry (cf. v. 10), the poor . . . the naked (v. 7)" (John A. Martin, "Isaiah" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1113). Jesus addressed much the same problem in much the same way (cf. Mt 23:23).

v. 4 **quarreling** "Fasting was intended to win divine approval, but it brought out the worst in people—understandable if a basically unspiritual family was forced to spend a hungry day together!" (Motyer, 361). "Instead of the heart looking to God, the fasters became irritable and upset; and no doubt this was contagious. Indeed, this strife led to striking with the clenched fist" (Young, 418).

v. 5 **humble himself** Lit., "afflict himself." Jesus condemned this kind of religious, attention-getting behavior. "And when you fast, do not put on a sad face as the hypocrites do. They neglect their appearance so that everyone will see that they are fasting. I assure you, they have already been paid in full" (Mt 6:16 TEV).

v. 5 **like a reed** "The straight rush is easily bent, and furnishes a suitable figure for the bent-over worshipper" (Young, 419). The figure also suggests that the people's worship was of no more consequence than a common reed blowing in the wind.

v. 6 **loose, untie, break** "It is possible that this and the other phrases refer [specifically] to the release of unjustly held slaves. According to the law, slaves of Israelitish descent were to be emancipated every three years" (Young, 419). "Chains . . . cords: time made free by being set apart in fasting should be used [generally] to correct every way in which social structures or wrongdoers within society destroy or diminish the proper liberty of others. Untie . . . yoke: to eliminate every way in which social mismanagement treats people like animals. Break . . . yoke: it is not enough to untie; action must be taken to see that such bondage cannot ever be repeated" (Motyer, 361).

v. 7 **food, clothe** "Eat less in order to have food to give to the 'hungry.' Wear less-expensive clothes in order to clothe the 'naked' (58:7, 10). This is the kind of cessation and self-affliction God has 'chosen'" (Oswalt, 626).

v. 7 **flesh and blood** I.e., "relatives" (GNT); "kin" (NRSV); here probably "fellow Israelites" (2Sa 5:1).

v. 9 **pointing finger** I.e., body language that communicates subtly in hints and innuendo (cf. Pr 6:12-14).

v. 10 **light** Light is a metaphor that enfolds the blessed conditions described in vv. 11, 12.

v. 13 **Sabbath** "Sabbath observance was a barometer of one's faithfulness to the Mosaic Covenant. By following the rules for the Sabbath a person acknowledged the importance of worshiping God and showed that he depended on God to bless him materially for that time he took off from work. By putting God first and not seeking to do as he wished, a person would have joy, not only in spiritual salvation (ride on the heights) but also in prosperity (feast on the inheritance)" (Martin, 1114).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Many years ago, my kids were attending a Vacation Bible School at a local church when I stumbled across a familiar mom volunteering. I knew this mom from the elementary school my kids attended, and honestly, I was a little confused. Her behavior did not indicate she was a follower of Christ at all. I was genuinely surprised and shocked when I learned she was a regular attender of the host church. I know it sounds like I'm calling this mom out, but I was personally convicted at the time and still am. I wonder, could this also be said of me? Do others know without a doubt that I follow Jesus? Does my personal walk align with who Jesus wants me to be? Where is the evidence? I tell my kids not to gossip, then share "news" with a friend. I encourage my kids to share, then hold tightly to that which I feel is mine. I encourage my kids to be a friend to all, and don't even notice the quiet person in the corner. I gloss over everyday injustice right in front of me feeling helpless to make change. I know without a doubt I want to be more like Jesus. I don't want to be one person on Sunday and another through the week. My heartfelt prayer for all of us this week is to be burdened by what burdens God and to act accordingly, showing generous grace and compassion to those in need.

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Isaiah 58.

1. What did the Israelites do that looked like they tried to please God (verse 3)?
2. What did the Israelites do that contradicted this "worship"?
3. Describe the eight acts of love and kindness that please the Lord in verses 6-7.

What Do You Think

Why do you think God called the Israelites rebellious and sinful?

What R U Going To Do

Go through your clothes and toys this week and donate gently used items to Mission Arlington.

Core Comp

Compassion - I believe God wants me to help others in need.

Memory Verse

1Sa 16:7 – *The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.*

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse _____, completed *Scrolls* _____, brought Bible _____, brought a friend _____.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

Tom Bulick (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.
Ft. Worth, TX 76120
1-866-PANTEGO
Fax 817-275-6403
www.pantego.org

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is tbulick@pantego.org.