

# Count on it

Living in the certainty of God's Word



## AFTER THE TALK

These further ideas for interacting with Isaiah 55 can be used in small groups or as material for future talks. They also include a list of helpful resources to give people a better grasp of the Bible and help them interpret and encounter it in different ways.

### QUESTIONS FOR A HOUSE GROUP SESSION FOLLOWING THE SERMON

- Does Isaiah 55.10–11 mean that God's Word is some sort of irresistible force? Does verse 11 imply that God's purposes are inevitable? What do we have to do if we are to benefit from them?
- How does God's Word have its effect on us?
- Perhaps invite people to share testimonies of ways in which their lives have been changed by the Bible.
- What experiences have your group had of God caring for us through the financial crisis of 2008–09?
- How can we recognise God's ways being different to our ways? How would we discern the difference between God's innovative methods and human silliness?

**These suggestions address other themes found in Isaiah 55 and can be explored in mid-week groups or future sermons.**

#### 1. Trust in financial difficulties

- Isaiah 55 opens with reference to money and finances. Even if the 'credit crunch' has settled down by the time you use this material, many members of the congregation may have found this a difficult time for trusting God.
- The classic passage to draw into this would be Matthew 6.25–33. You can investigate attitudes to possessions. How do we work out when to replace our mobile phone, for instance? Do we always need the latest model? In world terms, each of us in the West is rich.
- Visit the website [www.globalrichlist.com](http://www.globalrichlist.com) and punch your own salary in. It will tell you where you come in terms of global salaries. Do the same for some other salaries that members of your congregation probably earn.

- If we only think about our money in terms of living in this country, then we will fall into the trap of 'keeping up with the Joneses'. If we also look at the world poor, then willingness to tame our consumerist values can become easier.
- You can draw on the *Bible Foundations* material and make a connection to the difficulty the Israelites had in trusting God in their time of exile.
- Trusting God with our finances is undoubtedly one of the toughest areas of Christian living. It needs to become part of a mindset that sees God's priority in many areas that we typically see as our own preserve – the job, where we live, the school our children go to, the amount of money we give away. God looks for a prayerful willingness to look to him for these things.
- Whatever the difficulties, God asks us to trust him. How he works through each situation will be unique to that situation, but if we are casual in our trust, we should not be too surprised if we do not see him work.

## 2. My ways are not your ways

- Use the specially recorded worship song with this pack, *My thoughts are not your thoughts*, to open or close your session.
- Isaiah 55.8–9 will be a familiar pair of verses for many people.
- As part of the climax to chapters 40–55, these words loudly advertise the point that God's plan to raise up a pagan ruler like Cyrus and designate him 'anointed', is not an idea that would have occurred to any of us.
- Maybe invite people to reflect on unexpected things God did in the Bible and has done in their own lives. Perhaps consider the need to be open-minded about how God fulfils his purposes. Scripture suggests he rarely does things the way we would go about them!
- An example from history might be the death of Jim Elliot, the missionary killed in 1956 by the Ecuadorian tribe he was trying to evangelise. His journal contains what is now a classic quote: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' After his death, his wife Elisabeth worked to make disciples of the same people.
- God works not by mixing the good and bad in our lives to produce a mucky grey, but by allowing the colours and shades to sit alongside one another and cohere into a rich pattern (Romans 8.28). If you have a piece of embroidery or cross stitch, you can point out the mess on one side, and the picture on the other.

- This does not mean that any and every outlandish plan that we hear has God's sanction just because it is such a test of faith and reason. We cannot use these verses to justify taking extreme risks.
- The prophet calls us to make 'our ways' more like 'God's way'.

## HELPFUL RESOURCES AND BOOKS

Books for getting a grip on the overall message of the whole Bible:

- T Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: Exploring God's plan for life on earth*, Leicester: IVP, 2008
- Craig G Bartholomew and Michael W Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, London: SPCK, 2005

Books for entry level study of the Bible:

- David and Pat Alexander, *Lion Handbook to the Bible*, Oxford: Lion, 4th edition 2009.
- Mary Evans, *Old Testament Introduction*, London: Candle Books, 2002.
- Steve Motyer, *New Testament Introduction*, London: Candle Books, 2000.
- These last two are only 32 pages long (each), both fully illustrated.

Other resources:

<i>Lectio Divina</i> , Bible Society	<a href="http://www.biblesociety.org.uk/lectio-divina">www.biblesociety.org.uk/lectio-divina</a>
<i>lyfe</i> , Bible Society	<a href="http://www.lyfe.org.uk">www.lyfe.org.uk</a>
Reel Issues, Bible Society	<a href="http://www.reelissues.org.uk">www.reelissues.org.uk</a>
Walk Thru the Bible	<a href="http://www.walkthru.org">www.walkthru.org</a>
Wordlive, Scripture Union	<a href="http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk">www.scriptureunion.org.uk</a>

**These materials are by John Wilks. Originally trained in music, taking prizes at international competitions for orchestral composition, John later studied theology at London School of Theology and at St John's College, Nottingham. He is now an Old Testament specialist, working as the Director of Open Learning at London School of Theology.**