



WEEKLY STUDY

Stranger Things - Week Five

(Our August series is a look at the strange and unexpected events that take place in the book of Acts. While we are keenly aware of what is going on in the physical world in and around us, we sometimes lack awareness of the spiritual world which is just as real, only less visible. We'll look with spiritual eyes at the events of the early church to see how God was moving in those days, and what it might mean for our time.)

This week we saw the spread of the early church movement reach an Ethiopian man who was returning from worship in Jerusalem. As we've journeyed through Acts, we've witnessed several big events that collectively changed the world. This is one of them. The Ethiopian man had an important position, he was loyal to his queen, and yet he was moved deeply in his study of the scriptures. A mysterious encounter with a disciple of Jesus led him to become a disciple himself. There will be several moments in this week's study of Isaiah 53 when you will want to consider the lengths God has gone through to reach you. In each of them, may you praise God and deepen your faith.

Please note our prayer focus for the week in the box below. Join us in seeing what God will do as we unite in prayer.

Peace of Christ,
Pastor Mark Youngman

If you are studying with your Providence Small Group or Discipleship Group, you can share from your own daily reflections and consider the Group Discussion questions below. If you would like to get connected visit prov.church/smallgroups.

Prayer Focus:

- Lift up our international ministry partners in Belize (Bold Hope), Nicaragua (El Porvenir), Haiti (Grace and Glory), and Peru (Compassion International).

DAILY STUDY

MONDAY: ACTS 8.26-40 (NIV)

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian^[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship,²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet.²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?”³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?”^[37] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

- This man was a foreigner and a eunuch. These were typically barriers that would prevent someone from carrying around a scroll that contained Isaiah 53. But here he was, engaging deeply in the meaning of these words for himself. His question, “who is the prophet talking about?”, was one of those door-opener questions for a disciple of Jesus. Philip took the opportunity to share the good news about Jesus. Have you experienced such opportunities to share about Jesus? What would you say about Jesus based on the words of Isaiah 53?

- **Prayer Prompt:** There’s a wideness in God’s mercy
like the wideness of the sea;
there’s a kindness in His justice

which is more than liberty. (There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, by Frederick William Huber)

- *God, thank you for your mercy that stretches beyond earthly status. You have sent other disciples to meet me in my seeking. So also would you send me out. Amen.*

TUESDAY: ISAIAH 53.7-8

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.*

- The Ethiopian eunuch did not pick an easy passage to learn about the role of the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah was a mouthpiece for God, although he didn't know the fullness of what he was writing about. In this passage, he was using sheep imagery. Jesus, the Messiah, quietly submitted to his death. The punishment he took was not his own, but it was for the atonement of the whole earth. Could it be that someone who is otherwise "far off" is meant to read this as good news? What does it mean for you that the Lamb of God was led to slaughter because he knew it would ultimately give you new life in him?
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- **Prayer Prompt:** There is welcome for the sinner,
and more graces for the good;
there is mercy with the Savior;
there is healing in His blood. (There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, by Frederick William Huber)
- *Jesus, Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Thank you for breaking through distances of miles, years, and sin itself. Amen.*

WEDNESDAY: ISAIAH 53.1-3

*Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
² He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces*

he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

- Earlier in Isaiah 53, the prophet began the telling of the Servant-Messiah's suffering. He described what we now know to be the humble origin of Jesus. Born in a working-class family, not drawing attention to himself with obvious stature or greatness—Jesus was familiar with real life and real people. He allowed himself to become familiar with pain. When considering that Jesus is the Son of the all-powerful God, how do these images strike you? Have you ever known someone to willingly suffer for someone else's sake?
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- **Prayer Prompt:** For the love of God is broader
than the measure of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind. (There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, by Frederick William Huber)
- *O God, your willingness to enter into the brokenness of this world is not lost on me today. Your kindness is beyond expectation and far beyond anything I could deserve. It humbles me. Amen.*

THURSDAY: ISAIAH 53.4-6

*Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

- The prophet Isaiah captured the standard approach to suffering. We see a hurting and broken person and look around for someone to blame. Israel considered that it must be God who caused the Messiah's suffering. But he was pierced for our transgressions. His punishment led to our peace. It's difficult to imagine how these words might have landed on the ears of people living hundreds of years before Jesus was born. Our perspective makes it understandable, but no less overwhelming. The lamb that was slaughtered is actually the Good Shepherd of us—the sheep who have gone astray. Use the lines below to respond to this suffering Servant who gives us life.
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- **Prayer Prompt:** If our love were but more simple,
we would take Him at His word,
and our lives would be illumined
by the presence of our Lord. (There's a Wideness in God's Mercy, by Frederick William Huber)
 - *Merciful God, the Gospel, at its core, is a love story of your faithfulness and mercy. Restore my heart.
Restore the whole world I pray. Amen.*

FRIDAY: ISAIAH 53.11-12 (NIV)

*After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.*

- Before he took his last breath on the cross, Jesus cried out, "It is finished". It was not defeat in his voice, but satisfaction that the light of life was about to be restored in his resurrection. If anything seems to be owned by us, to our credit we give it back to God who satisfies us. God sent his Son. God sent his Son to pour out his life. God sent his Son to pour out his life for us. Where do you need to hear "it is finished" in your life? How will you lean into the satisfaction of knowing Jesus?
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- **Prayer Prompt:** Oh for a word from Zion's King,
Her captives to restore!
The joyful saints thy praise shall sing,
And Israel weep no more. (Song 67 by Isaac Watts)
- *Jesus, the one who was lifted up on a cross for me, I lift up your name to the Heavens and give you praise. Amen.*

SATURDAY: ISAIAH 56.3-5 (NIV)

*Let no foreigner who is bound to the LORD say,
"The LORD will surely exclude me from his people."*

*And let no eunuch complain,
“I am only a dry tree.”*

⁴ *For this is what the LORD says:*

*“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me
and hold fast to my covenant—*

⁵ *to them I will give within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name
better than sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name
that will endure forever.*

- God’s salvation is available to every person in every place and time. There are no boundaries. A eunuch was not allowed to enter the assembly of God’s people (Deuteronomy 23.1). But the prophet has good news for those who had previously been kept away. “I will give them an everlasting name” What barriers have you considered to be too big for God to overcome? Is there something in your life that you are allowing to hold you back from the full embrace of God?
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- **Prayer Prompt: The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call. (Acts 2.39)**
- *God, you continue to chase after me over and over. I was once far off but you saw me. Thank you for making a way for all of us to know you fully through your Son Jesus. Amen.*

GROUP DISCUSSION

In worship, we were invited to pray for specific people and situations that are close by, in our region, and around the world. Consider sharing these with your group as you are comfortable. Are any of these prayer requests already answered? Commit to praying for each of them as a group.

“...you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1.8)

- Jerusalem (Someone close to me)
- Judea (someone nearby me)
- Samaria (someone who seems different from me)
- Ends of the Earth (someone who feels far away from me)