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Meditations on Isaiah 54

A WORD OVER OUR HOUSE

We believe Isaiah 54 is God's word over One City Church for this season, and we steward it by praying it.

Because of what the Suffering Servant has accomplished in Isaiah 53, Isaiah 54 calls us to respond in faith. God speaks to a woman with nothing to show for her hope and tells her to sing, to enlarge her tent, to hold nothing back and to strengthen her stakes. We hear him saying the same to our house.

We pray these prayers as a church: in our homes, in our small groups, in our gatherings and on our own. We pray them from the finished work of Jesus. Nothing we ask here is earned. The Servant has already done the work. He suffered for us, and by his wounds our peace was already secured. God spared no expense in redeeming us, so we hold nothing back in responding to him.

Pray the prayers aloud where you can. Add your own words, and when God answers, write it down. The answers belong to the story of this house.

We begin at the cross

Isaiah 53:4–6, 10–12

Every prayer for this season starts where everything was paid for.

Lord Jesus, thank you for taking up our pain and carrying our suffering. You were pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities.

Thank you that the punishment that brought us peace fell on you. By your wounds, we are healed.

We lay down every attempt to earn your blessing. We come to you as a house that has already been welcomed.

You saw the fruit of your suffering and were satisfied. Let One City be part of that fruit.

Lord Jesus, everything we ask for this house, we ask on the ground of your cross. Your work is finished, and we stand in it together. Amen.

Sing – Worship While You Wait

Isaiah 54:1 · Habakkuk 3:17–18 · Romans 4:18–21 · 2 Chronicles 20:20–22 · Acts 16:25–26 · Psalm 126:5–6

Isaiah 54 opens with a single command: sing. It comes to a woman with nothing to show for her hope. Zion has been devastated, her children scattered, her city humbled. She looks like someone whose promises have failed her. Yet God tells her to sing before the children return and before the tent expands.

Something has already happened before she sings a note. Isaiah 53 comes before Isaiah 54: the Servant has suffered, borne our sin, and secured our peace. Zion's song rises from what God has already spoken and the Servant has already accomplished.

There is an echo here of Sarah. Earlier, God told Zion to look to Abraham and to Sarah who gave her birth (Isaiah 51:2). Sarah knew what it meant to hold a promise while staring at barrenness. Romans 4 tells us Abraham faced the deadness of Sarah's womb and still stayed persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is the faith God is forming in us.

Habakkuk looks at empty fields and still rejoices in the Lord. In 2 Chronicles, Judah's singers walk out ahead of the army before a single battle is fought, and centuries later Paul and Silas are singing at midnight with their feet still in stocks. Sometimes worship comes after the breakthrough. Sometimes worship is what faith sounds like while we are still waiting.

Waiting reveals whether our worship is rooted in the gift or in the Giver. Anyone can sing once the answer is already in their hands. Faith sings while the field is still empty, because it has learned to trust the character of the One who made the promise.

Faith learns to sing about what God has said before it can see what God has done.

Pray for yourself

- Be open and honest with God about the places in your life, family, or work that feel barren.
- Praise Him before anything changes. Habakkuk lists every failed crop, but says, "yet."
- Give him glory as someone fully persuaded that he will do what he has promised, as Abraham did.
- Choose a song of praise and sing it over that place, out loud if you can.

Pray for our church

- Thank God for the word he has spoken over One City for this season.

- Name the places in our church that still look barren, and praise him there.
- Thank him in advance for spiritual sons and daughters not yet born into our family.
- Pray Psalm 126 over every tear sown in this house, and ask for songs of joy at harvest.

Pray for our city and nation

- Praise God ahead of time for the people across Abuja who don't yet know him.
- Bring him the barren places in Nigeria, where hope has run dry, and declare his faithfulness over them.
- Ask God to raise a sound of praise from churches across the nation, one city calling to another to seek the Lord (Zechariah 8:21).

Father, you have spoken, and that is enough for us to sing. We bring you every barren place, in our lives, in this house, in our city and our nation, and we praise you there before anything changes. You are faithful, and you will do what you have promised. In Jesus' name, amen.

DECLARE

Faith sings about what God has said before it sees what God has done.

Stretch – Make Room for the Promise

Isaiah 54:2a · 2 Kings 4:1–7 · Isaiah 49:19–20 · Joshua 1:3–4 · Ephesians 3:20 · 2 Corinthians 6:11–13

Then God says something almost unreasonable: "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide." Remember who he is speaking to. This is a barren woman. No children fill the tent yet, and there is no visible reason to need more room. Yet God tells her to enlarge today because of what he has promised for tomorrow.

