DELAWARE CITY VINEYARD

A STUDY COMPANION



A journey through the prophets

An invitation to explore the lives and messages of some of the great prophets of the Old Testament, discover how their stories lead us toward Jesus, and see what they reveal about God's heart along the way.

TRUTH WITHOUT DESPAIR / HOPE WITHOUT DENIAL

A companion for personal reflection and small-group conversation.

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01 / INTRODUCTION- Discovering God's Heart Through the Prophets

WHAT IS PROPHECY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT?

When we hear the word prophecy, many of us think of predicting the future. But the prophets of the Old Testament did far more. They spoke to real people facing real problems: slavery, sin, idolatry, disobedience, injustice, grief, exile, and the need for hope. Through their words we begin to see God's character, his promises, and his concern for how his people live.

WHERE DID THEIR PROPHECIES COME FROM?

2 PETER 1:21 *"For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."*

Peter is speaking here about prophecy preserved in Scripture. The prophets were not merely offering private opinions. To understand their message, we will begin with the people, the place, and the situation into which God spoke—before asking what the passage means for us.

THE INVITATION: "WHAT IF?"

In Robb's vision for this series we are asked to imagine that the way things are today is not the end of the story. He does not suggest we can guarantee every outcome. Instead, he points us toward the faithfulness of God: a God who meets us now and promises a future in which Christ makes all things new. Prophetic courage can look honestly at pain without surrendering hope.

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann argues that prophetic ministry can awaken people to possibilities they have stopped imagining. It does two things at once: it challenges what is broken, and it calls people toward the newness God can bring.

> *"The task of prophetic ministry is to hold together criticism and energizing."*
>
> — Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination

Put simply: criticism without hope can harden into cynicism. Hope that refuses to face suffering becomes shallow optimism. The prophets often hold both together—grief over what is and trust in what God can do.

DIFFERENT CALLINGS. THE SAME GOD.

Moses, Miriam, Elijah, Amos, Joel, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel did not all speak in the same way. Each was called into a particular moment in Israel's story. Some challenged injustice. Some lamented what was lost. Some called people to return to God or helped them see a future beyond exile. We will listen to each prophet in their own setting, place and time.

WHERE DO JESUS AND THE CHURCH FIT?

Jesus is more than just another prophet. He reveals the Father and fulfills God's promises. The New Testament also describes prophetic gifts among ordinary believers, given to strengthen the church—not to create new Scripture. These words are to be weighed and tested (1 Corinthians 14:3, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21).

John Wimber helped give the Vineyard its conviction that "everyone gets to play." His emphasis was that ordinary followers of Jesus can learn to pray, listen, and serve through the Holy Spirit. That is an invitation to humble participation—not a claim that every impression carries the authority of the biblical prophets.

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1 **2 Peter 1:19-21** What does this tell us about the biblical prophets? Why might their historical setting matter?

2 **Amos 3:7–8; Jeremiah 1:7–10** What do these passages reveal about the call and responsibility of Old Testament prophets?

3 **Hebrews 1:1–3** What changes when the writer turns our attention from the prophets to Jesus?

4 **1 Corinthians 14:3, 29-33** How does the New Testament describe the purpose of prophecy in the church—and the importance of weighing what is spoken?

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak, and listen without rushing or trying to make something happen.

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you sensed, saw, or felt God bringing to your attention.

End your time in prayer.

Sources: Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination (rev. ed., Fortress Press, 2001); Vineyard USA, "Everyone Gets to Play: Ordinary People Doing Extraordinary Things" (2016).

02 / MOSES- Israel comes out of bondage

BEFORE THE BURNING BUSH

Moses was born among an enslaved people, raised in Pharaoh's household, and later fled Egypt after killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew man (Exodus 2:11–15). Years later, while tending sheep in Midian, he encountered God in a burning bush. The story does not introduce an eager hero. It introduces a reluctant man—and a God who had heard the cries of his people.

GOD HEARS. GOD SEES. GOD SENDS.

Read Exodus 2:23–25 and 3:7–12. God names the people's suffering before sending Moses to confront Pharaoh. Moses asks, "Who am I?" God's answer begins, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:11–12). Moses' confidence will rest not in his ability, but in God's presence.

Moses keeps objecting: What if they do not believe me? What if I cannot speak well? What if someone else would do better? (Exodus 4:1–17). God provides signs, patience, correction, and Aaron's help. Moses' courage develops in conversation with God, not in certainty about himself.

MORE THAN A DELIVERER

Moses' calling extended far beyond the burning bush. Through him, God confronted Pharaoh, delivered Israel from slavery, and led his people through the wilderness. Moses received God's commandments, taught the people how to live as God's covenant community, and interceded for them when they rebelled. His extraordinary relationship with God shaped a lifetime of leadership, courage, and compassion (Exodus 14; 32:11–14; 33:11).

WHEN GOD SAYS SPEAK, DON'T STRIKE

After years of leading Israel through the wilderness, Moses faced another crisis when the people complained about having no water. God instructed him to speak to a rock, promising that water would flow. But in his frustration, Moses struck the rock twice instead (Numbers 20:7–12). Water came, but God told Moses he would not lead the people into the Promised Land because he had failed to trust and honor God before them. Even a faithful leader can allow frustration to interfere with obedience. Moses' story reminds us that doing God's work does not give us permission to substitute our own judgment for his instructions.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

One God's faithfulness. Two covenant moments. A promise brought to fullness in Christ.

THE COVENANT AT SINAI

After rescuing Israel from Egypt, God brings the people to Sinai (Exodus 19–24). Through Moses, God forms a covenant relationship with them. The commandments describe a life of faithfulness to God and justice toward neighbors. The order matters: God rescues the people before giving them the law (Exodus 20:1–2).

THE PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT

Centuries later, Jeremiah looks toward a new covenant marked by God's law written on hearts, a deeper knowledge of God, and forgiveness of sin (Jeremiah 31:31–34). At the Last Supper, Jesus speaks of the "new covenant" in his blood (Luke 22:20). Hebrews 8 explains that Jesus mediates this better covenant.

MOSES POINTS US TOWARD JESUS

Moses tells Israel that God will raise up a prophet like him (Deuteronomy 18:15). In Acts 3:22–26, Peter applies that promise to Jesus. Hebrews 3:1–6 also draws a careful distinction: Moses was faithful as a servant in God's house; Christ is faithful as the Son over that house. Jesus is not merely a second Moses. He brings God's purposes to fulfillment.

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Walter Brueggemann describes the "alternative community of Moses": a people called out of Pharaoh's domination into a life shaped by God's freedom, justice, and compassion. The Exodus changes more than Israel's location; it opens up a different way of living together.[1]

John Wimber wrote that the law revealed at Sinai reflects God's character and exposes our need for redemption—but cannot itself make sinners right with God. He directs our attention to Christ's cross, where God's love makes reconciliation possible.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1 **Exodus 3:7–12** What moves you about the way God notices Israel's suffering? Where do you hear both compassion and a call to action?

2 **Exodus 4:10–17** Moses offers several reasons he cannot do what God asks. Which response feels most familiar to you? What might change if God's presence—not your ability—were the starting point?

3 **Exodus 19:4–6; Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:6–12** Why is it important that God rescued Israel before giving the law? What is made possible through Jesus and the new covenant?

4 **Numbers 20:7–12** God told Moses to speak to the rock, but Moses struck it instead. What can we learn from this about listening carefully to God and resisting the temptation to do things our own way—even when our intentions are good?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Moses didn't begin his journey feeling qualified or courageous. He questioned his ability, yet God assured him, "I will be with you" (Exodus 3:12). That promise became the foundation for everything that followed. Moses would face powerful opposition, lead a difficult people, and learn through both obedience and failure.

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention.

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you heard, sensed, saw, or felt God showing you.

End your time in prayer.

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, rev. ed. (Fortress Press, 2001), chap. 1, "The Alternative Community of Moses."

