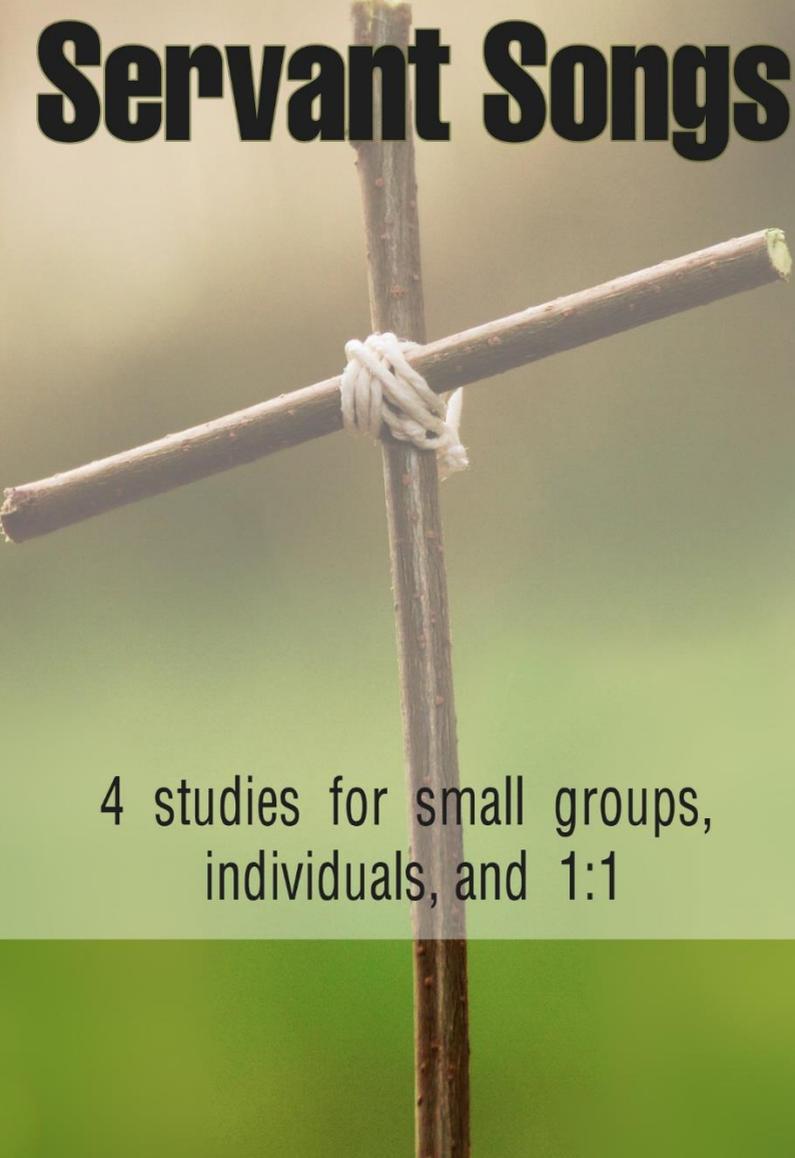


Isaiah's Servant Songs



4 studies for small groups,
individuals, and 1:1

Welcome to Isaiah – Servant Songs

This study guide will take you into the four sections of God’s Word through the prophet Isaiah that are known as the “Servant Songs.” These four songs speak of the Servant of the Lord, who will lead and rescue God’s people, suffering for their rebellion in the process. Ultimately these songs can only be true of Jesus.

If you’re using these studies in a **Bible Study Group**, try to make sure you’ve read the passage and done your preparation before you meet. This will be of great benefit not only to you, but also to the other members of your group.

If you’re a **Bible Study Group Leader** please don’t feel that your group needs to answer every question in every study. With such a wide variety of ages and personalities in our church, we have included a number of different types of questions, including some which reflect on the same points, just from slightly different perspectives. Please choose the questions most appropriate for your group.

If you’re doing these studies **individually**, why not let someone know you are doing so, and arrange a time to meet with them when you’ve finished (or even as you go) to let them know how your life is being changed by God’s Word.

Recommended Reading:

Isaiah - Tyndale New Testament Commentary. Alec Motyer
God’s Prophet, God’s Servant, Paternoster Press. John Goldingay
The Message of Isaiah - The Bible Speaks Today. Barry Webb

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- 1.** Can you think of something for which you have waited a very long time? What was the outcome?
Did you ever get it?
How good were you at waiting?!

- 2.** Think of someone you know who is not a Christian but interested in the person of Jesus (it might be you!). What aspect of the person, work or character of Jesus is most appealing to them?

- 3.** What do you know of the situation facing God's people in the 8th Century BC?
What has happened in the centuries prior?
What is about to take place?

If you have access to an ESV or NIV study Bible read the introduction to Isaiah or read the Isaiah articles in the New Bible Dictionary. Make a note of any details that seem especially important.

Read Isaiah 42:1 - 7

- 4.** This is the first of four "servant songs" in the book of Isaiah. Describe the person and work of the servant pictured here.

5. Make note of all the things we learn about the servant's relationship to God.

6. What meaning is intended by the two word pictures in verse 3?
Write a modern equivalent of these expressions.

7. What encouragement is contained in this song that God is able to bring about what he promises?

8. In what ways could the servant in Isaiah 42 be described as the true Israel?

9. What do we learn about people through the words of this song?

Read Matthew 12:1 - 21

10. Matthew tells us that Jesus fulfils the promise of the servant in Isaiah 42. What then does Isaiah 42 tell us Jesus' ministry will be like?

