

Adult Teaching Resources

September 16, 2018



Doing, and Being (September 2-November 25)

Deuteronomy 4:1-15 (RCL 4:1-2, 6-9) – “Following Through”

Psalm 146 – “Trusting God”

Isaiah 50:4-9 (RCL 50:4-9a) – “Standing Firm”

Psalm 1 – “Living Wisely”

Psalm 124 – “Offering Praise”

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Standing Firm

Isaiah 50:4-9 (RCL 50:4-9a)

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.” Isaiah 50:4a

When the going gets tough...the faithful are expected to remain faithful and keep going. But that can be difficult. Even the most faithful follower wants to give up, sometimes.

Today, we explore the steady faith found in the third servant song in Isaiah. Words to remind us to stand firm in the face of whatever challenge might come our way.

Opening

After everyone arrives, move to the board and ask your group to engage in a group-think exercise. Make a list of all the challenges typically encountered by people in your age-group. Take some time to list the big, scary challenges and the smaller, not as obvious challenges.

Discuss the challenges involved in overcoming the items listed on the board. What needs to happen to come out healthy on the other side?

How often do our challenges get the best of us and we end up paralyzed or stuck in our situation?

How often do we overcome and move forward in life?

Who, or what, helps us get past our challenges and into new life?

Reading the Bible

What has God given Isaiah? (the tongue of a teacher)

What is the purpose of that gift? (to know how to sustain the weary with a word)

How does God waken? (by ear to listen to those who are taught)

What did an open ear do for Isaiah? (he was not rebellious, he did not turn backward)

What did Isaiah do with those who opposed him? (he gave his back to those who struck him, gave his cheeks to those who pulled out the beard, did not hide his face)

What does God do for Isaiah? (helps him)

Reading the Bible *continued*

How does God do it? (he set his face like flint, knows he will not be put to shame)

What is the Isaiah's plea for his enemies? (stand together)

What is Isaiah's cry for his enemies? (let them confront me)

What does God do? (helps me)

What will happen to those who declare Isaiah guilty? (they will wear out like a garment, the moth will eat them up)

Making Connections

When have you endured trial or suffering, but because of god, come out okay? What did you gain from that experience?

Our Lesson Writer says, "Whether suffering or not, there is much God can teach us every day if only we pay attention, thinking theologically through all the activities of daily life." What does it mean to you to think theologically? How often do you intentionally think theologically? What difference does that make in your life?

How do you pay attention to God? How do you obey God? How do you hear God?

Our Lesson Writer says, "The servant of Isa. 50:4-9 said he awakened to learn from God each day." What do you awaken to do each day? Where is God in that plan?

What helps you get through the bad days/moments? Who do bad days/moments affect your faith?

Who do you turn to for help? What help/gift does that person give you? How much difference does that person make in your life?

What does it take for you to turn to God for help? What do you expect from God? What does God provide?

So What?

Go back and review the list from the beginning of class.

With that list in mind and just having explored the passage from Isaiah, make a list of practical ways we can:

Listen to God.

Follow God.

Trust God, no matter what others do?

Spend some time talking about how God is with us; we just need to pay attention and act with God in our lives.

The Challenge

This week, commit to listen, follow, and trust God as you face a specific challenge. When you face the challenge, take your time to include God in the situation and reflect on how God makes a difference in your life.

Prayer

Loving God, life is not easy. We know that because we live it. But, because we know you, we have the assurance that we can get through any challenges and crises that come our way. Be with us, Lord. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Servant songs—The “Servant Songs” are often identified as Isa. 42:1-4, 49:1-6, 50:1-11, and 52:13-53:12, but scholars disagree on their precise limits. Some, for example, consider the first song to be comprised of Isa. 42:1-4 only, while others see it as 42:1-7 and others stretch it to 42:1-9. The second song is often delimited as 49:1-6, but some scholars see it continuing through v. 13. Some identify the third song as 50:1-11, but others include only 50:4-11. There is little question about the limits of the fourth song, marked as 52:13-53:12. Some scholars interpret Isaiah 55 as a fifth servant song.

Who is the servant? At times, the “servant” clearly appears to be Israel in a corporate sense, but in other instances, as here, the servant is depicted as an individual. And, while he suffers, his pain appears to be for the sake of others, rather than for his own sin (compare the charges against Israel in Isa. 40:1-2, 42:22-25, 43:22-28, 47:6, 50:1 with descriptions of the servant in Isa. 50:5-6; 53:4-6, 9, 11-12).

Early Christian believers took Isaiah’s description of the “suffering servant” as prophecies of Christ, who suffered for others without complaint.