[2] John Wimber, "The Cross," Vineyard USA, Feb. 26, 2016. vineyardusa.org/the-cross

03 / MIRIAM – The Courage to Sing and Dance

MORE THAN MOSES' SISTER

Miriam first appears as the courageous young girl who watches over her baby brother Moses and helps arrange for his own mother to care for him (Exodus 2:4–8). Years later, she stands beside a nation newly delivered from slavery. Scripture identifies Miriam as a prophet, and Micah 6:4 names her alongside Moses and Aaron as leaders God sent to Israel. Her story reveals another dimension of prophetic ministry: inspiring God's people to recognize his faithfulness and respond together.

A SONG ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA

Read Exodus 15:1–18. After their extraordinary deliverance from Pharaoh's army, Moses and the Israelites sing of God's mighty acts. Their song begins by celebrating what God has done, but it also looks ahead to what he will do. In verses 13–18, they sing confidently of a future they have not yet experienced. Their worship is rooted in yesterday's victory while expressing faith in tomorrow's promises.

THE BEAT OF DELIVERANCE

Read Exodus 15:19–21. Miriam takes up her timbrel—a handheld drum—and leads the women in singing and dancing. But her song is also an invitation: “Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted!” Her words echo the song of Moses and the Israelites, drawing attention to the God who delivered them all.
Imagine the drums, the dancing, and all of the voices joining in celebration! Miriam's prophetic worship was more than personal praise; it helped unite a community in remembering and celebrating God's faithfulness.

WHEN MIRIAM FAILED — CORRECTION AND RESTORATION

Read Numbers 12:1–16; Micah 6:4
Though Miriam was one of Israel’s leaders, she and Aaron challenged Moses' leadership in the desert, and God confronted them. Miriam suffered a painful consequence, but Moses interceded for her, and she was restored to the community. Her failure was serious, but it did not erase her place in God's story. We, too, can carry shame over past mistakes and believe God can no longer use us. Miriam's story reminds us that God's correction and mercy go hand in hand, and our failures need not define our future.

COURAGE TO CELEBRATE AN UNFINISHED STORY

Miriam danced after the Red Sea victory, but Israel had not yet reached the Promised Land. The wilderness still lay ahead, with challenges they could not imagine. Yet they had already witnessed God's faithfulness.

Another remarkable example appears in 2 Chronicles 20:20–22. King Jehoshaphat sends singers ahead of the army, praising God before the victory is visible.

Prophetic worship does not deny the difficulties before us. It remembers who God is and declares his faithfulness even when the future remains uncertain. Sometimes worship becomes an act of courage, inspiring others to trust God before they can see the outcome.

WHEN MUSIC AND PROPHECY MEET

David danced before the Lord when the ark was brought to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:14–15). Later, he appointed musicians from the families of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to prophesy with harps, lyres, and cymbals (1 Chronicles 25:1–3).

Not every song is prophetic, but Scripture shows that music and prophetic ministry can work together, giving voice to God's truth and drawing others into worship.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB

Read Revelation 15:2–4. John sees God's victorious people singing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. What began as a celebration of God's deliverance beside the Red Sea finds its echo in heaven, where worship centers on God's marvelous deeds and the victory of Jesus.

ENTER HIS COURTS WITH PRAISE

Psalm 100:2–4 invites us to come into God's presence with singing and enter his courts with praise. Worship turns our attention toward God, opening our hearts to his presence and the leading of the Holy Spirit. As we lift our voices together, praise can become an invitation into deeper worship, where we listen, respond, and make room for God to move among us.

WHEN THE HOLY SPIRIT INSPIRES A SONG

Read Ephesians 5:18–20 and 1 Corinthians 14:26. Paul describes Spirit-filled believers singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He also pictures gatherings where someone brings a hymn, another a teaching, and another a revelation—all for building up the Church.

Prophetic worship remains a beautiful part of the Church today. Sometimes the Holy Spirit inspires a fresh song, a simple refrain, or words of praise that rise spontaneously from someone's heart. Others may join in, and what began with one voice becomes a shared expression of worship. Such moments can draw people into a deeper awareness of God's presence, opening the way for prayer, encouragement, healing, and fresh encounters with Jesus.

WORSHIP THAT STRENGTHENS THE CHURCH

Paul reminds us that prophecy is given to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others (1 Corinthians 14:3). A Spirit-inspired song may do exactly that—bringing hope to someone who is discouraged, reminding the congregation of God's promises, or calling hearts back to Jesus. Such contributions should be received and weighed with humility, Scripture, and love (1 Corinthians 14:29).
Like Miriam's invitation to sing, prophetic worship can become a gift to the entire community.

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Walter Brueggemann describes Miriam's response to God's deliverance as “a celebrative dance of freedom.” He sees the women's singing and dancing as testimony to what God had done. Miriam's prophetic worship did more than celebrate a victory; it invited the community to remember God's faithfulness and join in joyful praise.[1]

John Wimber envisioned “the message, the music and the ministry” working together in a church where “everyone gets to play.” Miriam's example reminds us that worship isn't simply something led by a gifted

individual. It can become a shared expression of God's presence and work, as ordinary people respond together in praise and participate in what God is doing.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1. Exodus 15:1–21 — The song of Moses and Miriam moves from remembering what God has done to declaring confidence in what he will do. How does remembering God's faithfulness shape our ability to trust him for an uncertain future?

2. Exodus 15:20–21; Micah 6:4 — Miriam's prophetic leadership helped draw God's people into a shared expression of worship. How might the Holy Spirit use our voices to move a discouraged or divided community toward renewed hope and unity? What might prevent us from responding when we sense his invitation?

3. Exodus 15:13–18; 2 Chronicles 20:20–22 — Miriam celebrated a victory already won, while Jehoshaphat's singers praised God before the outcome was visible. What does each example teach us about prophetic courage? How can we proclaim God's faithfulness without denying the suffering, uncertainty, or unanswered prayers we still face?

4. Psalm 100:2–4; Ephesians 5:18–20; 1 Corinthians 14:3, 26 — What might happen in our worship gatherings if we became more attentive to the Holy Spirit's leading? How could a spontaneous song, a Scripture, or a simple expression of praise open the way for deeper worship and strengthen others?

5. Numbers 12:1–16; Micah 6:4 — Have you ever allowed a past failure to convince you that God could no longer use you? What does Miriam's story teach us about receiving God's forgiveness and moving forward?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Miriam's prophetic courage was expressed through a song that invited others to celebrate God's faithfulness. Today, prophetic worship may begin with a Scripture, a melody, a spontaneous song, or words of praise that the Holy Spirit brings to mind. We need not be accomplished musicians or singers to respond. What matters is a listening heart and a willingness to offer what God gives us.

How might the Holy Spirit use your voice or instrument to awaken hope, deepen worship, or bring unity to your family, small group, or church? Sometimes one person's faithful response can inspire an entire community to turn its attention toward Jesus.

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention.

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you heard, sensed, saw, or felt God showing you.

End your time in prayer.

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1. Walter Brueggemann, "The Conditions from Which the Poems Arose," *Church Anew*, section on Exodus 15:21.
2. John Wimber, quoted in "Quotes From John Wimber," *Vineyard USA*, March 25, 2016.

04 / ELIJAH – Living in Power and Weakness

WHEN LOYALTIES ARE DIVIDED

Elijah appears during the reign of Ahab, king of northern Israel. Ahab and Jezebel promoted the worship of Baal, while Elijah called the people back to the LORD (1 Kings 16:29–33; 17:1). This was not simply a disagreement about religious preferences. It concerned whom Israel would trust, worship, and obey. Throughout his ministry, Elijah confronted idolatry and injustice, cared for people in desperate circumstances, and discovered his own dependence on God.

GOD'S PROVISION IN DESPERATE TIMES

Elijah's ministry began with a declaration that no rain would fall except at his word. Yet he too had to depend on God's provision during the drought. Ravens brought him food beside a brook, and when it dried up, God sent him to a poor widow in Zarephath. She had barely enough food for one final meal, but God miraculously sustained her household throughout the famine. Later, when her son died, Elijah cried out to God, and the boy's life was restored (1 Kings 17). Through Elijah, God demonstrated his compassion and power, even beyond the borders of Israel.

