

Calling

Isaiah 55

My Story - Testimony Video

My name is Darin. I grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and ***my parents brought me to church all the time*** so I learned about Jesus from an early age. Mom says I “asked Jesus into my heart” when I was only 2 or 3 years old. I was very blessed with solid Bible teaching and lots of great Christian role models.

But over all of this good teaching I felt like there was **a cloud of GUILT AND FEAR**. I knew there was a God - I never doubted that. I knew He was perfectly righteous and I wasn't - so I struggled with guilt for my sins. I also knew God was terrifyingly powerful so I carried around the nagging fear of His punishment. As a result, I raised my hand to “get saved” at just about every opportunity - from Sunday School to Bible Club to church camp to youth conferences. I was never quite sure it had “worked,” you know?

Then one day when I was 13 I worked up the courage to share my very personal journal with my youth leader, Andy. ***I confessed some pretty serious middle school sins*** in there so I wasn't sure what would happen. Again - guilt and fear. Would he tell the pastor? Even worse, would he tell my parents?

What Andy did was take me out to Arby's and buy me a Jamocha shake. And over the next few weeks he led me through a Bible study about the love and grace of God. I can still picture one of the cartoons. It showed a teenage boy like me beside the smoking wreck of a car. It asked the question - if you trashed your dad's car would he be mad at you? (You better believe it!) But would he still be your dad?

At the time, my dad had a brand new Ford Mustang - so I knew he would be very mad at me if I wrecked it. But I also knew that **my dad would ALWAYS be there for me** - nothing could ever change that. Andy said: that's what God is like. He's your heavenly father. Once you come into his family by calling on Jesus to save you, nothing can ever separate you from the love of God.

A little later I heard the teaching - ***“Nothing you do can make God love you more. Nothing you do can make God love you less.”*** I struggled to believe that because I really felt that there were things I did and God loved me more; and things I did and God loved me less. I had two lists: one that scored points and one that cost you points.

But the gospel was breaking through to me and making it clear that **God has loved us INFINITELY in Jesus**. Jesus won the perfect score and he gave me credit for it! I could not add to

or take away from the grace of Jesus. “NOTHING you do could make God love you more and NOTHING you do could make Him love you less.”

As the light of God’s grace came on in my heart and mind **my guilt was replaced by the JOY** of being forgiven and accepted in Christ; and **my fear was replaced with the PEACE** of experiencing the unconditional, unbreakable love of my Father in heaven.

That’s my story! **What’s your story?**

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So that’s an example of what we want EVERYONE to prepare this summer! What’s YOUR story? I used four words - guilt and fear replaced by joy and peace - to show how Jesus changed my life completely. How has Jesus changed your life? Make up a 2-3 minute video testimony - upload it to google drive or something and send the link to me.

Today I’m going to use my personal story to illustrate what it looks like to respond to God’s call. We’ll see in Isaiah 55 there are **five steps to responding to God’s call**.

Responding to God’s Call

- Thirst
- Turn
- Seek
- Receive
- Rejoice

The first words of this chapter are about **THIRST**. “Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.” This means that the water of life that can save you and satisfy you is available, but if you don’t think you need it, you won’t ever come.

But in order to come to Jesus, the source of living water, **you have to first turn away from other sources of life** and purpose and happiness. Then you have to seek him, listening to His Word. Fourth, you have to receive His gift of salvation. And fifth, the result of responding to God’s invitation is JOY.

The first step to a changed life is thirst.

Responding to God’s Call

1. Thirst

“Come, **everyone who thirsts**, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1

- **Admit you need something you cannot get on your own**

This seems so obvious but the starting point to change is **admitting you have a problem**. Until you realize that you need something you will not even try to change. Thirst is the feeling of NEED for something essential to life. Without water you can only live for a couple of days. The only thing we need more than water is AIR.

You could amplify the meaning here by saying,

“Come everyone who likes OXYGEN, come and BREATHE. You polluters who have turned your planet into a cloud of poisonous evil, come into the Oasis of pure, clean air. Come and breathe it in!”

The first step is admitting you need something and that **you cannot get it on your own**. We have to admit we are POOR in order to receive the RICHES of God’s grace. The blessing of God is only available to those who know they are **poor in spirit** - that we come to God with empty hands; we bring nothing of value to the relationship.

One of the advantages of growing up - as I did - in church and knowing there is a holy, glorious, Almighty God is that you are programmed with the FEAR OF THE LORD. ***I grew up with guilt and fear.*** And those are not all bad. In fact, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” I knew God was holy and I felt utterly incapable of living up to His standards. In essence, my church experience gave me a thirst for righteousness and convinced me that I could not achieve this on my own.