Faith celebrates the promise, and faith makes room for it. Isaiah has used this picture before. In chapter 49, Zion's returning children become so numerous that they say, "This place is too small for us." Isaiah 54 tells her to prepare for that future before it arrives.

That same rhythm appears in 2 Kings 4. The widow is told to gather empty jars, not just a few. The oil is God's provision. The jars are her prepared capacity, room to receive what he gives.

We stretch because grace has already spoken. God's promise comes first; our preparation follows it.

Often, before God enlarges our platform, our buildings or our resources, he enlarges us. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Open wide your hearts." Our hearts can become too narrow for the people God wants us to love, the responsibility he wants us to carry, the generosity he wants to form in us, and the future he wants us to steward.

So we ask: if God answered some of what we're praying, would there be room in our lives for the answer? Room in our schedules, our homes, our teams, our hearts, and our imagination?

Real faith prepares to steward what it's asking God to do.

If you believe God for more, make room for more.

Pray for yourself

- Ask God to enlarge your heart first (2 Corinthians 6:13).
- Ask him to show you where small expectations have become a ceiling in your life.
- If God answered your prayers this year, would your life have room for the answer? Ask him what needs to change in your time, your home and your habits.
- Ask for one specific step of preparation this week, a jar to gather or a space to clear.

Pray for our church

- Ask God to raise leaders in One City before they are needed.
- Pray for our small groups, teams and gatherings to be ready for the people he is sending.

- Pray Isaiah 49:20 over us, until we find ourselves saying the place is too small.
- Pray Ephesians 3:20 over this house: immeasurably more than we ask or imagine.

Pray for our city and nation

- Ask God to open doors across Abuja: in universities, among NYSC members, in workplaces and in families.
- Pray for the gospel to reach every state in Nigeria, and for the churches there to enlarge their tents too.
- Pray Joshua 1:3 over the ground we walk in this city, as ground God has already given.

Lord, you are able to do far more than we ask or imagine. Forgive us for preparing for so little. Enlarge our hearts, this house, and our vision for Abuja and Nigeria. We will gather the jars and trust you to fill them. In Jesus' name, amen.

DECLARE

If you believe God for more, make room for more.

Spare No Expense — Hold Nothing Back

Isaiah 54:2b ("spare not", KJV; "do not hold back", NIV) · Romans 8:32 · 2 Timothy 1:7 · 2 Kings 13:14–19 · Luke 5:4–6 · John 12:24–25 · 2 Corinthians 9:6–8 · Philippians 3:13–14 · Genesis 12:1–4

Isaiah continues: "Do not hold back." The King James Version says, "Spare not." Spare No Expense is our way of naming that command, and it reaches further than money. It means wholehearted obedience.

There is a way to obey God while still protecting ourselves from the full cost of obedience: to stretch, but only so far; to give, but only so much; to go, but keep one foot behind; to follow, but preserve enough control to retreat if things get uncomfortable. Isaiah says: do not hold back.

The story of King Jehoshaphat gives us a sobering picture. Elisha told him to strike the ground with his arrows. Jehoshaphat struck three times and stopped. Elisha was angry, because the king's restrained response revealed a restrained expectation. He obeyed, but he still had arrows in his hand when he stopped.

Restraint is often our greatest obstacle, more than outright rebellion. We stop while there are still arrows in our hands, retreating because obedience has become expensive, protecting our comfort, our reputation, our money or our control.

Why do we hold back? Usually it's fear: fear of losing control, fear of looking foolish, fear of running out before tomorrow comes. Paul writes to Timothy, "God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Timothy 1:7). The fear that makes us stop at three strikes doesn't come from God; his Spirit gives us power to obey, love that doesn't protect itself, and a clear enough mind to hear his voice over our fear.

But the gospel gives us another reason to hold nothing back. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all" (Romans 8:32). Before God ever tells us, "Spare not," he shows us a God who gave his own Son. Our costly obedience is always a response to grace already given.

God held nothing back in redeeming us. In Christ, he gave himself for us, so we open our hands before him and say: nothing you ask of me is more precious than you.

William Carey put it simply: expect great things from God, attempt great things for God. Expectation without attempt becomes passivity, and attempt without expectation becomes human striving. Faith expects because God is faithful, and attempts because God has spoken.

Pray for yourself

- Ask the Holy Spirit to search you (Psalm 139:23–24). What arrows are still in your hand?
- Confess where you have obeyed halfway, and receive his forgiveness without condemnation. The Suffering Servant carried that too.
- Pray with open hands, releasing whatever you have been protecting: comfort, reputation, money or control.
- Where you have worked all night and caught nothing, ask for faith to say with Peter, "Because you say so, I will let down the nets."

