



Real love and worship

Isaiah 58

The desire for intimacy with God has been there since the world began. All of us have experienced times where we feel our worship is inadequate. We would love to have said and done things but we just didn't express what was on our hearts. This chapter will help us see what God desires from us and, hopefully, remove guilt from us when we feel we should have done better. In the days of Isaiah (around BC 700) the people were being caught up in what God had not particularly commanded (fasts) and were neglecting what he specifically commanded – the Sabbath feast.

You may like to talk about times where your own experience of worship has left you feeling low.
Talk about times when your worship experience was uplifting
What are the barriers you have experienced to heart felt worship?

Verses 1 to 3 introduce the subject. The people give every appearance of piety and wanting to know God's will. But Isaiah describes how they have 'forsaken the commands' of God and are in a state of 'rebellion'. Their motives are challenged. It is not to express their gratitude and submission to God. Rather they are asking God to do them some favours (v2b)

We can sometimes give ourselves a hard time about how we worship
Is it possible we worship to gain God's attention?
Have you ever tried simply to say to God how grateful you are for being a child of God?
Have you ever asked God to help you obey his commands? (that's part of worship)?

Verses 4 to 12 expand on this theme. God **does** want to bless his people. But that blessing is given to those who strive for a living covenant relationship.

How can people show that's what they want?

It doesn't appear to be fasting in the Old Testament – it's only mentioned twice. But in hundreds of places, he commands his people to treat other people, especially those weaker than they are, with respect, justice and kindness. So, in verse 6 and 7 God tells his people to treat the poor and those in bondage with a kindness and tenderness that demonstrates their heart is right.

How can we demonstrate our heart is right?
How can we feed the poor?
Is that about eating less?
How can we clothe the 'naked'?
Is that about wearing less expensive clothes?
How can we set the oppressed free?
Is all of that up to someone who has power or can we contribute?

God calls for behaviour that is self-forgetful and outward looking. Let acts of self-denial be for the sake of others and not just to make you feel good?

Is this suggesting that true worship comes from acts of kindness which demonstrate our obedience to God?

Perhaps you find it surprising that true worship comes from the hearts of people whose **ACTIONS** show they are following God's commands. If that is true, worship cannot simply come from a good feeling but from hearts devoted to needy people. It implies that God's heart of justice will be reflected in the actions of God's people. We will be transformative and, more and more, will want to grow our relationship with God. Our impact on society will draw people to the one true God.

The reference to light (v 8 and 10) runs through Isaiah (e.g., 42:6 & 49:6) and refers to God's light of justice shining through his people to the nations of the world.

How can we be part of that? Look at verses 11 and 12 to see the effects.

The last two verses (v 13 and 14) are speaking about the Sabbath. It is clearly stated that the Sabbath is a holy day for the worship of God and we should 'make the Lord's Day honourable'. We should 'not speak idle words' and 'do as we please'.

Does the principle of a day set aside for the worship of God still apply?

How should we avoid speaking idle words?

What does it mean not to do as we please?

The last verse shows us how God wants us to experience and enjoy his presence in worship.

Have any of the ideas of true worship in this chapter surprised you?