FIRE ON MOUNT CARMEL

Read 1 Kings 18:17–39. After years of devastating drought, Elijah stood before King Ahab, 450 prophets of Baal, and a people divided in their loyalty to God. Baal was worshiped as a god of storms and rain, yet he had been powerless to end the drought. Elijah challenged the people to choose whom they would serve. The prophets of Baal cried out for hours, but nothing happened. Then Elijah repaired the Lord's altar with twelve stones, drenched the sacrifice with water, and prayed that the people would know the LORD was God. Fire fell from heaven, consuming the sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and even the water! The people fell facedown, crying, “The LORD—he is God!” (18:39). God had revealed himself before the gathered people, calling them back to wholehearted devotion.

COURAGE, EXHAUSTION, AND A GENTLE WHISPER

After the confrontation on Mount Carmel, Elijah prayed for rain. Six times his servant looked toward the sea and saw nothing. On the seventh, a cloud no bigger than a man's hand appeared, and soon after a downpour that ended the drought. (1 Kings 18:41–46). Yet when Jezebel threatened Elijah's life, the courageous prophet fled in fear and despair. God provided food and rest, then met him at Mount Horeb—not in the powerful wind, earthquake, or fire, but in a gentle whisper. God assured Elijah that he was not alone and gave him new direction (1 Kings 19:1–18). Even this great prophet needed God's strength, reassurance, and care.

SPEAKING TRUTH TO POWER

Elijah's prophetic calling also confronted injustice. When King Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard, Naboth refused to surrender his family's inheritance. Jezebel arranged false accusations that led to Naboth's death, and Ahab took possession of the vineyard. God sent Elijah to confront the king with his wrongdoing and announce judgment (1 Kings 21). Elijah's ministry reminds us that faithfulness to God concerns more than worship. It includes how people are treated, especially when those with power exploit the vulnerable.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

THE WIDOW JESUS REMEMBERED

Before Carmel, God sends Elijah to a widow in Zarephath, outside Israel. God sustains her household through famine and later restores her son's life (1 Kings 17:8–24). When Jesus recalls this widow in Nazareth (Luke 4:25–26), he reminds his hearers that God's mercy reaches beyond the people who assume it belongs to them. Luke also records Jesus raising a widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11–17). Both sons are returned to their mothers.

WHEN THE DISCIPLES WANT FIRE

In Luke 9:51–56 (NKJV), a Samaritan village refuses to welcome Jesus. James and John ask whether they should call down fire from heaven to consume them, "just as Elijah did" (v. 54). They were recalling Elijah's actions in 2 Kings 1:10–12. But Jesus rebukes them, reminding them that he came to save lives, not destroy them. The disciples knew Elijah's example of God's power, but still needed to understand the heart and mission of Jesus.

TAKEN INTO HEAVEN

Elijah's earthly ministry ends in an extraordinary way. A chariot and horses of fire appear, and Elijah is taken into heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:11). Centuries later, Jesus also ascends into heaven before his followers (Acts 1:9–11). Elijah is a servant of God, taken into heaven by God's power. Jesus is the risen Son of God, who has conquered death and returns to the Father. The two extraordinary departures invite comparison while revealing the greater identity and mission of Jesus.

ON THE MOUNTAIN, LISTEN TO JESUS

At the Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus, bringing together the Law and the Prophets. Their presence connects God's work throughout the Old Testament with its fulfillment in Jesus. Luke tells us they spoke with Jesus about what he was about to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30–31). Then the Father directs attention to his Son: "Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:1–8). Moses and Elijah were faithful servants in God's unfolding story, but Jesus is the fulfillment of that story—the One to whom the Law and the Prophets point.

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Walter Brueggemann sees Elijah's confrontation on Carmel as a contest between rival accounts of reality: Who truly rules, and whose word can be trusted? Prophetic courage challenges the story that the powerful insist is the only possible one.[1]

Vineyard theologian Derek Morphew observes that John Wimber's emphasis on signs and wonders was also joined to "mercy ministry." God's Kingdom is not power without compassion; in Jesus, both belong together.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1. God's Provision — 1 Kings 17:8–24; Luke 4:25–26

What does God's care for Elijah and the widow reveal about his character? Why do you think Jesus reminded the people of Nazareth about this particular widow?

2. The Small Cloud — 1 Kings 18:41–46

Elijah continued praying even when there was no visible sign of rain. What can we learn from his persistence, and how might this encourage us when we are waiting on God?

3. When Courage Gives Way to Fear — 1 Kings 19:1–18

After witnessing God's extraordinary power, Elijah became frightened and discouraged. What stands out to you about God's response to him? What might we learn about receiving God's care and listening for his voice?

4. Speaking Truth with Courage — 1 Kings 21:1–29

Elijah confronted Ahab over a terrible injustice. What does this teach us about the courage to speak God's truth, particularly when people in positions of authority are doing wrong?

5. Learning the Heart of Jesus — 2 Kings 1:9–12; Luke 9:51–56 (NKJV); John 4:25–42

When James and John wanted to call down fire on a Samaritan village, they referred to Elijah's example. Jesus rebuked them, reminding them that he came to save lives, not destroy them. Earlier, Jesus had revealed himself as the Messiah to a Samaritan woman, and many in her town believed in him. What do these encounters reveal about Jesus' heart toward those who accept him and those who reject him? How should this shape our own responses?

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention.

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you heard, sensed, saw, or felt God showing you.

End your time in prayer.

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, The Practice of Prophetic Imagination (Fortress Press, 2012), discussion of 1 Kings 18:21.

[2] Derek Morphew, “The Kingdom: Healing the Dualism of Personal and Social Ethics,” Vineyard USA, Mar. 7, 2016. vineyardusa.org/the-kingdom-healing-the-dualism-of-personal-and-social-ethics/

05/ AMOS – Called Out For Justice

AN UNLIKELY MESSENGER

Amos came from Tekoa in Judah. He worked with flocks and sycamore-fig trees, but God sent him north to speak to Israel (Amos 1:1; 7:14–15). During a time of prosperity for some, Amos saw a troubling reality: the wealthy could thrive while vulnerable neighbors were mistreated. He was not trying to make himself popular.

WHAT WAS WRONG AT THE CITY GATE?

Read Amos 5:7, 10–12. The "gate" was a place where public disputes and legal decisions were settled. Amos describes bribes, unfair treatment, and burdens placed on the poor. The problem was not simply that some people lacked generosity; justice itself was being bent in favor of those with power.

WHEN WORSHIP AND LIFE PART WAYS

Read Amos 5:21–24. God rejects festivals, offerings, and songs while people continue to oppress their neighbors. Amos is not saying that worship is bad. He is saying that beautiful worship cannot cover up lives that contradict God's character. Our treatment of others should reflect the character of the God we worship.

THE OTHER INVITATION: SEEK GOOD

Amos does more than expose wrongdoing. He calls the people to "seek good, not evil" and "establish justice in the gate" (5:14–15). Justice in Amos is not a fashionable slogan. It is a way of living that reflects God's goodness, honesty, and concern for people who have little protection.

WHEN TRUTH IS UNWELCOME

Read Amos 7:10–17. Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, reports Amos to the king and tells him to leave Israel and take his prophecies elsewhere. Amos responds that he did not choose this calling for himself; God took him from tending flocks and sent him to speak. His courage was not rooted in personal ambition or a desire for confrontation. He understood that faithfulness sometimes means speaking an unwelcome truth, even when powerful people would rather silence it. Prophetic courage requires both conviction and humility.