Pray for our church

- Pray for wholehearted obedience across One City, from our leaders to our newest members.
- Ask God to make us a generous, sowing church, confident in his provision (2 Corinthians 9:8).
- Pray for our leaders to have wisdom to tell costly obedience from recklessness, and clarity about what God has said.
- Ask for a house that keeps striking the ground until God says stop.

Pray for our city and nation

- Pray for believers across Abuja to carry the gospel boldly into government, business, media, education and the creative industries.
- Pray for leaders in Nigeria to serve with integrity and sacrifice, holding nothing back for the good of the people.
- Ask God to raise a generation in this nation that expects great things from him and attempts great things for him.

Father, you spared no expense in redeeming us. You gave your Son. We open our hands and hold nothing back from you, in our lives, in this house and in this nation. We will not stop where you have not told us to stop. In Jesus' name, amen.

DECLARE

God spared no expense in redeeming us, so we will hold nothing back in responding to him.

Strengthen – Build the Depth That Can Carry the Breadth

Isaiah 54:2c · Isaiah 54:14 · Ephesians 3:16–19 · Colossians 2:6–7 · Psalm 1:1–3 · Jeremiah 17:7–8 · Luke 6:48 · Acts 9:31

Isaiah's vision of enlargement carries a warning inside the imagery: "Lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." The tent must grow wider, and the stakes must grow stronger at the same time. A larger tent creates greater tension on every peg. If the tent expands while the foundation stays weak, enlargement becomes instability.

So God calls his people to establishment as much as expansion.

Later in the chapter he says, "In righteousness you will be established" (Isaiah 54:14). It's easy to want greater fruit without asking whether our roots can sustain it.

More influence needs deeper character. More responsibility needs greater maturity. More people need stronger community. More ministry needs deeper communion with God. And more fruit needs deeper roots.

Jesus described the wise builder as the one who "dug down deep." Psalm 1 pictures the fruitful life as a tree planted by streams of water. Paul prays that believers would be strengthened with power in their inner being, rooted and established in love. In Acts 9, the church was strengthened, and then it grew in number. God cares about what he builds in us as much as what he builds through us.

Before we ask how much bigger this could become, it's worth asking a harder question: if God enlarged this tomorrow, what would strain first? Our character, our prayer life, our marriage, our leadership, our friendships, our rhythms of rest, our structures? The answer may show us which stake God wants to strengthen now.

Faithfulness, more than size, is the goal.

God wants us established as well as enlarged. Build the depth that can sustain the breadth.

Pray for yourself

- Pray Ephesians 3:16–19 intentionally over yourself, replacing "you" with your own name.
- If God grew your influence tomorrow, what would strain first? Your character, discipline, marriage, rest or friendships? Ask him to strengthen that stake.
- Name one practice you will recommit to this week: prayer, the Word, community or Sabbath.

- Pray for the people who help hold your tent up.

Pray for our church

- Pray Acts 9:31 over One City: strengthened, walking in the fear of the Lord, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, growing in number.
- Ask for discipleship deep enough to carry every person God adds.
- Pray for our pastors, leaders and serving teams to be rooted in Christ, healthy and rested.
- Pray for the marriages and families of this house, the stakes that hold so much of the tent.

Pray for our city and nation

- Pray for the churches of Abuja to be rooted in the gospel, and for unity among them, that they may all be one (John 17:21).
- Pray for families across Nigeria to be strengthened, and for peace and security in every region.
- Ask God to make this nation like a tree planted by the water, bearing fruit even in drought (Jeremiah 17:8).

Lord, root us and establish us in your love. Where you are widening our reach, deepen our roots in our lives, in this house and across this nation. Make us like trees planted by the water, bearing fruit in every season. In Jesus' name, amen.

DECLARE

Lord, build in us the depth that can sustain the breadth.

A Prayer Over Our House

We sing because we believe him.

We stretch because we expect him.

We spare no expense because we trust him.

And we strengthen because we want to faithfully steward whatever he sends.

Father, thank you for your Servant, who was wounded so that we could be healed. We receive your word over One City in this season. Because of Jesus, we will sing while the tent is still small. We will make room for what you have promised. We will hold nothing back from you, because you held nothing back from us. Strengthen our roots so that we can faithfully carry all that you send. Enlarge us, enlarge this house, and enlarge your Church across Abuja and to the ends of the earth, so that the world may believe that you sent your Son. For the glory of Jesus. Amen.

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you.

ISAIAH 54:10 (NIV)