

Bible Studies for Life Series for November 26: Acknowledge God's call on your life today

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Acknowledge God's call on your life today

- Isaiah 55:1-13

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I remember it as if it were yesterday. A missionary—also my father—preached at a world missions conference in Memphis, Tenn. In that moment, the truth of Paul's words in Romans 1:16-17 embodied itself in my young life: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first to the Jew, and then the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is from faith from first to last (from faith to faith), just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith.'" Right there and then, as an 11-year-old, the power of the gospel became real in my life, and I "gave my life to Jesus."



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The majority of adult Sunday school members probably can recite a similar testimony about their initial encounter with the good news: a powerful sermon, inviting music, a nod from Mom or Dad, and a step down the aisle of a church—the common threads of an experience that was profound for most, perfunctory for some. All should acknowledge, however, that the first step into the aisle was just the beginning of a lifelong journey with Jesus.

This week’s lesson, “Live Now ... and Forever,” bids to consider anew God’s call on our lives. The lesson title is appropriate in that it bids us to “live now” first and then worry about “forever.” Too often, people hear the good news as a plan to escape this world and move on to “eternal life,” but Jesus, like Isaiah, calls us to live in the world “now!”

This final lesson from Isaiah completes the unit “Invitation to Maximum Living: Isaiah Speaks Today.” Over the last several weeks, we have heard Isaiah’s call to live in relationship rather than rebellion, to live in light rather than darkness, and to live in reality rather than delusion. The lessons powerfully relate the biblical truth that God consistently sets before humanity a basic choice: Choose God’s way, or your own way.

When humanity chooses its own way over God’s way, we find ourselves living in rebellion, darkness and delusion. If we really are going to live “now,” we need to acknowledge God’s call on our lives today and live each subsequent day in relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The focal passage from Isaiah 55 is an evangelistic call to God’s people. It

comes in the midst of a series of “servant songs” and salvation oracles. The early church interpreted Isaiah’s words as a description of the life and work of Jesus (Matthew 12:18-21; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47; 26:23).

Beginning in Isaiah 49, the prophet describes the servant of the Lord who will “restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept, I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (49:6-7). For this, God’s servant will be despised (49:7), beaten (50:6) and killed (53:2-9), but God will set things right. The servant of God becomes the means of forgiveness: “Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed” (53:4-5).

As early Christians sought meaning in the events of Jesus life, particularly his suffering and death, they understood that Jesus fit Isaiah’s model of the suffering servant of God who willingly bore the punishment for sin, and became the means by which all might experience forgiveness. The focal passage from Isaiah 55 brings the announcement of God’s forgiveness to a thunderous crescendo with an offer to experience such forgiveness.

In the opening verses of Isaiah 55, the prophet urges the hearer to experience new abundant life in relationship to God. The prophet describes an existence where the thirsty have plenty to drink and the hungry are satisfied (vv. 1-2). The other side of the reward of relationship with God is the responsibility of relationship with God. Isaiah reminds us the covenant relationship with God requires us to be a witness to the people of the world. God’s plan of salvation includes the whole world: “Surely you will summon nations you know not, and nations that you do not know you will hasten to you” (vv. 4-5).

When we establish relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our

transformed lives become the means by which other people seek relationship with God. Living “now and forever” requires that we receive the reward but also accept the responsibility of following Jesus.

The time for turning to God is now. Isaiah says, “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near” (v. 6). The prophet’s call seems less a warning about potential missed chances and more an encouragement to go ahead and choose relationship.

While the urgency in Isaiah’s admonition cannot be denied, the sense of it is “why waste anymore time? Get on with what you know to be right!” Many refuse relationship because it requires them to give up so much. Isaiah says, “Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts” (v. 7). In our honest moments, we lament that we do not want to give up “our ways” and “our thoughts,” but real life “now” requires we receive mercy from God (v. 7) and allow God to transform our lives (Romans 8; 12:1-2).

The focal passage concludes with a powerful and poetic description of God’s promises that do not fail. We may not always understand all of God. In fact, we cannot know all of God (vv. 8-10), but we can know God is true—God is able! Isaiah reminds us of the surety of God’s word, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: it will not return empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it” (v. 11). God’s word—the good news—is the “power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). God’s promise of forgiveness and abundant life both now and forever is real—it is ours to accept.

Discussion questions

- Do you recall your initial encounter with the good news? Can you give your testimony about your experience of the gospel as the “power of God”?

- What are the rewards of salvation and how do you experience them “now and forever”? What about the responsibilities of salvation—how do we experience them in the present?
- What “ways” and “thoughts” might we need to give up in order to live life in Christ “now”?
- Do you have a relationship with God through Jesus Christ?

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