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Isaiah: Setting Things Right

*How can we cooperate with God to set things right
in our hearts, minds, and daily lives?*

Beebe Kauffman



Lighthouse Bible Studies, LLC

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Preface: User-Friendly Packaging

I like Bible studies that do three things: explain Scripture in ways that I can understand it, surprise me with insights, and show me how to apply Scripture to what's going on in my life right now. I like devotional books that inspire me, or that cause me to pause and contemplate the spiritual applications of a verse, story, quote, or the example of someone's character. But Bible studies can be daunting in length, and devotionals sometimes address so many topics that what I've read blurs together or fades from memory.

So this Bible study comes packaged as a devotional, and joins the benefits of the two books into one. The devotions of this book cover the insights and application of the first six chapters of Isaiah, and each devotion usually takes five minutes or less to read. Three questions guided the writing of each one:

- What is God emphasizing in these verses?
- What picture is He using to emphasize it?
- How are these verses relevant to us today?

This Bible study is topical—it has a “big picture” to keep it on track. One topic ties the whole study together, and each day's devotion adds something to that topic. The “take-away” from each day is a growing understanding of Scripture, personally relevant application, or a memorable spiritual principle. Questions at the end of the daily devotions help you personalize the application or give you an additional insight.

Ignore the day-designations and keep reading if you like a longer quiet time or study time, or if you feel like reading further on a particular day. *Isaiah: Setting Things Right* can also be used for a group study. The Leader Guide divides it into eight sessions and maps out lesson plans that can be adjusted for various time frames for each session.

Punch, zip, and wow. Sparkle, warmth, and memorable pictures. Spiritual understanding, personal relevance, and breathing in the richness of Scripture. I hope you find some of these in your daily devotions.

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Introduction



Great Works of Art

Several years ago when my husband went to Europe on business twice a year, my daughter and I went with him. While he was working, we had adventures. On each trip we went to a different city, and in each city we visited four places: a cathedral, a zoo, a castle (or fortress), and an art gallery.

We spent hours in the art galleries looking at the paintings. We saw scenes of rural life, golden wheat fields dotted with workers dressed in brown and black. We saw great battle scenes that changed the course of history—the field crowded with horses rushing toward each other, their riders with outstretched swords, anxious for victory over the enemy. We saw a portrait of a woman who was almost smiling, and countless paintings of angels bearing good news to Mary. The colors were beautiful, the use of light was masterful, and the skill of the artist drew us into the scene, just as if we were there.

We wanted to know more about the paintings, but their titles were rarely in English. Some of the galleries provided books in English, but the information was usually dry and factual, giving only the name of the painting, the artist, when it was painted, and a few words about the subject of the painting. We wanted more.

Then we went to Florence, Italy. The hosts for my husband's business conference made arrangements for the attendees and their families to have a private evening at The Uffizi Gallery, complete with tour guides. Our guide was an artist, not as a painter, but as a storyteller. As we walked through the gallery he told us background stories about the artists and the paintings. He knew the history that led up to each battle scene. We heard the stories of the lives of the people whose portraits still hung in the gallery, hundreds of years later. He did with words, what the artists had done with canvas and paint.



*Our guide was
an artist
as a storyteller.*



The Bible is an art gallery, and God is the Master Artist. He has chosen His words as carefully as a master paints the details of his painting. When we study the Bible, God serves as our Tour Guide, enriching our understanding as a skillful storyteller, encouraging and delighting our hearts with stories of heroes, rescues, and struggles that come out right in the end, or cautioning us against wrong choices and their consequences.

Like all of the other books of the Bible, Isaiah teaches us about the spiritual realities of life—how things work and what our choices are. In Isaiah, God wants to impress us strongly with a foundational principle of life: Don't choose sin over God, because the nature of sin is to damage and destroy. Sin damages our values, our thinking, our priorities, and the way that we treat people. Sin puts us at odds with a holy God. This is Isaiah's message of warning.