Responding to God’s Call

1. Thirst

“Come, **everyone who thirsts**, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” Isaiah 55:1

- ***You can’t get the infinite wealth of Jesus until you realize your personal bankruptcy.***

You cannot experience Jesus as the spring of living water until you feel your **spiritual thirst**. You cannot know Jesus as the bread of life until you admit your **spiritual hunger**. You cannot find life in Christ until you realize you are **dead in your sin**. You cannot experience the infinite grace of God until you acknowledge that **you could never deserve it** - you have no chance to earn it. The first step to change is admitting you need something you have no hope in this world to get.

But here is the beginning of the good news: this water, this bread, ***this life, forgiveness and grace is available absolutely FREE!*** When have you ever heard this offer in an infomercial? “He who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy whatever you want WITHOUT MONEY AND WITHOUT PRICE.”

The first step is thirst - admitting our need. The second step is to TURN.

Responding to God’s Call

2. Turn

“Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for ***that which does not satisfy?*** Listen diligently to me and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.” Isaiah 55:2

- **Forsake your devotion to everything and everyone but Jesus**

If the way you've been living has left you thirsty, the only logical thing to do is to stop living that way and find the thing that will quench your thirst! **Insanity is continuing to do the same thing**, over and over, and expecting a different result.

- If money has not satisfied your soul yet, why do you think it's going to?
- If pornography has not met your deepest longings yet, why do you keep going back for more?
- If relationships keep leaving you empty and broken, why do you keep drinking from that well?
- If work has proven a cruel slave driver for you, why do you keep worshipping at the altar of your job?

Why do we spend our lives, our labor, our hours and days on things that do not and could never satisfy our souls? The things of this world are SAND and POISON. They cannot satisfy the hunger and thirst of our souls. Only Jesus can do that. He alone has the living water we can drink and never thirst again.

Jesus said, *"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy - but I have come that you may have life and have it ABUNDANTLY."* Jesus alone offers real, abundant life. I'm not talking about getting healthy and rich and famous. That is what the devil promises and it is all plastic and poisoned fruit. I'm talking about the love and grace and power and purpose and peace and joy that flows from the LIFE OF GOD HIMSELF.

God calls everyone to forsake our old allegiances, our other devotions, our worship of other gods, our commitment to little idols. Jesus says:

Responding to God's Call

2. Turn

*"If anyone comes to me and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple."* Luke 14:26

- Forsake your devotion to everything and everyone but Jesus

With Jesus it is ALL OR NOTHING. There is no partway, halfway. It's a trade. You trade your life for His life. That means YOUR LIFE MUST DIE. Jesus calls us to the cross. He calls us to lay down our old, selfish, sinful lives so He can give us His life, His Spirit, His power and love and purpose and grace - so He can give us HIMSELF. But Jesus cannot give us Himself until we first surrender ourselves to Him.

There is a river that flows directly from the throne of God in heaven. The book of Revelation paints a picture of what heaven is like and that is the central image. Trees grow along the shores of this river and their bear fruit in season on which we will feast for eternity. The point is that all life and provision and blessing and joy flow directly from the throne of God. HE IS THE SOURCE OF ALL LIFE and joy and blessing.

By coming to earth Jesus opened up the fountain of life right here on earth - through his crucified and resurrected body. But you can't come to Jesus in faith until you turn away from all of your other allegiances. Listen to verse 7:

Responding to God's Call

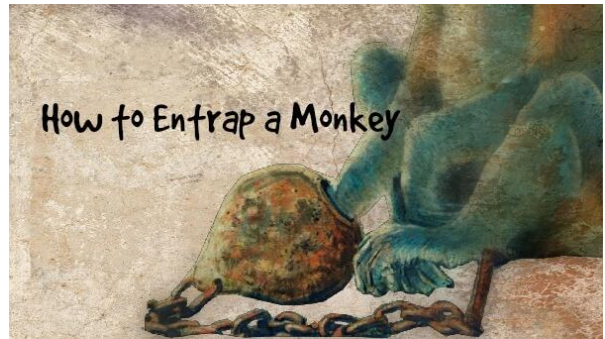
2. Turn

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; **let him return to the Lord**, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” Isaiah 55:7

- **You can't take hold of Jesus by faith until you let go of your selfishness and sin**

The compassion of the Lord and His abundant pardon is available for those who **REPENT**. This was the message of John the Baptist, Jesus and the apostles. Many churches have lost the message of repentance but it is **ESSENTIAL** to the gospel. There is no faith without repentance just as there is no real repentance without faith. They are two sides of the same coin.