TRUTH WITHOUT DESPAIR / HOPE WITHOUT DENIAL

Amos delivers some of Scripture's strongest warnings, yet God's invitation remains: "Seek me and live" (Amos 5:4). His warnings are not an excuse for hopelessness, nor is his mercy permission to ignore injustice. God calls his people to confront what is wrong, turn toward him, and allow that turning to reshape how they live. The same God who exposes injustice continues to call people toward righteousness, restoration, and life.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

WORSHIP THAT SHAPES HOW WE LIVE

Amos confronts Israel for worshiping God while neglecting justice and mistreating others. Jesus teaches that loving God and loving our neighbors are inseparable. Both remind us that genuine devotion to God must be reflected in how we live and treat others.

JESUS AND THE WEIGHTIER MATTERS

In Matthew 23:23, Jesus confronts religious leaders who carefully tithe the small herbs while neglecting "justice, mercy and faithfulness." He does not tell them to abandon devotion; he says they must practice both. Like Amos, Jesus refuses to separate religious faithfulness from the treatment of other people.

THE NEIGHBOR WE MAY WALK PAST

Amos challenges those who live comfortably while remaining unmoved by the suffering around them (Amos 6:4–6). Jesus brings that challenge into focus when someone asks, "Who is my neighbor?" He tells the story of a wounded traveler and an unexpected helper (Luke 10:25–37). The Samaritan sees someone suffering and acts. Jesus ends with an invitation: "Go and do likewise."

GOOD NEWS WITH HANDS AND FEET

Through Amos, God calls for justice to flow like an unfailing stream (Amos 5:24). Jesus announces good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed (Luke 4:18–21). His ministry demonstrates God's concern for the whole person. We cannot solve every injustice, but we can ask the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to people nearby and show us the next faithful act of love.

AMOS ENDS WITH A PROMISE

Amos closes with a picture of God restoring what has fallen (Amos 9:11–15). In Acts 15:13–18, James draws on Amos when explaining how people from the nations are being welcomed into God's people. Even this fierce prophetic book looks beyond judgment toward God's larger work of restoration.

IN AMOS	IN THE WAY OF JESUS
Seek good; establish justice. • Amos 5:14–15	Practice justice, mercy, and faithfulness. • Matt. 23:23
Let our lives reflect the God we worship. • Amos 5:21–24	Love your neighbor in costly, practical ways. • Luke 10
God promises to rebuild. • Amos 9:11–15	God welcomes people from the nations. • Acts 15:13–18

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote that "a person is a being whose anguish may reach the heart of God." For Amos, injustice wasn't simply a social problem. God saw the suffering of people being cheated, exploited, and oppressed. The prophet challenges us to recognize that the way we treat others matters deeply to God.[1]

John Wimber declared, "Serving the poor isn't an option." He believed worship and compassion belonged together. Amos confronts the same disconnect: people could offer sacrifices and sing praises while neglecting justice. Genuine devotion to God must be reflected in mercy, fairness, and practical love for others.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1 **Amos 5:10–15** What was happening to people without wealth or influence? Where do you see Amos calling for more than private kindness?

2 **Amos 5:21–24** Why would God reject the people's worship? How might we recognize a gap between what we sing and how we live—without turning the discussion into blame?

3 **Matthew 23:23; Luke 10:25–37** What does Jesus add to our understanding of justice? Whose need might become visible when we slow down enough to notice?

4 **Amos 9:11–15; Acts 15:13–18** Why do you think a book full of hard truth closes with restoration? What does the welcome of outsiders reveal about God's heart?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Justice can start close to home: treating workers fairly, believing people whose voices are overlooked, refusing to benefit from someone else's mistreatment, or standing beside a person who is being excluded. Where might God invite you to move from concern to one concrete act of love? There is room for small, faithful beginnings.

Read Amos 5:24 slowly, then sit quietly. Ask: "Holy Spirit, whose life or situation do you want us to notice? Show us the heart of Jesus." Receive impressions humbly; test them with Scripture and love. Pray where the Spirit leads rather than feeling obliged to cover every question or action.

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention.

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you heard, sensed, saw, or felt God showing you.

End your time in prayer.

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1. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2001), p. 276.
2. John Wimber, "Quotes From John Wimber," Vineyard USA, March 25, 2016.

6 / JOEL - Devastation, invitation, and promise

WHEN THE LAND FALLS SILENT

Joel opens with a disaster. Swarms of locusts have stripped the fields, vineyards, and trees. Food is scarce, joy has faded, and even the offerings at the temple are affected (Joel 1:4–12). We do not know precisely when Joel lived. But we can hear the anguish of a community whose familiar world has been shaken.

FIRST, GIVE GRIEF A VOICE

Read Joel 1:13–20. The priests mourn because worship has been interrupted; farmers face ruined fields, animals suffer, and streams have dried up. Joel gives this devastation words. He cries out to God rather than disguising the pain or offering easy explanations. Lament lets a community tell the truth about what has been lost and bring that sorrow before the Lord.

"RETURN TO ME WITH ALL YOUR HEART"

Read Joel 2:12–13. God's invitation is personal: "Return to me with all your heart." Joel says to tear your hearts, not merely your garments. In his world, torn clothing could express grief or repentance. God wants more than an outward display; he welcomes a genuine turning toward him. The reason for hope is God's own character: gracious, compassionate, patient, and rich in love.

A CALL TO RETURN TOGETHER

Read Joel 2:15–17. This is more than private regret. Joel calls for a solemn gathering that includes elders, infants, and even newlyweds who would normally be excused from public duties. The priests stand between the temple porch and altar and plead, "Spare your people, LORD." The whole community is invited to turn toward God together, asking for mercy and taking seriously their shared responsibility to live differently.

MERCY IN THE MIDST OF LOSS

Truth: loss and sin must not be hidden behind religious appearances. Hope: the Lord invites his people to return because he is merciful. Joel does not promise that every painful circumstance will change immediately; he calls people to the God who meets them in it.

FOLLOW THE THREAD TO JESUS

"I WILL RESTORE" — A HOPEFUL FUTURE

In Joel 2:18–27, God responds to devastation with compassion and the promise of restoration. "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten" (2:25) speaks to Israel's suffering, not as a guarantee that every personal loss will be reversed. Centuries later, Peter speaks of the time when God will "restore everything" through Jesus (Acts 3:19–21). Joel's promise gives us a glimpse of Jesus' greater plan to make all things new. (Rev. 21:5)

A PROMISE THAT CROSSES BOUNDARIES

In Joel 2:28–29, God promises to pour out his Spirit on all his people—sons and daughters, young and old, even servants. No longer would hearing from God be limited to a select few. This extraordinary promise opens the door for everyone to participate in God's work.

PETER SAYS, "THIS IS WHAT WAS SPOKEN"

At Pentecost, Peter recognizes Joel's prophecy unfolding before their eyes (Acts 2:14–21, 32–33). The risen Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit, empowering ordinary believers to become witnesses to him. What Joel anticipated has now begun!

EVERYONE INVITED; EVERY WORD DISCERNED

The Vineyard often says, "Everyone gets to play." Joel helps explain why ordinary believers may expect the Holy Spirit to work through them. But that is not a claim that every impression is God's voice or that prophecy today has the authority of Scripture. The New Testament tells the church to weigh prophetic words carefully (1 Corinthians 14:3, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:20–21).

IN JOEL	IN THE WAY OF JESUS
Bring grief honestly before God. • Joel 1:13–20	Jesus welcomes those who mourn. • Matt. 5:4
Return with the whole heart. • Joel 2:12–13	Turn toward God and receive good news. • Mark 1:15
The Spirit is poured out broadly. • Joel 2:28–29	The risen Jesus pours out the Spirit. • Acts 2:32–33

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

Walter Brueggemann writes, "The laments are refusals to settle for the way things are." He describes lament as an act of persistent hope in God's power to transform circumstances. Joel calls the whole community to bring its grief before God, repent, and trust in his mercy. Their cries are not expressions of hopelessness but invitations for God to bring renewal.[1]

John Wimber declared, "The manifestation of the Spirit is not supposed to be the exception—it's supposed to be the norm." Joel's promise that God would pour out his Spirit on sons and daughters, young and old, even servants, reveals God's desire to work through ordinary people. At Pentecost, that promise begins to unfold as the Holy Spirit empowers believers to participate in God's work.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1. Joel 1:13–20 — Joel calls the entire community to grieve and cry out to God. Why might honest lament be an important part of spiritual renewal? What happens when we rush past suffering instead of bringing it before God?