11. In what particular episodes of Jesus' ministry do you see the fulfilment of the Isaiah 42 promises?

12. In what ways does God the Father show his approval of Jesus?

13. How does what we learnt about the servant's relationship to God help us understand Jesus' relationship with his heavenly Father?

Read Acts 13:43 - 48

14. In this section part of the work of the servant is extended to become the work of all Christians. In what specific ways, then, does Isaiah 42 shape your life and ministry?

1. Is there a rescue story that has encouraged or inspired you?
2. If humanity tried to identify its greatest need, what issues would make the shortlist of the people you live amongst?
3. If humanity were to devise a plan to rescue people from sin, what would the plan look like?

Read Isaiah 49:1 - 7

4. What does this song add to the description of God's servant that we saw in Isaiah 42?
5. What does this section add to our understanding of God?
6. How would you summarise the ministry of the servant from this section?

- 7.** Why does the Lord refer to the servant by the name "Israel" (v3)?

- 8.** When God's people first heard of the great gathering promised in the life of this servant, how would they have understood and expected that?

- 9.** Make a note of the places in this section where the identity of the person speaking changes. Who is speaking to whom at each point?

- 10.** What does verse 4 tell you about the reception that the servant received from God's people?

- 11.** What is the ultimate promise held out in this song?

- 12.** How does the achievement of the restoration promised in these verses display the splendour of the Lord (v 3)?

- 13.** How do we see Jesus fulfilling the restoration promised in these verses?

- 14.** Where in the New Testament is similar imagery of a sword used?

- 15.** How does Isaiah 49 help us understand what is being described in those passages?

- 16.** Once again God's servant is described as "a light to the Gentiles" (v 6) and in Matthew 5:14 - 16, Jesus tells his followers that they are "the light of the world." How does Isaiah 49 help us understand the ministry to which Jesus was entrusting Christian men and women?

Isaiah 50:4 -11 The Servant Who is Vindicated

1. Why do you think stories of those who suffer on behalf of others resonate with us so much?
2. Have you ever memorised poetry?
Can you recite any now?
3. To what extent do you think suffering can be positive?

Read Isaiah 50:4 - 11

4. What hope and expectation would Isaiah's listeners have had upon hearing these words?
5. This passage and several others are very clear about the suffering that the Servant would endure. Why then was the necessity of a suffering Messiah so hard for the people of Jesus' day to accept?
6. What message does this servant bring?

- 7.** What aspects of this prophecy do you see fulfilled in the events surrounding the cross of Jesus?
See for example, Matthew 26 & 27.

- 8.** The “Sovereign LORD” is identified in verse 4, 5, 7 & 9. How is God’s sovereign control of these events, including the suffering of the servant, pictured?

- 9.** How does this help you understand the events of the cross of Christ?

- 10.** The servant speaks of “the Sovereign LORD who helps me” (v9). What help does he receive from God? What help or deliverance does he not receive?

- 11.** Verse 8 speaks of vindication for the servant. How do we see this in the life and ministry of Jesus?

- 12.** How does this song help us understand the ministry of Jesus more broadly?

- 13.** How is obedience demonstrated according to this song?

- 14.** How does this servant song give you confidence to stand before God?

- 15.** How are the outcomes different for the person who “fears the Lord” (v 10) and the person who tries to provide for themselves (v 11)?

- 16.** How is the attempt at self-sufficiency and independence pictured in verse 11 symptomatic of all sin?

- 17.** In what ways have you discovered that God’s Word “sustains the weary” (v 4)?

- 18.** How could you use this servant song to encourage a Christian friend who struggles with the knowledge of their sinfulness?

- 1.** What qualities or characteristics do you look for in a leader?
What traits put you off completely?!
- 2.** If you asked the average Australian to “Describe the problem of sin” what kind of responses do you think you would receive?
- 3.** Have you ever “stood in” for someone else when you didn’t really want to?
Was your reluctance justified?!

Read Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12

- 4.** What is your emotional reaction on reading this song about the Lord’s servant?
- 5.** Describe the effects and consequences of sin mentioned in this song.
- 6.** What makes this servant, who incurs the penalty for the sin of God’s people, an unlikely or unexpected saviour?

7. How do God's people benefit from the suffering of the servant?

8. Make a list of all the things this passage says about how people get into a right relationship with God.

9. How does Jesus achieve the things you listed above?

10. What aspects of the servant's suffering can you identify in Jesus' trial and execution? See, for example, John 18 - 19.

11. How is the Lord's approval of the servant expressed?

Read Philippians 2:1 - 11

12. How do Paul's words here help our understanding of the servant's exaltation after his death?

13. How does Philippians 2 help Christian people understand how to live as those who benefit from the servant's ministry?

14. A key theme in the Christian doctrine of justification is the substitution of one person for another in the judgment of sin.
How is the language of substitution used in the servant song of Isaiah 52 - 53?

Read Acts 8:26 - 35

15. How can reading the servant song in Isaiah 52 -53 help us gain a better understanding of the ministry of Jesus?

16. A Christian friend tells you they can continue to embrace a sinful lifestyle because "sin doesn't really matter."
How would you use this servant song to respond to your friend's statement?

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