

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

The Isaian Call to the American Church: What Went Wrong?

Text: Isaiah 1:16–17; 58:6–9, 12; 56:3–5

Is. 1:16-17 Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove your evil deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil; ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.

Is. 58:6, 8-9, 12 ⁶ Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help, and he will say, “Here I am.” If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil. ¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.

Is. 56: 3-5 Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people,” and do not let the eunuch say, “I am just a dry tree.” ⁴ For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵ I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.

The Big Idea: Isaiah's answer to a nation in crisis is NOT simply, “You have the wrong leaders.” It is: “You have forgotten what God requires of you—justice, mercy, and protection for those who have little power.”

I. When Worship continues but Justice disappears (Isaiah 1:10–17)

- A.** Isaiah begins with a shocking accusation. Israel is still worshiping. Fasting, sacrifices, festivals, prayers, religious gatherings don't move the heart of God: “**I don't want your worship when your hands are full of injustice.** Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.” (**Is. 1:17**)
- B.** The problem isn't that Israel stopped being religious. The problem is that **religion became disconnected from how people treated their neighbors.**
- C. Application to America:** Sunday is good worship, great music, passionate preaching – BUT we have ignored the marginalized, neglected the foreigner, rejected the LGBTQIA+ community.

II. When Wealth becomes the measure of Success (Isaiah 5:7–8)

- A.** Isaiah gives one of Scripture's clearest condemnations of concentrated wealth: “Woe to those who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is no more room.” The issue isn't simply that someone owns a large house. The issue is **wealth accumulation without regard for one's neighbor**—a society where those with resources continually acquire more while others lose access to land, security and opportunity.
- B.** God evaluates a society not merely by its prosperity, but by **what its prosperity does to people at the bottom.**

Sunday Message Notes – Better Bible Reading in 2026

C. A nation can become richer, while becoming less just. USA wealth gap (US Fed. Res):

Top 10%: \$118.3 trillion

Bottom 90%: \$119.0 trillion

Federal Minimum Wage: \$7.25 per hour

29 Million Americans cannot afford healthcare / insurance

And, the Christian vote has overwhelmingly elected representatives more concerned with new private jets, golden ballrooms, oppressing the foreigner, and convincing simple-minded people they are concerned with unborn children. When 90% of the nation is living paycheck to paycheck, workers cannot earn a living wage, common folks cannot afford healthcare – we are not Pro-Life, we are Pro-Birth. Christians vote for the sanctity of the womb while negating the quality of life. If the baby must be born, provide that baby with an opportunity to experience life and liberty.

III. The Work of Inclusion (Isaiah 56:3–8)

“Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, ‘The LORD will surely separate me from his people. My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.’”

A. Isaiah's vision of God's people is radically expansive. The foreigner isn't merely someone God tolerates at the edges, the margins. **God brings the outsider into the center.** Concern for the immigrant/foreigner is NOT a modern political invention. The Old Testament repeatedly commands Israel to remember that the foreigner is vulnerable to exploitation and therefore deserves protection.

B. Then, Isaiah introduces people who, within the social and religious world of ancient Israel, could be regarded as **sexually different, and therefore excluded from full participation in the community.** The eunuch says: “Behold, I am a dry tree.” In other words: *I am different. I cannot fulfill what society expects of me. There is no place for someone like me among God's people.* But, God's response is extraordinary: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose the things that please me... I will give... a name better than sons and daughters.” Not tolerated...celebrated.

C. **God's people are not defined by who they keep out, but by who they welcome in.**

IV. What can America become? (Isaiah 58:8–12)

A. **Repent and Restore:** Defend the powerless. Welcome the stranger. Correct unjust systems. Refuse to measure human worth by wealth, race, nationality, social status or sexual orientation. “If my people, who are called by my name, humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land.”

B. **The vision of restoration:** “Then shall your light break forth like the dawn...Then shall I Hear your prayers...Then shall I accept your worship...Then you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to dwell in.”

C. **We can Make America Great by becoming Repairers of the Breach!**

V. Honoring a Man Who Made Inclusion Sustainable at Spirit & Truth Sanctuary

In a community as wonderfully unconventional as ours—a Q+ affirming, interfaith spiritual collective built on the conviction that love is wider than the boundaries we have inherited—it is worth naming the gift of Pastor Curtis Howell's presence. Curtis Howell, a retired successful businessman, steady and deeply grounded, has spent decades quietly caring for us.

This image shows a full page of blank, lined paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal grey lines across its entire width, typical of notebook or legal stationery. The paper is otherwise completely empty, with no margins, text, or other markings.