Lord GOD—Ordinarily, texts pairing these two divine names appear as LORD God, but here they are Lord GOD. Why? The most common dual expression is *Yahweh Elohim*. Since the divine name *Yahweh* is always rendered in all capital letters, and *Elohim* means “God,” it translates as LORD God.

Occasionally, however, some of the prophets preferred the expression *adonai Yahweh*. “*Adonai*,” which could refer either to God or to a person in authority, also translates as “Lord.” We wouldn’t want to render it as “Lord LORD,” so translators have conventionally chosen to spell “GOD” in all capital letters to indicate that it is a reference to *Yahweh*, resulting in “Lord GOD.”

Learning from suffering—On a cold morning in January of 1994, a drunken driver crashed into our car as I was driving my seven-year-old daughter back home from a visit with her grandparents. The wreck killed Bethany instantly, and left me with a large collection of broken ribs and bones.

That experience taught me many things about pain and sorrow that I would rather have avoided – but also much about hope and strength that I would not have learned otherwise, or at least so quickly. I never thought God caused the crash to teach me a lesson, but I did believe that God expects all of us to be good stewards in everything, including our suffering, to learn from it and to pass those lessons on to others.

Digging Deeper *continued*

In a variety of ways, I have sought to do that, and many who read these words also know what it is to suffer and learn and use those learnings to encourage others. All of us have the potential – and the obligation – to do the same.

Turning and hearing—Isaiah spoke of hearing God and not turning away. We hear best when we're looking at the person who's talking to us. I feel this acutely, because a multi-year bout with Meniere's Disease in my 30s left me mostly deaf in my right ear. In a large space, if someone calls my name and I can't see them, I have no idea where they are. If there is noise in a room, I can't begin to keep up with a conversation if I don't look directly at the person speaking. I have to be conscientious about using my ears: if I turn away, I don't hear.

Confidence—Isaiah's trust in God inspired Baptist educator Page Kelley to point out years ago that the servant's "sublime affirmation of faith reminds one of the later words of the Apostle Paul, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31, KJV; "Isaiah," *Broadman Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5 [Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971], p. 334]).

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

The Hardest Question is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Did you say “Second” Isaiah?

Readers commonly assume that a single author was responsible for the entire content of a biblical book attributed to Isaiah. One might argue that the first Isaiah simply had God-given foresight, and during times of meditation, wrote oracles to address issues that would not arise for more than 150 years. The most likely explanation, however, is that there were at least two, if not three prophets who contributed to the compilation of prophecies that became known by the name of its primary author, Isaiah of Jerusalem.

During the eighth century, the Israelites lived in two separate kingdoms: a northern realm called “Israel,” and a southern one known as “Judah.” The first Isaiah, often called “Isaiah of Jerusalem,” spent most of his life in Judah’s capital city but spoke to the people of both nations. He lived in an age of relative peace and prosperity for the Israelites as a whole, but a time of oppression for the poor as wealthier Hebrews bought up property, often leaving the poor homeless and forced to work as indentured servants. The false security of peaceful times led many to think of religion as a system of required rituals, with no demand for personal righteousness and justice. Isaiah joined the prophets Micah, Amos, and Hosea in decrying injustice and launching verbal barbs designed to deflate Israel’s false sense of security.

Isaiah understood the political scene as well as the economic, social and religious aspects of life in Palestine. During Isaiah’s ministry, the northern kingdom was defeated and carried into captivity. As the prophet predicted, Judah also fell under the power of Assyria, living as a vassal state. For the most part, Isaiah 1-39 describes this period in Israel’s life.

With chapter 40, however, the scene shifts from eighth-century Judah to sixth-century Babylon. Judah fell to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE. Many Judahites were marched to Babylon that year, and many more were forced into captivity following the destruction of Jerusalem 10 years later.

God used Isaiah of Jerusalem to afflict the comfortable and warn them of the coming captivity. More than 150 years later, as the people languished in captivity, God raised up another prophet who spoke comfort to the afflicted. We often speak of him as “Second Isaiah.” This prophet spoke words of encouragement and hope to a defeated and downhearted people. His work appears in Isaiah 40-55. As he preached in God’s name, this Isaiah envisioned a coming “servant” who would suffer in behalf of his people.

Following the exile, the Hebrews who returned to Jerusalem faced different challenges, which are reflected in Isaiah 56-66. It is possible that Second Isaiah returned with the other Hebrews and continued to speak in that context. It is more likely, however, that yet a third prophet arose in Jerusalem to preach in the spirit of Isaiah. He is typically known as “Third Isaiah.”

The Hardest Question *continued*

The possibility that multiple prophets contributed to the book called “Isaiah” does not take away from the Scripture’s authority, but testifies to God’s interest in providing the message people need to hear in the time they need to hear it.