2. Joel 2:12–18 — God calls his people to tear their hearts, not merely their garments. What distinguishes genuine repentance from religious activity? How might a deeper understanding of God's compassion change the way we respond to his correction?

3. Joel 2:25–29 — God's promise moves from restoring what was lost to pouring out his Spirit on all kinds of people. What does this reveal about the breadth of God's purposes? How might it challenge our assumptions about whom God chooses to speak through and use?

4. Acts 2:16–21, 32–33 — Peter connects the outpouring of the Spirit directly to the risen and exalted Jesus. Why is that connection essential? What might a church look like if it truly embraced Joel's vision of the Spirit working through ordinary believers?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Joel looked forward to a day when God would pour out his Spirit on ordinary people, empowering them to speak prophetically. In the New Testament, prophecy is given to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others (1 Corinthians 14:3). We are invited to listen to the Holy Spirit and humbly share what we sense God may be saying. Who might need a word of encouragement, comfort, or hope? How might God use you to build someone up in their faith?

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Read Joel 2:12–13 slowly. Sit in silence for a moment. Ask, "Holy Spirit, is there anything you want to bring into the light? Where are you inviting us to return to Jesus?" Let prayer arise naturally. If someone shares an impression, receive it gently and weigh it with Scripture and love.

End your time in prayer.

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1. Walter Brueggemann, *Old Testament Theology: Essays on Structure, Theme, and Text* (Fortress Press, 1992), p. 29.
2. John Wimber, quoted in Vineyard USA, "Quotes From John Wimber," March 25, 2016.

7 / JEREMIAH – Weeping Prophet

A PROPHET IN A KINGDOM COMING APART

Jeremiah spoke to Judah during its final, troubled decades before Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC. Leaders trusted political alliances and the temple to keep them safe, while many neglected God's covenant and mistreated their neighbors (Jeremiah 7:1–11). Jeremiah warned that belonging to God did not excuse injustice or make the nation immune to consequences. His words were costly and usually unwelcome.

"TO UPROOT … AND TO PLANT"

Read Jeremiah 1:4–10. God calls a young, hesitant Jeremiah to speak to nations and kingdoms: to uproot, tear down, destroy, and overthrow—and also to build and plant (1:10). These describe the impact of God's word, not permission to harm others. The story does not end with what is torn down. In Jeremiah 30–33, God promises to bring his people home, heal their wounds, and make a new covenant. In 31:28, God echoes Jeremiah's calling: the One who watched over them to uproot and tear down will also watch over them to build and plant. Judgment is real; so is God's promise of a future.

WHEN FALSE PEACE CAUSES MORE HARM

Read Jeremiah 6:13–14 and 7:5–7. Some voices assured people that all was well when it was not. Jeremiah names dishonest gain, injustice, and the mistreatment of vulnerable neighbors. Calling something "peace" cannot heal what we refuse to face. Prophetic courage may mean telling an uncomfortable truth without losing compassion for those who will bear its consequences.

THE PROPHET WHO CANNOT STOP WEEPING

Now read Jeremiah 8:18–9:1. The prophet hears the anguish of his people and cries, "Since my people are crushed, I am crushed" (8:21). In this poetry, the voices of God and Jeremiah can seem to overlap. The picture is striking: faithful truth-telling has not made Jeremiah cold. He is brokenhearted over the suffering around him.

"IS THERE NO BALM IN GILEAD?"

Jeremiah asks why his people's wounds remain unhealed (8:22). Gilead was known for a medicinal balm, but this is a deeper wound that no simple remedy can mend. The question is not a neat answer; it is an aching prayer. Sometimes the most faithful words are "How long?" and "Where is healing?"

Follow the Thread to Jesus

THE COURAGE TO WEEP

Jeremiah did not stand at a distance from the suffering and unfaithfulness of his people. He grieved deeply over their condition and the destruction that awaited them. Centuries later, Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). Their tears remind us that compassion requires more than recognizing suffering. It calls us to allow our hearts to be moved by what moves the heart of God.

A DEEPER ANSWER THAN "EVERYTHING IS FINE"

Jeremiah rejects easy assurances of peace. Jesus also confronts hollow religion: in Mark 11:17, he echoes Jeremiah 7:11 when challenging what the temple has become. But Jeremiah's message does not end in judgment.

God promises return and healing (30:3, 17), a new covenant written on hearts (31:31–34), and ordinary life restored: houses, fields, and vineyards bought again (32:15). Jesus inaugurates that new covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:8–12). Truth and hope belong together.

LIVING BETWEEN "NOW" AND "NOT YET"

God's kingdom has come near in Jesus, but suffering has not vanished. We can pray for healing, work for justice, and still grieve unanswered prayers. Jeremiah teaches us not to deny pain; Jesus teaches us that pain does not get the final word. The promise that God will wipe away every tear (Revelation 21:4) is future hope, not pressure to stop crying today.

COURAGE THAT DOES NOT NEED TO FIX EVERYTHING

When someone is grieving, we may rush toward explanations, advice, or cheerful Bible verses. Jeremiah offers another way: stay present, name the loss honestly, and bring it before God. Lament is more than sadness. It is sorrow spoken in relationship with God, often on behalf of others.

IN JEREMIAH	IN THE WAY OF JESUS
God will build and plant again. • Jer. 1:10; 31:28	A new covenant and a new beginning. • Luke 22:20
Tears for a wounded people. • Jer. 8:21–9:1	Jesus weeps over Jerusalem. • Luke 19:41
A longing for true healing. • Jer. 8:22	Jesus meets mourners with compassion. • John 11:35

TWO VOICES WORTH HEARING

Walter Brueggemann writes about the prophetic work of facing painful reality while stirring hope for God's future. Jeremiah does both: he weeps over destruction, yet holds out God's promise to "build and to plant" (31:28) and to make a new covenant (31:31–34). Hope does not erase grief; it opens a future beyond it.[1]

John Wimber acknowledged the mystery of unanswered prayer. The Vineyard's "already and not yet" understanding of God's kingdom leaves room for both expectant prayer and genuine grief. Faith does not require us to pretend every wound is healed today.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1 **Jeremiah 1:4–10** Why does God give Jeremiah words about both uprooting and planting? What might happen if we remember only one side?

2 **Jeremiah 6:13–14; 8:18–22** Why can false reassurances be harmful? What does Jeremiah's grief show us about speaking hard truths with love?

3 **Jeremiah 8:18–9:1; Luke 19:41–44** What do Jeremiah's tears and Jesus' tears reveal about God's heart for people who are suffering?

4 **Jeremiah 30:17; 31:28–34; Revelation 21:1–5** What do God's promises to heal, build, and plant offer people who are grieving? How can we hold hope without rushing past their pain?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Sometimes courage means saying what others would rather avoid. Sometimes it means staying beside someone whose pain we cannot solve. Is there a sorrow—in your family, church, community, or the wider world—that you have been tempted to look away from? What might compassionate faithfulness look like?

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Read Jeremiah 8:21–9:1 slowly. Pause in silence, whether you are alone or with others. Invite the Holy Spirit to bring to mind people who need comfort or a situation calling for honest prayer. Respond gently: with tears, intercession, practical care, or silence. If studying with others, share what feels appropriate.

Close your time in prayer.

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[1] Walter Brueggemann, The Prophetic Imagination, rev. ed. (Fortress Press, 2001), on prophetic criticism and energizing; see also DCV Sermon Series Guide for Preachers.

[2] John Wimber, "Unanswered Prayer," from Prayer: Intimate Communication (1997), republished by Vineyard USA; Vineyard USA, "The Now and the Not Yet of the Kingdom" (2016).

