

ISAIAH: Trusting God's Promises

Fifth Week in Lent:

March 22, 2026



Small Group Guide: "What If We Have Worship All Wrong?" Opening Prayer

Begin your time together by asking God to open hearts and minds to His Word and to help the group understand what it truly means to worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Ice Breaker

Share a "what if" question you've pondered about your life. (Examples: What if I had chosen a different career? What if I had moved to a different city?)

Sermon Summary

Isaiah 58 comes from the period after the Babylonian exile, when God's people had returned to Jerusalem and were rebuilding their lives and worship practices. In the earlier chapters of Isaiah (36–39), Judah had faced crisis and exile because of pride, misplaced trust, and failure to live faithfully within God's covenant.

By the time we reach Isaiah 58, the people have restored many of their religious practices—fasting, prayer, and gathering for worship—but God challenges them because their worship has not yet transformed how they live in everyday life.

The sermon challenges us to examine whether our worship ends at the church doors or extends into our daily lives. God rebuked the Israelites for worshiping correctly on the surface while ignoring justice, oppressing workers, and neglecting the poor. True worship involves:

- **Personal piety** (walking humbly with God)
- **Acts of mercy** (alleviating immediate suffering)
- **Acts of justice** (changing systems that create suffering)

Discussion Questions

Context & Connection

1. When the Assyrian army threatened Jerusalem, King Hezekiah brought the crisis before the Lord in prayer. (Isaiah 37:14-17) How does Hezekiah's response demonstrate what genuine trust in God looks like? How is that different from the kind of outward worship God criticizes in Isaiah 58?
2. Before the exile, the prophets often criticized worship that looked correct outwardly but ignored justice and mercy (see Isaiah 1:11–17 and Micah 6:8). Why do you think God

repeatedly connects worship with justice and compassion? What dangers arise when worship becomes disconnected from everyday life?

3. How does Isaiah describe God's mission for His people in the world? (Isaiah 42:6-7; 45:22.) How does that mission connect to the call in Isaiah 58 to free the oppressed and care for those in need?

Understanding the Message

4. The sermon asks, "What if we have worship all wrong?" How did that question make you feel? Defensive? Curious? Convicted?
5. Read Isaiah 58:3-8 again. The people returning from Babylon were very focused on fasting and ritual observance, hoping God would restore their prosperity. What specific complaints did the people have? What was God's response? Why do you think people sometimes expect God to reward religious activity? How does God redefine worship in this passage?
6. Read Isaiah 1:17. How does this earlier message from Isaiah help us understand what God means by true "fasting" in Isaiah 58.
7. Read Isaiah 44:9-10. Why do you think Isaiah spends so much time criticizing Idols? How might modern forms of idolatry distract us from the kind of worship God desires?
8. Explain the difference between "acts of mercy" and "acts of justice" in your own words. Why are both important?
9. Isaiah 58 suggests that true worship changes how we treat people outside the walls of worship. Where do you see the greatest gap today between Sunday worship and Monday living?

Going Deeper

10. The sermon stated: "Nehemiah shows us what Sunday is supposed to look like. Isaiah 58 shows us what Monday is supposed to look like." (Nehemiah 8:1-3) What does this mean for your life?
11. How does the covenant God made with Abraham—"I will bless you so that you may bless others"—apply to us today as Christians?
12. John Wesley fought for women's rights, workers' rights, and against slavery 240 years ago. What current injustices do you think the church should be addressing today? Why?
13. The sermon mentioned over 3,000 verses in the Bible deal with poverty and injustice. Why do you think God emphasizes these issues so much?
14. "We are the ones we've been waiting for." What does this statement mean to you? How does it challenge you?

Personal Application

15. Rate yourself honestly (1-10 scale):

Walking humbly with God (personal piety)

Loving mercy (acts of compassion)

Doing justice (changing systems)

16. Which area needs the most growth in your life?
17. Think about your typical week. Where is there a disconnect between your Sunday worship and your Monday-through-Saturday living?

18. The sermon listed many ministries the church participates in (literacy programs, Safe Haven, Hannah's Hope, etc.). Which of these resonates with you? How might God be calling you to get involved?
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Key Takeaways

- ✓ **Worship is not just what happens on Sunday—it's how we live every day.**
 - ✓ **God desires both personal piety AND social holiness.**
 - ✓ **The covenant calls us to be blessed so we can bless others.**
 - ✓ **True worship includes loosing chains of injustice, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and freeing the oppressed.**
 - ✓ **We don't have to travel far to find people in need—poverty, injustice, and inequality exist in our own community.**
 - ✓ **When we live out true worship, "our light will break forth like the dawn."**
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Reflection Questions for the Week

Journal or meditate on these throughout the week:

1. God, where is there a gap between my worship and my daily life?
 2. Who are the "hungry," "naked," and "oppressed" in my community?
 3. What blessing have I received that I'm meant to share with others?
 4. What would it look like for my light to "break forth like the dawn"?
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Closing Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for the gift of worship and for the covenant you have made with us. You have blessed us so that we might be a blessing to others. Forgive us when our worship stays in words but does not shape the way we live. Teach us to walk humbly with you, to love mercy, and to seek justice in our world. Send us from this place with hearts ready to serve, so that our lives may reflect your love and our light may break forth like the dawn. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

"We are the ones we've been waiting for. Not because we're the solution, but because God chooses to work through people like you and me."