In the same moment that you turn your back on all other gods you take hold of Jesus. Think of it like a **MONKEY TRAP**. Secure a small mouth jar with a fruit inside and to a post. A monkey will reach into grab the fruit but be unable to pull the fruit out in his clenched fist. Instead of letting go of the fruit to escape, the monkey can be easily captured.



How often are we just like the monkey? Instead of letting go of the sin that so easily entangles us, we hold on - refusing to **REPENT**. Freedom is right now available to all who are willing to call on Jesus in faith. But you first have to let go of your sin - let go of your selfishness - let go of your pride - let go of your **LIFE**.

What is the fruit inside your trap that you just don't want to release? Jesus said, “Anyone who would come after me must deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow after me.” To follow Jesus you have to **DENY** yourself. You have to turn away from your old life - indeed you have to let your old life **DIE** in order to let Jesus raise you up to new life in Him.

This is why handing my journal to my youth leader was **a major turning point in my life**. That was my way of letting go of the poisoned fruit in my monkey trap. Andy helped me repent and let go of my selfishness and sin so I could take hold of the grace of Jesus. He helped me believe that Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient to save me and bring me into an unchangeable relationship with God as my Father.

My fear of God gave me a thirst - a sense that I needed something I couldn't get. My guilt and conviction of sin led me to turn from my sin. And then I set my heart to seek after Jesus - which is step three in responding to God's call. Verse 2-3.

Responding to God's Call

3. Seek

“Listen diligently to me... Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.” Isaiah 55:2-3

- **Actively study God's Word** to understand and believe the Gospel

God is calling out to EVERYONE. The good news is for every tongue and tribe and nation. It was never meant to be limited just to the Jewish nation. 700 years before Jesus, Isaiah proclaimed **God's open invitation**: “Come! EVERYONE who thirsts!” This was God's Word through His prophet. We must listen

diligently to the voice of God as recorded in Scripture. God is calling everyone - but it is up to us to actively LISTEN - to study His Word in order to understand and believe the Gospel.

Jesus said it the same way, quoting this passage: "If ANYONE thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37). The Bible ends with a repeat of this invitation from Jesus:

Responding to God's Call

3. Seek

"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price." Revelation 22:17

- Actively study God's Word to understand and ***believe the Gospel***

The invitation of Jesus stands open to ***everyone***. Jesus offers water you can drink and never thirst again. He was talking about the Holy Spirit - the life of God Himself - that becomes in the believer a spring of living water welling up to eternal life. Hear the voice of Jesus, crying out through His church saying 'COME!' This is our job - our commission - empowered by the Spirit, WE ARE THE BRIDE commissioned to invite all who are thirsty to come and take the water of life without price.

God is patiently enduring the wickedness of mankind so that more people might hear and respond. The promise of God is that "everyone who asks receives, everyone who seeks finds and to the one who knocks the door will be opened." Verse 6:

Responding to God's Call

3. Seek

"Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near." Isaiah 55:6

- Actively study God's Word to understand and ***believe the Gospel***

Right now God's grace is available to anyone who turns from their sin and comes to Jesus in faith. ***Let go of the poisoned fruit in the monkey trap and seek the Lord Jesus.*** As soon as you set your heart to seek after Him, God promises to make Himself known to you. If you keep running away from God you will not find Him or the happiness and life you are looking for.

Most of my life I did sincerely seek after the Lord. And He was always faithful to bring me to a deeper understanding of His love and grace. I knew the love of God as a child, it was just clouded over with some guilt and fear. I experienced God's grace as a young teenager, but still kept straying into selfishness and sin. Yet God was always there to call me back. You know the voice of God. You hear Him. Just Come! Come back!

Every time I set my heart to seek after God - every time - He met me right there. The times in my life when I felt distant from the Lord, He was not the One who had moved away - I was. He was always ready for me to come back. I just had to turn away from my old sins and selfishness and set my heart to seek after Him again. And again. And again.

“Seek the Lord. Call on Him!” ***The offer of the Gospel is the most amazing offer*** - the most mind-blowing promotional deal. **And it is for a limited time only.** When Jesus comes back it will be too late to call on Him. When you die, it is too late to repent and believe. NOW is the time of God’s favor. Seek the Lord NOW.

These steps of response to God’s call all grow from HUMILITY. Are we humble before the Almighty, All-knowing God? Verse 8:

Responding to God’s Call

3. Seek

“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways.” Isaiah 55:8-9

- ***You can’t experience God’s grace until you acknowledge His greatness***

Pride is what keeps people from experiencing the cleansing waters of God’s grace. Pride that says, “I’m not thirsty. I don’t need Him. I’ve got this. I’m in control.” Humility abandons that pride and falls down before the Almighty, All-knowing, All-loving God of heaven and says, “YOU ARE GOD. I AM NOT.”