With such a critical message, God needed a powerful medium of presentation. In Isaiah, God paints with words the most dramatic pictures of the desolations of sin, and the most glorious pictures of the beauty and joy of restoration. Picture this from Isaiah Chapter 37:

- A city besieged and surrounded by a powerful enemy
- A king inside the city, pleading with God for the survival of his people
- And then at daybreak, before the first encounter of battle, 185,000 of the enemy lay dead in the fields surrounding Jerusalem

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When the fallout of sin besieges us with misery and ruin, God can rescue us. This is Isaiah's message of hope. God fixes things (*things* being the appropriate technical term for the aggregate of all that God can fix). He sets things right. What does He set right? People, souls, hearts, minds, and lives. When we turn from sin to Him, He works within us to repair and restore the way we think, what we value, and the priorities and perspectives that move us to action.

The message of warning gets stronger. Our own sin causes us misery and ruin, but desolation can come from another Source—God. When we refuse to turn from a practice of sin, God can use desolation to turn us to repentance and drive us back to Him. The book of Isaiah pictures a people who were once glorious in the eyes of the world, now weakened by their own corruption. Because of their sin, God eventually allowed His people to be overrun and conquered by the enemy. They were forced to leave the homeland that He had given them. After 800 years, they were led away captive, helpless, and humbled.

Other artists paint portraits or landscapes that picture real life; God used real life to illustrate His message. He chose as a setting for the book of Isaiah, a time in history when His people were turning more and more to sin. He used their choices and their practices for the subject of His "paintings." He even gives us a glimpse into the spiritual state of their hearts. God uses their lives to picture spiritual principles that apply to every generation. He paints with words an understanding for us about how damaging sin really is, and how we can have a better life now, a life restored from the desolations of sin.

Many of the European galleries had masterpieces that portrayed events in the Bible. There were so many that it seemed to be a favorite subject of the artists: Adam and Eve in the garden, Daniel in the lions' den, Jesus's birth, His crucifixion, and Peter's denial of Christ. These artists painted pictures that brought the events to life, enabling the viewer to be impacted by the wonder, the sorrow, or the joy of the moment, living it mentally and emotionally. God does a better job. In Isaiah, God paints with words, illustrated truths that impact our lives with repentance, understanding, hope, and renewed commitment.

❧ Questions ❧

1. One of the major themes of this Bible study is, "God sets things right." He fixes things. God can fix our attitudes, our heartaches, the way we think, how we live, and (when both parties are willing and cooperative) our relationships. Has God ever used Scripture or any other means to set something right for you?

2. When we don't have anyone but God who can set things right in our circumstances or relationships, how does that affect our relationship with Him?

What will God do to set things right? The next devotion gives us a quick preview.

The Health of the Soul

The essentials for a healthy soul are the same as for a healthy body—diet, exercise, and rest. The diet of the soul is what it “eats,” what it feeds on, what it takes into the mind and heart. A soul digests thoughts and principles. The soul’s food is that by which it is nourished, energized, and sustained.⁶



The diet of a healthy soul is the word of God. First Peter 2:2 tells us to “desire the sincere milk of the word” (KJV) that we may grow spiritually. Jeremiah 3:15 says that God will give us pastors (KJV), or shepherds (NKJV), who will feed us with knowledge and understanding. God nourishes our souls with His word.

Diet alone isn’t enough for a healthy soul. Good health also requires exercise. Once our souls feed on the word of God, we need to exercise what we have heard—use it, practice it, apply it in our daily lives. The following verses from Deuteronomy and Kings include the phrase “with all your (‘their’ or ‘his’) soul.” These verses give us insight as to which “exercises” build up the soul’s health.

Deut 4:29	Seek the LORD your God . . . with all your soul.
Deut 6:5	Love the LORD your God . . . with all your soul.
Deut 10:12	Serve the LORD your God . . . with all your soul.
Deut 30:2	Return to the LORD your God and obey His voice . . . with all your soul.
Deut 30:10	Turn to the LORD your God . . . with all your soul.
1 Kings 2:4	. . . walk before Me in truth . . . with all their soul
2 Kings 23:3	follow the LORD and . . . keep His commandments . . . with . . . all his soul


*Diet alone
isn't enough
for a healthy soul.*


Seek, love, serve, return to, obey, turn to, walk, follow, and keep. The exercises that keep a soul healthy, center us on God.

Rest for the soul is found in trusting God, depending on Him, and seeking His guidance and direction. These life’s habits are built up as we feed on God’s word, exercise its truths, and follow its instructions in our daily walk (Isaiah 28:10-12, Jeremiah 6:16, 19). Scripture says that God grants us rest: from sorrow, fear, and hard bondage (Isaiah 14:3); from “the days of adversity” (Psalm 94:13); from our adversaries and from evil (1 Kings 5:4); and from our enemies (Joshua 21:44).

