

A thoughtful invitation has life-changing potential.

Around 15 years ago, I was invited to lunch by a man who was virtually a neighbor of ours. His home was on the other side of a wooded ravine. But at lunch he invited me and my son to attend a workshop devoted to singing in the barbershop tradition. It was a winsome, low-pressure invitation, and although I did not answer right away, I eventually said yes. And that ‘yes’ led to a four-year streak where Andy and I sang in shows and ended up on local TV. My son was even featured on the front page of the Zanesville Times-Recorder. A thoughtful invitation did indeed change our lives, and introduced us to things we had never considered before.

Isaiah 55 contains one of God’s great invitations. In this invitation, God calls out to His people with urgency. And Isaiah gives us a simple, three-fold pattern for responding to this God: Seek. Call. Return. These three words are the invitation. They describe the open arms of God. Let’s walk through them.

“Seek the Lord while He may be found.” At first hearing, that sounds like God is hiding. But Isaiah is saying the opposite. God is findable. He’s near. He has already come close. But the time is now.

Think of a child playing hide-and-seek with a parent. The parent hides behind the couch—but leaves a foot sticking out. Or hides behind the curtain—but the curtain moves around once in a while. The parent wants to be found. The joy is in the finding.

God is not hiding behind the furniture of the universe. He is not distant, not aloof, not waiting for us to solve a spiritual puzzle. He has drawn near in His Word, near in His promises, near in His Son. The gospel is not that it’s up to you to find God. The gospel is that God has come to find us. So, Isaiah says, “Seek Him.” Not because He is far away, but because He is right here.

“Call upon Him while He is near.” Calling is an act of trust. It is the cry of someone who knows they will be heard.

A father once shared an incident in which his young daughter fell off her bike. She wasn’t badly hurt, but she was startled and scared. Immediately after falling off, she cried out one word: “Dad!” She called out “Dad,” not only because she knew her father was near, but that He cared. She trusted him to help.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us to “Call upon the Lord.” No eloquence is needed. One or two words will do. “Father, help.” “Lord, have mercy.”

The gospel promise is that God hears that cry. He hears the sinner. He hears the wanderer. He hears the weary. He hears the one who barely knows what to say. But it’s not just that he hears. He cares. He knows how to help. He knows what I need way more than I do. Call upon Him with the expectation of faith.

“Let the wicked forsake his way... let him return to the Lord.” This is repentance. But Isaiah describes repentance not as moral self-improvement; instead, it is simply turning around and discovering that God has been tracking with you the whole time.

I think of search-and-rescue teams in the mountains. When hikers get lost, they often keep walking, convinced they’re heading in the right direction. But the moment they stop, the rescuers can find them. The moment they stop relying on their own sense of direction, help is given the time it needs to arrive. Repentance is stopping from your work and letting God rescue you.

And what happens when we stop and when we return? Isaiah says, “He will have compassion... He will abundantly pardon.” Not reluctantly or partially. Abundantly pardon. Picture a cup under a waterfall. That’s God’s mercy. It doesn’t trickle. It pours. And the cross of Jesus is the guarantee that God’s pardon is abundant. The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that His compassion never ends. This is what you are invited to return to.

Then Isaiah gives us one of the most famous lines in Scripture: “My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” We often hear that as God saying, “I’m mysterious.” But in context, God is talking specifically about His mercy. He’s saying: “You don’t forgive like I forgive.” “You don’t love like I love.” “You don’t show compassion the way I show compassion.”

If we wrote the story of salvation, we would make it conditional. We would make it earned. We would make it reserved for the deserving. But God writes a different story—a story where sinners are welcomed, wanderers are restored, and enemies are made sons and daughters. His thoughts are not our thoughts. His ways are higher—but in Christ, those higher ways come down. Jesus is the living proof that God’s thoughts are thoughts of grace. Jesus is the living proof that God’s ways are ways of salvation. Jesus is the living proof that God’s pardon is abundant.

A thoughtful invitation has life changing potential. My prayer is that you will answer this invitation by seeking, calling, and returning, and that you will love where your “yes” is taking you.