8 / ISAIAH – Here Am I, Send Me

ONE BOOK, A LONG AND TROUBLED STORY

Isaiah's story begins in eighth-century Judah, when powerful empires threatened the nation and its leaders struggled with whom to trust. The prophet confronted pride, injustice, false security, and worship that had lost its meaning. Yet his message also reached toward an extraordinary future. The book moves through warnings of judgment and exile into promises of restoration, peace, and God's coming salvation. Isaiah's courage was not simply in confronting what was wrong, but in proclaiming what God could yet accomplish.

A VISION THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Read Isaiah 6:1–8. Isaiah encounters the overwhelming holiness of God and becomes painfully aware of his own inadequacy. Yet God cleanses him and calls him to speak. Isaiah answers, “Here am I. Send me!” His prophetic ministry begins not with confidence in himself, but with an encounter with the living God. The courage to carry God's message begins with knowing the One who sends us.

WHEN GOD CALLS FOR MORE THAN WORSHIP

Read Isaiah 1:11–17. God confronts a people who faithfully observe religious ceremonies while neglecting justice and the needs of the vulnerable. Later, Isaiah 58:6–12 describes the kind of fasting God desires: freeing the oppressed, feeding the hungry, and caring for those in need. Isaiah's vision of hope is never separated from righteousness. God wants to restore not only the circumstances of his people, but the way they live with one another.

A KINGDOM UNLIKE ANY OTHER

Read Isaiah 9:2–7 and 11:1–9. Into a world marked by conflict and unjust leadership, Isaiah speaks of a coming ruler whose reign will be characterized by righteousness, justice, and peace. The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, and he will defend those who are poor and vulnerable. Isaiah envisions a future where even creation is at peace. God's promise reaches far beyond replacing one earthly king with another. He is revealing a different kind of Kingdom.

WHEN THE WILDERNESS BLOOMS

Read Isaiah 35:1–10. Isaiah pictures deserts bursting into bloom, weak hands strengthened, fearful hearts encouraged, and the redeemed returning with songs of joy. These images speak of God's power to transform what appears barren and hopeless. The prophet dares to imagine restoration where others can see only devastation. Prophetic hope sees beyond present circumstances because it trusts the character and promises of God.

“COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE”

Read Isaiah 40:1–2. By this point in the book, the message addresses a people whose world has been shattered by exile. God commands that comfort be spoken tenderly to Jerusalem. He has not abandoned his people. His word of comfort does not dismiss their suffering or deny the consequences of their past. It announces that judgment will not be the final word. God's mercy opens the way to a new beginning.

A HIGHWAY THROUGH THE WILDERNESS

Read Isaiah 40:3–5. The image is of a highway prepared through the desert for the coming of the Lord. It recalls the exodus, when God led his people out of Egypt. Now those who cannot imagine a way home hear that God

himself is coming. The mountains and valleys that seem immovable will not prevent him from fulfilling his promise. The prophet calls people to prepare for God's coming, even before they can see the road ahead.

THE GOD WHO IS BOTH MIGHTY AND TENDER

Read Isaiah 40:6–11. Human strength fades, kingdoms rise and fall, but God's word endures. Then Isaiah gives us a remarkable picture: the sovereign Lord who comes with power is also a shepherd who gathers lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart. Here is the foundation of Isaiah's hope. The God who is powerful enough to accomplish his purposes is also compassionate enough to care for his weary people.

STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. Just before this promise, God's people wonder whether he sees their suffering or has forgotten them. Isaiah doesn't dismiss their weariness. Instead, he reminds them of the God whose strength is never exhausted and whose understanding is beyond measure. Waiting on the Lord is not passive resignation; it is a choice to trust his faithfulness when we cannot see what he is doing. Notice that renewed strength is not only for soaring like eagles, but also for continuing to walk. Sometimes the greatest expression of prophetic hope is not a dramatic breakthrough, but the courage to persevere when the journey is long. Isaiah reminds us that God's strength is available precisely where our own runs out.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

THE PROMISED KING AND HIS KINGDOM

Read Isaiah 9:2–7 and 11:1–9. Isaiah envisions a ruler unlike any Israel has known. The Spirit of the Lord rests upon him, and his reign brings justice for the poor, righteousness, and lasting peace. When Gabriel announces Jesus' birth, he declares that his Kingdom will never end (Luke 1:32–33). In Jesus, we begin to see Isaiah's extraordinary vision unfold—a Kingdom where power is expressed through righteousness, mercy, and love.

THE SERVANT WHO WILL NOT BREAK A BRUISED REED

Isaiah 42:1–4 describes God's chosen servant, empowered by the Spirit to bring justice without crushing the weak or extinguishing a flickering flame. Matthew 12:15–21 directly connects this prophecy to Jesus' gentle ministry. Here is a remarkable picture of prophetic power: not demanding attention or overwhelming the vulnerable, but bringing healing and hope. Jesus shows us that God's strength and tenderness are never in conflict.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT WHO CARRIES OUR SORROWS

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12. Isaiah describes a servant who is rejected, suffers unjustly, and bears the sins and sorrows of others. Centuries later, the early Church recognizes Jesus in these words (Acts 8:32–35; 1 Peter 2:22–25). God's answer to human suffering is not simply a promise spoken from a distance. In Jesus, he enters our suffering and carries what we could never bear alone. The cross reveals the depth of God's love, and the resurrection declares that suffering and death will not have the final word.

GOOD NEWS THAT CHANGES LIVES

In Isaiah 61:1–3, the Spirit-anointed messenger brings good news to the poor, freedom to captives, and comfort to those who mourn. When Jesus reads this passage in the synagogue, he announces that it is being fulfilled (Luke 4:16–21). His ministry demonstrates what that good news looks like: healing the sick, welcoming the excluded, forgiving sinners, and restoring broken lives. The hope Isaiah proclaimed becomes visible in the life and ministry of Jesus.

REST FOR THE WEARY

Isaiah 40:28–31 promises renewed strength to those who hope in the Lord, while Isaiah 50:4 speaks of a word that sustains the weary. Then Jesus offers an invitation that seems almost too wonderful to believe: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28–30).
Jesus does not simply tell exhausted people to try harder or carry their burdens more faithfully. He invites them to come to him, take his yoke, and learn from his gentleness and humility. His rest is not freedom from every difficulty, but the gift of walking with him rather than struggling in our own strength. The God who promises strength to the weary now invites us into a personal relationship with the One who gives that strength.

A LIGHT FOR ALL NATIONS

Isaiah's vision reaches far beyond Israel. In Isaiah 49:6, God's servant is appointed as a light to the nations so that salvation may reach the ends of the earth. When Simeon holds the infant Jesus, he recognizes him as that light (Luke 2:29–32). God's saving purposes have always been greater than one people or place. Through Jesus, the invitation to know God extends to every nation, language, and generation.

BEHOLD, I AM MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

Isaiah's vision culminates in something almost beyond imagination. God will swallow up death, wipe away tears (Isaiah 25:6–9), and create new heavens and a new earth (Isaiah 65:17–25). In Revelation 21:1–5, we encounter these promises again as God makes his dwelling among his people and declares, "I am making everything new!" The hope Isaiah carried was never limited to relief from present troubles. It pointed toward God's ultimate restoration of creation. Through Jesus' resurrection, we have a foretaste of that coming reality. Prophetic hope invites us to live faithfully in the present while keeping our eyes on the future God has promised.

INSIGHTS WORTH SHARING

N. T. Wright, reflecting on Isaiah 35, reminds us that God's purpose is not to discard creation but "to renew it, to restore it, to fill it with new joy and purpose and delight." Isaiah's blooming wilderness points toward something extraordinary: God's intention to make all things new. This hope changes not only how we view the future, but how we care for God's world today.[1]

Vineyard pastor Tri Robinson, reflecting on Isaiah 61, writes, "We must follow God's leading to participate with Him to bring out the beauty from the muck and the mire." For Robinson, proclaiming good news involves caring for both the spiritual and practical needs of people. The hope Jesus brings is something the Church is called to demonstrate, not simply announce.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1. Isaiah 6:1–8; 58:6–12 — Isaiah's encounter with God's holiness transformed his understanding of himself and his calling. Later, the book challenges worship that neglects compassion and justice. How should an encounter with God's holiness change the way we see and respond to the world around us? What might prophetic courage look like when our actions must speak as clearly as our words?