God and our relationship with Him are the keys to our soul’s health. When we rebel against God as the people of Judah did, we deny our souls the essentials of good health and leave them prey to sin. Read in v.4-6 how sin affected the people of Judah.

*4 Alas, sinful nation,
A people laden with iniquity,
A brood of evildoers,
Children who are corrupters!
They have forsaken the LORD,
They have provoked to anger
The Holy One of Israel,*

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*They have turned away backward.
5 Why should you be stricken again?
You will revolt more and more.
The whole head is sick,
And the whole heart faints.
6 From the sole of the foot even to the head,
There is no soundness in it,
But wounds and bruises and putrefying sores;
They have not been closed or bound up,
Or soothed with ointment.*

Why are there so many warnings about sin in the Bible? Because sin is a disease that damages the health of the soul. It mars our character. It puts the wrong filter on how we think. It throws our priorities and values into confusion and disorder. It centers us on selfishness and evil. It hinders our relationships. It blinds us to the truth and paralyzes us from doing good. Sin is a sickness of the soul that only God can cure.

God begins these verses by painting a revealing portrait of the state of the people's souls. It was not flattering, but it was accurate. The people were overloaded with sin, and it had made them sick. They had turned away from holding fast to God and from practicing His ways of peace and truth, and it had destroyed the soundness of their souls with *wounds and bruises and putrefying sores*.

They had no justification for what they had chosen. They couldn't plead ignorance. They knew the difference between right and wrong. God's word was read regularly in their worship services. Their children were raised hearing the stories of His miraculous works. Their whole culture was centered on the worship of God. These were not people who practiced sin because they had never heard the truth. They practiced sin because they chose it. They had turned away from the love and goodness of God to sin and to self-indulgence.

How do you think this preference for sin would affect the heart of a Father whose name is *the Holy One of Israel*? He whose nature is holiness, watched the people that He loved become more and more overtaken by sin, evil, and corruption. He who wanted to sanctify His people from their sin and rescue them from its miseries, saw sin overtake their practice and become their reputation.

God wanted His people to turn from the sinful practices that were making them sick. He had already *stricken* them with discipline, but they responded to it with more rebellion. God told Judah in Jeremiah 2:30, "In vain I have chastened your children; they received no correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion." Discipline wasn't enough. Not only did the people stubbornly continue in sin, but at times they killed the prophets that God sent to help them.

How extensive was the disease? Verse 5 says, *The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints*. Both *sick* and *faints* have the sense of weakened⁷ or impaired. How dangerous is it for the human body, when the head or the heart is sick? Think how many functions the head is responsible for, and how many systems of the body count on the flow of blood that the heart keeps pumping. The whole life of the person is endangered if the head or the heart is sick. What could the head represent spiritually? Our reasoning, our judgment concerning right and wrong. These are vital to our spiritual well-being. What could the heart represent? Our motivations and values, the basis of what we do and how we live. Sin damages our thinking, our decision-making, our motivations, and our values; and its effects grow worse over time.

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In contrast to that damage, in v.6 we find a beautiful word, *soundness*. God wants our souls to be sound, that is, “free from flaw, defect, or decay; showing good judgment or sense; free from injury or disease.”⁸ As we cooperate with God, He works to repair the damage that sin has inflicted on our souls, and builds them back up to strength and good health.

But there was no soundness in the people of Judah. Sin’s infection had spread so thoroughly that everything about them was diseased, weakened, or malfunctioning. When the people of any generation choose sin over God, they work against the health and well-being of their souls.

Proverbs 6:32 Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding;
he who does so destroys his own soul.

Proverbs 8:36 But he who sins against me [wisdom] wrongs his own soul;
all those who hate me love death.

Proverbs 15:32 He who disdains instruction despises his own soul,
but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding.

Sin injures our souls. In v.6, God pictures the degenerating effects of sin as *wounds and bruises and putrefying* (fresh or new⁹) *sores*. How could we distinguish between them? *Wounds* indicate damage to the soul that shows up on the surface in our behavior, in what we say, or in the way that we treat others. *Bruises* are injuries to the health of the soul that lie just beneath the surface, coloring how we see ourselves and others, and how we handle the situations of life. *Sores* are isolated or distinct areas of pain or weakness that cause us to shrink back from acting on the finer inclinations of the soul.

