

Small Group Meeting week 10 on Isaiah 61:1-11

Review (20mins)

Reflect together on your experiences over the last week. What has God been teaching you? Where have you been growing in your walk with Him? Had you set yourself a challenge in your discipleship? How is that going? Share those experiences with your small group.

Read (10mins)

Recap on the sermon from last Sunday. Try to give a summary to those who were not able to be present.

Isaiah 61:1-11

Read the Bible passage for this week, slowly and prayerfully. To get the feel of the different voices have three people read: (a) vv1-3c; (b) vv3d-7 and 10-11; (c) vv8-9. It might help to use your imagination to picture the scene. At the end of the text you will find helpful background information in our 'Setting the Scene' section.

As you read, look out for *shockers* and *blockers*.

Shockers – a phrase, word, image or something from the text that resonates, stands out or connects with you.

Blockers – something from the text that raises questions for you.

Setting the scene:

- King Cyrus fulfilled his commission and allowed those in exile to return (Is. 45:13 – cf; 2 Chronicles 36:22,23; Ezra 1:1); although many stayed put.

- Those exiles that did return went back to a land in ruins and which was still far from safe. For the best part of a hundred years the Persian Empire faced troubles in its borderlands – including Palestine. When Artaxerxes became king he sent Ezra, and then Nehemiah, to return and rebuild (Ezra 7:11 and Nehemiah 2:1ff).
- It is likely that chapter 61 is addressed to those of Ezra’s and Nehemiah’s time. The people are ‘home’ but still under the sovereignty of Artaxerxes and there are many who would love to see their demise (think of the cast of opponents in the books of both Ezra and Nehemiah).
- Into their despair the prophet speaks words of comfort (the major theme of the book of Isaiah from chapter 40 onward) and challenge.
- **As always we have to read this chapter across a number of different horizons:** the time of the people returned from exile, Jesus application (Luke 4 and the Beatitudes in Matthew 5), our own time and the end of time

Reflect (20 mins)

After you have all had time to read the text, pause and be still to listen to God through the Scriptures.

Begin your reflection time by each naming your *shockers* and *blockers*. Listen carefully to each other, share your thoughts and reflect on this passage together.

You might also like to explore these questions:

Q1. The activity of the Spirit-filled servant of God (vv1-3) brings healing and freedom in many different areas (the verbs could be taken to apply physically or metaphorically). Where do you need to experience afresh the freedom that the Spirit can bring? Pray for one another.

Q2. In vv3d and 4 the theme is 'restoration' (echoing something of chapter 58. Where in your day-to-day working lives (or your community if you are not at work) do you need to become an agent of restoration, bringing freedom to others?

Q3. In v9 YHWH declares that 'all who see (his people) will acknowledge that they are a people that the Lord has blessed' and v11 that this will be 'before all nations'. Is the message of your small group/Christ Church to those who are 'outside' a message of freedom or one of ... ?

Respond (20mins)

As you draw near to the end of your session, consider how you might respond to your reading and reflection by "walking the talk". What are you going to be doing this week that will help you stretch the faith you have? It may be a challenge or activity that you are currently engaged with over many weeks. Be prepared to share how you are growing in that.

Some new challenge ideas

1 "I delight greatly in the LORD" (61:10)

Spend some time reviewing your prayer life. How much time is spent delighting in the Lord and how much time spent in asking for things? Resolve to spend time 'delighting in the Lord'.

2 "Rebuild, restore, renew" (61:4)

Look at the communities in which you move (home, work, neighbourhood). Where are you being called to 'rebuild, restore and renew' that which is broken? Share in your next meeting and pray for courage to act.

3 “Proclaim freedom for the captives” (61:1)

Look at the communities in which you move (home, work, neighbourhood). Where are you being called to ‘proclaim freedom for the captives’? Who could you help free up this week to reach their full potential or freedom? Share in your next meeting and pray for courage to act.

Group Prayer

As a group, pray for one another this week as you explore a deeper life with God through prayer. Pray that your times of prayer and your attempt to walk in the light of God’s ways will increase and become more habitual throughout each day.