2. Isaiah 9:2–7; 11:1–9 — Isaiah describes a coming King whose reign will be marked by justice, righteousness, and peace. How does this vision challenge our human ideas about power, leadership, and success? If we truly believed that this is the Kingdom Jesus is establishing, how might it change the way we live as his Church?

3. Isaiah 40:27–31; Matthew 11:28–30 — God's people feared they had been forgotten, yet Isaiah promises renewed strength to those who wait on the Lord. Jesus later invites the weary to take his yoke and find rest.

What is the difference between struggling to remain strong in our own efforts and learning to rest in Jesus? How might experiencing his rest change the way we carry hope to others?

4. Isaiah 42:1–4; 52:13–53:12 — Isaiah's servanthood brings justice without crushing the weak, yet also bears suffering and rejection. What does this reveal about the surprising nature of God's power? How does Jesus challenge our understanding of what it means to be courageous, victorious, or effective in ministry?

5. Isaiah 35:1–10; 65:17–25; Revelation 21:1–5 — Isaiah's vision of restoration is remarkably tangible: healed bodies, safe homes, fruitful work, and even creation itself renewed. Why do you think God's promises include such ordinary, earthly details? What does this reveal about the scope of God's Kingdom, and how might it challenge a view of salvation that focuses only on our spiritual lives?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Isaiah's prophetic courage was not limited to confronting sin or announcing judgment. He carried a vision of God's Kingdom that reached beyond the brokenness of his own generation. His words gave people reason to hope when their circumstances offered little encouragement.

Today, we are invited to carry that same hope through the Holy Spirit. New Testament prophecy is given to strengthen, encourage, and comfort others (1 Corinthians 14:3). Sometimes that means speaking a word of hope into discouragement, reminding someone of God's promises, or recognizing what the Holy Spirit may be doing where others see only defeat.

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

We've explored some remarkable truths about God's heart and his purposes through Isaiah. Now let's take a few minutes to sit quietly in his presence.

Invite the Holy Spirit to bring to mind something from this study that he wants to deepen in you. Ask, “Lord, what do you want me to understand, receive, or respond to?”

Afterward, write in your journal or share with your group anything you sensed God bringing to your attention.

End your time in prayer.

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[1] N. T. Wright, “The Road to New Creation,” sermon, Durham Cathedral, September 23, 2006. ntwrightpage.com/2016/03/30/the-road-to-new-creation/

[2] Tri Robinson, “Bringing Hope to a Desperate World,” Vineyard USA, March 7, 2016. vineyardusa.org/bringing-hope-to-a-desperate-world/

9 / EZEKIEL – Hope in Hopeless Circumstances

A PROPHET FAR FROM HOME

Ezekiel was a priest living among people taken from Judah to Babylon in 597 BC (Ezekiel 1:1–3). Jerusalem and its temple still stood—until the city was destroyed in 587/586 BC. Imagine the questions: Where is God now? Have his promises failed? Ezekiel's dramatic visions, sometimes strange and unsettling, confront the reasons for this disaster. Yet they also carry a remarkable promise: God has not finished with his people.

THE GOD WHO DOES NOT ABANDON HIS PEOPLE

Ezekiel sees God's glory depart from the defiled temple (chapters 8–11). That is a devastating picture of what Judah's unfaithfulness has cost. But the book does not end there. God promises a new heart and his Spirit within his people (36:26–27), and later Ezekiel sees God's glory return (43:1–5). Judgment is not the final word. God intends to restore both his people and his presence among them.

"OUR HOPE IS GONE"

Read Ezekiel 37:1–3, 11. The prophet is placed in a valley full of bones—very dry bones. God asks whether they can live. Only God knows. Then God explains the vision: the bones are "the whole people of Israel," who say that their hope is gone and they are cut off. These are not simply weary individuals needing encouragement. They are a shattered people who cannot imagine a future.

BONES, BREATH, AND THE GIVER OF LIFE

Read Ezekiel 37:4–10. At God's command Ezekiel speaks, and the bones come together. But they are still lifeless until breath enters them. The Hebrew word ruach can mean breath, wind, or spirit. The scene recalls God breathing life into the first human (Genesis 2:7). What has been broken cannot be made whole by human effort alone. Life comes from God.

WHAT THE VISION ACTUALLY PROMISES

Read Ezekiel 37:11–14. God promises to bring his people out of exile, give them his Spirit, and settle them again in their land. This vision first speaks of a people restored, not an instant solution to every private struggle. Yet it reveals something enduring about God: even where hope seems buried, he is able to create a future his people cannot yet see.

Follow the Thread to Jesus

MORE THAN A RETURN TO THE LAND

God promises, "I will give you a new heart" (Ezekiel 36:26–27). His purpose is not merely to repair outward circumstances but to renew his people from within. Jesus speaks of being born of the Spirit and compares the Spirit's work to the wind we cannot control (John 3:5–8). God is not simply restoring what was; he is making new life possible.

THE SHEPHERD WHO COMES FOR THE LOST

Earlier, Ezekiel condemns leaders who have neglected and harmed God's flock. God promises to seek the lost, bring back the strays, and care for the injured (Ezekiel 34:1–16). He promises a shepherd from David's line (34:23). Jesus calls himself the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and lays down his life for them (John 10:11–16). Restoration has a face—and a heart.

FROM A VISION OF LIFE TO THE RISEN JESUS

The dry bones first picture the renewal of Israel after exile. They are not simply a prediction about an individual rising from the grave. Yet Christians read Ezekiel within the larger biblical story: Jesus calls himself "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and his own resurrection makes hope more than a metaphor (1 Corinthians 15:20–26). The God who can restore a people is the God who has conquered death through Christ.

"RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT"

In John 20:21–22, the risen Jesus breathes on his disciples and tells them to receive the Holy Spirit. It is a striking echo of the Creator's life-giving breath and Ezekiel's vision. The Spirit forms a people sent to carry Jesus' peace and witness. We may pray for renewal with expectation, while remembering that the Kingdom is here in Jesus and still awaits its fullness.

IN EZEKIEL	IN THE WAY OF JESUS
God promises a new heart. • Ezek. 36:26	Jesus teaches new birth. • John 3:5–8
God seeks his flock. • Ezek. 34:11–16	Jesus is the Good Shepherd. • John 10:11
God gives breath. • Ezek. 37:9–14	Jesus breathes on his followers. • John 20:22

TWO VOICES WORTH HEARING

Walter Brueggemann writes, "The news of the book of Ezekiel is that YHWH wills life and has power to grant it." Ezekiel stands among the dry bones of a people who have lost all hope. Yet restoration comes not through human effort, but through God's word and life-giving Spirit. What seems impossible to us is not beyond God's power.[1]

John Wimber taught, "Our part is to pray 'Thy kingdom come' and trust Him for whatever healing comes from His gracious hand." We are invited to participate in Jesus' ministry through the Holy Spirit, praying with faith while leaving the outcome to God. We may not see everything restored now, but we can trust the God who brings life and promises to make all things new.[2]

Reflect, Respond and Listen

EXPLORE THE SCRIPTURES

1. **Ezekiel 8–11; 43:1–5 —** Ezekiel sees God's glory depart from the temple and later return. What do these visions reveal about God's holiness, his faithfulness, and his desire to dwell among his people? What might they teach us about valuing God's presence in our lives and churches?
2. **Ezekiel 34:1–16; John 10:11–16** — God confronts leaders who have neglected his people and promises to become their shepherd. What does this reveal about God's heart? How do we see that heart expressed through Jesus, and what might it teach us about caring for others?
3. **Ezekiel 36:25–27; John 3:5–8 —** God promises to give his people a new heart and put his Spirit within them. Why is inward transformation so important? How can we become more responsive to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives?
4. **Ezekiel 37:1–14; John 11:25–26 —** Ezekiel sees a situation that appears utterly hopeless, yet God promises new life. What does this vision teach us about God's power and our dependence on him? How does Jesus' promise of resurrection deepen our hope when circumstances seem impossible?