Wounds, bruises, and sores indicate damage that has been done to the soul that needs to be healed, fixed, set right. The soundness of the soul which is needed to live a healthy and satisfying life, has been crushed, broken, or shattered.¹⁰ For example, selfishness has crushed kindness, fear has broken down courage, or worry has shattered peace.

The people had not *closed or bound up* their injuries, or *soothed* [them] *with ointment*. There had been no repentance. No reformation brought soothing or healing. Nothing was done to set things right. Choosing sin over God was their habit of life, a habit that did not make good sense because:

v.4-6 Sin damages the health of the soul.

∞ Questions ∞

1. Have you ever thought of sin as a sickness of the soul? _____

Can you think of any symptoms of a physical disease that would make a good analogy for how sin affects our hearts and minds?

2. Our souls need food, exercise, and rest. Which one does your soul need more of right now?

3. According to the devotion, what exercises of mind and heart help to keep our souls healthy?

4. In v.5, both *sick* and *faints* have the sense of weakened or impaired. What healthy attitudes, priorities, practices, motivations, or values does sin weaken or impair?

5. God tried to correct His people, but they just revolted more and more. Think about the people in your life who tried to correct something in your walk or held you accountable to do what was right.

How did you feel about being corrected at the time? _____

Has your perspective on accountability changed? If so, how?

Have you become a person who encourages or enforces accountability to your children or to someone else? _____

Sin damages the health of the soul, but the damage doesn't end there. In the next section, sin had so weakened the people of Judah that their country became prey to their enemies.

LEADER GUIDE

Notes to Leaders:

1. May God bless you and your group as you study Isaiah Chapters 1-6!
2. If an instruction in the Leader Guide is in parentheses, it's for your information only. It's not meant to be read to the group.
3. The italicized Day numbers and titles are also not meant to be read to the group. They are provided to help you keep your place.
4. Sometimes a discussion gets going in class, and we run short on time. If you read through the week's discussion questions before class and mark the ones that you want to discuss the most, you can use these prior notations to pick up speed at any point during class.
5. If you want to make Take-Away Cards for each class, see the end of the Leader Guide for instructions on how to make them.

Week One: Preface and Days 1-2 **Introduction to Isaiah**

General:

1. (Ask the group members to introduce themselves. Take up to 20 minutes for this.)
2. (Ask an icebreaker question for everyone to answer, such as:
Where is your favorite place to eat on your birthday?)

Preface: User-Friendly Packaging

1. The preface is called *User Friendly Packaging*. It tells us that this study of Isaiah has some of the features of a devotional book and of a Bible study, and that three questions guided the writing of it. Let's read the Preface. (Have the group members take turns reading the paragraphs.)

Day 1 Great Works of Art Introduction, Part 1

1. The first two devotions are an introduction to the book of Isaiah. The title of Day 1 is *Great Works of Art*, and it's going to picture God as a Master Artist. (Have the group members take turns reading the paragraphs.)
2. (Discuss Questions 1-2.)

Day 2 Six Rooms in Isaiah's Gallery Introduction, Part 2

1. We're only going to study a few chapters of Isaiah, but Day 2 gives us an overview of the whole book. It tells us how to organize the sixty-six chapters into six parts. Day 2's title is *Six* what?
2. (Have the group members take turns reading the paragraphs.)
 - a. Room 1 covers which chapters of the book of Isaiah? What is the main subject?
 - b. Which chapters are in Room 2? The war is between whom?
 - c. Which chapters are in Room 3? A farmer threshing wheat pictures what spiritual principle?
 - d. Room 4 covers which chapters? They're about the defeat of whom?
 - e. Which chapters does Room 5 cover? What is on trial?
 - f. Which chapters are covered in Room 6? What is the main subject of these chapters?
3. (Discuss the Questions at the end of Day 2.)
4. The assignment for next time covers the first part of Chapter 1 (write it on the board or on a flip chart):
Read Day 3 through Day 9, and answer the questions. In case you want to spread your reading assignments evenly through the week, this week has one devotion for seven days.
5. (Pray.)