A COURAGEOUSLY PROPHETIC RESPONSE

Ezekiel begins in a valley he cannot repair. God asks him to listen and speak what God gives him, not to manufacture life on his own. Sometimes courage means naming a real loss without surrendering to despair. Sometimes it means standing with someone whose hope has faded. What might patient, practical hope look like for a family, a friendship, a church, or a community?

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. As you reflect on Ezekiel's message, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention.

Close your time in prayer.

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1. Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, discussion of Ezekiel 37:14.
2. John Wimber, *Kingdom Suffering* (Vineyard Ministries International, 1988), p. 9.

10 / JESUS - The Fulfillment of Every Prophetic Longing

WHEN THE PROMISED FUTURE BECOMES "TODAY"

Read Luke 4:16–21; Isaiah 61:1–2: For generations, God's people had waited for the fulfillment of his promises. They had experienced slavery, exile, oppression, and suffering. Through the prophets, God had spoken of deliverance, justice, restoration, and a coming King. Now, under Roman rule, Israel still waited.

Into this long history of expectation, Jesus stands in the synagogue at Nazareth and reads Isaiah's promise of good news for the poor, freedom for captives, sight for the blind, and release for the oppressed. Then he closes the scroll and declares, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Imagine the significance of that moment! The promises were no longer simply words about a distant future. The One in whom they would find their fulfillment was standing among them. And today, we are invited to encounter that same living Jesus. His words challenge us to recognize his presence, receive his transforming work in our lives, and participate in the Kingdom he came to establish.

THE MESSIAH THEY STRUGGLED TO RECOGNIZE

Yet the extraordinary declaration that God's promises were being fulfilled in Jesus did not lead everyone to recognize or welcome him. Read Luke 4:22–30: The people initially marvel at Jesus' words. But how could Joseph's son make such an extraordinary claim? When Jesus reminds them of God's mercy toward a foreign widow and Naaman, a Syrian, their wonder quickly turns to rage. Within the same encounter, those who had marveled at his words are ready to kill him, driving him out of town to throw him off a cliff.

What a startling picture of how deeply our expectations can shape our response to God! We, too, can become so attached to our religious traditions, familiar understandings, and expectations of how God should work that we resist Jesus when he challenges them. It is possible to know the Scriptures, practice our faith, and yet miss the living reality of who Jesus is. Following him calls us beyond religious familiarity into a life of surrender to his truth, authority, and transforming presence.

MORE THAN ANOTHER PROPHET — GOD WITH US

Read John 1:1–14; Hebrews 1:1–3; John 8:58: The prophets spoke God's words, revealed his character, and pointed toward his purposes. Jesus is fundamentally different. He is the eternal Word who was with God and was God, through whom all things were created, now dwelling among us.

When Jesus declares, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" his words echo God's revelation of himself to Moses. The One who called Abraham, delivered Israel, sustained the prophets, and promised restoration has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus does not merely tell us what God is like. He shows us the Father. In his compassion, holiness, authority, mercy, and love, we encounter the heart of God.

THE KINGDOM COMES THROUGH A CROSS

Read Isaiah 52:13–53:12; Luke 22:20; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26: Jesus fulfills God's promises in ways many did not expect. The promised King comes in humility. The suffering servant bears our sins. The One who announces freedom gives himself to bring reconciliation and new life.

His death is not the defeat of God's purposes, but central to their fulfillment. Through his resurrection, Jesus conquers death itself. The hope proclaimed by the prophets has become a living reality in the risen Christ.

THE KINGDOM HAS COME — AND MORE IS COMING

Jesus announces and demonstrates God's Kingdom through healing, deliverance, forgiveness, and restoration. After his resurrection, he pours out the Holy Spirit, empowering ordinary believers to continue his ministry. Yet we still live in a world where suffering, injustice, and death remain. We await the day when he will make all things new (Revelation 21:1–5).

Our hope rests not in human progress or our ability to change the world, but in Jesus Christ—the One who came, who is present with us through the Holy Spirit, and who will come again.

THE THREADS COME TOGETHER

Throughout our journey, we have encountered different expressions of God's heart. Now we see how they come together in Jesus.

MOSES — God promised, "I will be with you." In Jesus, God himself comes to dwell among us, bringing a greater deliverance from sin and death.

MIRIAM — Her prophetic song celebrated God's mighty deliverance and invited the people into worship. Through Jesus, we celebrate the greater victory of his death and resurrection.

ELIJAH — God revealed his power while gently caring for a weary prophet. Jesus demonstrates divine authority and welcomes the weary with compassion.

AMOS — God called his people to justice and genuine worship. Jesus embodies perfect righteousness, mercy, and faithfulness.

JOEL — God called his people to return and promised to pour out his Spirit on all people. The risen Jesus fulfills that promise at Pentecost.

JEREMIAH — The prophet wept over his people and announced a new covenant. Jesus weeps over Jerusalem and establishes that covenant through his own blood.

ISAIAH — The prophet proclaimed comfort, a coming King, a suffering servant, and good news for the oppressed. Jesus fulfills these promises through his life, death, and resurrection.

EZEKIEL — God promised a new heart, a faithful Shepherd, and life where hope had died. Jesus is the Good Shepherd, the giver of the Spirit, and the resurrection and the life.

The prophets revealed God's heart in many ways. In Jesus, we encounter the fullness of God's revelation and the fulfillment of his saving purposes.

Reflect, Respond and Listen

1. **Luke 4:16–30:** The people of Nazareth went from marveling at Jesus to wanting to kill him when he challenged their expectations. How might our own religious traditions, familiar beliefs, or expectations of God keep us from recognizing and responding to what Jesus is saying and doing today in our lives?
2. **John 1:1–14; Hebrews 1:1–3; John 8:58:** Jesus is not simply a great teacher or prophet, but the eternal Word through whom all things were created. What would change in our worship, priorities, relationships, and daily decisions if we lived with a deeper awareness of his holiness, absolute authority, and presence in our lives and churches?
3. **Isaiah 53:4–6; Luke 22:20; Philippians 2:5–11**: Jesus, the King of all creation, chose the path of humility, suffering, and sacrificial love. How does the cross challenge our understanding of greatness, power, and success? What might it mean to reflect his character in a world that values these things so differently?
4. **Acts 2:32–33; John 20:21–22; Revelation 21:1–5**: Throughout this study, we've discovered God's heart for justice, mercy, restoration, and new life. Now we see these purposes fulfilled in Jesus, who gives us his Spirit and invites us to participate in his Kingdom. How can we recognize where justice and mercy are needed, and act in light of what the prophets proclaimed and Jesus himself demonstrated?

A VOICE ABOVE ALL OTHERS

"Before Abraham was born, I am!" — John 8:58
Jesus reveals his eternal identity. He is not merely another prophet, but the great I AM.

"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." — John 14:9
In Jesus, we encounter the very heart and character of God.

"As I have loved you, so you must love one another." — John 13:34
The One who holds all authority calls us to reflect his love in how we live and treat others.

Waiting on the Holy Spirit, Prayer

Whether studying alone or with others, take a few minutes to sit quietly in God's presence. As you reflect on Jesus and the journey through the prophets, invite the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Remain open to whatever God may want to reveal, encourage, or bring to your attention. If you are in a group, share with others.

Close your time in prayer.

The Final Word

Jesus is worthy of all praise, glory, majesty, and dominion. He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the One through whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together. As we live in a world marked by instability, uncertainty, and division, we can fix our eyes on Jesus, our unshakable Rock.

Kingdoms rise and fall, human promises fail, and everything around us may change, but he remains faithful. His Kingdom cannot be shaken, his love never fails, and his promises will stand. The prophets pointed toward him; the apostles proclaimed him; and we have the extraordinary privilege of knowing him. He is our hope, our peace, and our King—yesterday, today, and forever.