Are you upset with God about some things that have happened in your life? Are you angry that God didn’t come through for you the way you think He should have? Is it JUST POSSIBLE that He knows a thing or two that you don’t? Is it just possible that God has a bigger plan in motion than you can see? His thoughts are so far above ours - His ways are so vastly superior to ours they are no more comparing with ours than your finger can reach to Orion’s belt and unbuckle it.

Have you bowed before the Lord in humility, awe and reverence? Again, I had the advantage of being raised in a church that sang, “To God be the glory great things He has done,” and “How great Thou art,” and “Holy, Holy, Holy.” I was raised with the fear of the Lord. So I trembled before Him. And that is what prepared me to experience the wonder of His grace. I knew that I deserved nothing from God but His wrath and judgment. So when He gave me instead His mercy and love, I was overwhelmed with the joy of the gospel.

The fourth step is to Receive and experience God’s grace:

Responding to God’s Call

4. Receive

“Hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.” Isaiah 55:3b

- ***Commit yourself fully to Jesus in personal faith***

I’m not saying “receive Jesus,” I’m saying “***receive the gift of God’s grace in Jesus.*** God is calling out to everyone who is thirsty. Turn from your sin, which is leading you to death and hell, and come to Jesus - the fountain of living water. He is stretching out His nail pierced hands to you, waiting to wash you in the cleansing blood of His sacrifice. And that is precisely what He does at the moment you commit yourself to Him in real, personal faith.

At the moment you commit your heart and life to Jesus **you enter an everlasting covenant with God**; you join the forever family of God with people like DAVID. God promised to bless the whole world through Abraham's offspring. God promised to establish His kingdom forever through a descendant of David. These were the central covenants of the old testament - and we bind ourselves to the Lord through faith in Jesus just as ancient people bound themselves to the Lord through circumcision and sacrifices.

Thankfully, in our case, **the blood is all from Jesus**. In the old days men and boys who committed to the Lord in faith were marked very personally by their own blood. Animals were sacrificed to provide cleansing from sin. But when Jesus came it changed all that through His perfect, all sufficient sacrifice. Come to Jesus in faith to experience His compassion and forgiveness: verse 7.

Responding to God's Call

4. Receive

"Let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, **for he will abundantly pardon.**" Isaiah 55:7b

- ***Jesus gives the believer forgiveness, freedom and fullness in Himself***

Here is the good news that I experienced when I was 13. God will abundantly pardon. ***Jesus offers total forgiveness***. He wipes the slate clean. Jesus paid it all. Your debts are forgiven - wiped out. Every sin - past, present and future - nailed to the cross, and you bear it no more. Your sin - believer - is not on you anymore. Jesus took it from you. Have you received the compassion and abundant pardon of the Lord Jesus?

Faith in Jesus brings you into ***a permanent covenant relationship with God as your Father***. That was the lightbulb for me in understanding and believing the Gospel. My relationship with God does not fluctuate with my behavior. God does not disown you every time you sin. He will always be your Father. Nothing can ever change that. Does He get upset when we mess up? Sure. But is He still our Father? Of course!

If you had a lousy Father, please hear me. God is nothing like your bad earthly father. If you had a great dad, like I did, then God is a little like your earthly dad. But the best dads on earth are just a glimmer, just a flickering candle next to the unconditional, infinite, majestic love and grace of our Father in heaven.

This is why nothing you do can make God love you more and nothing you do can make God love you less: because **God has loved you PERFECTLY in Christ**. You can't add to it or take away from it. God has abundantly pardoned you - taking your sins from you as far as the east is from the west.

And in Christ God not only gives us forgiveness but also freedom and fullness.

Responding to God's Call

4. Receive

"The law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death... in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us who walk... according to the Spirit."
Romans 8:2,4 NIV

- ***Jesus gives the believer forgiveness, freedom and fullness in Himself***

Have you experienced God's grace like this? Have you received this gift from the hands of Jesus? Have you turned from your self and sin - letting go of that poisoned fruit and taking hold of Jesus by faith?

That's what I did as a teenager and the grace of God took hold of me. I certainly wasn't perfect then and I'm nowhere near perfect now. But God forgave me and started a work in me of gradually and steadily breaking me more and more free from the sins of my flesh.

The result of this whole process is **JOY**.

Responding to God's Call

5. Rejoice

"For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout... so shall my word be..." Isaiah 55:10-11

- ***Experience the joy of belonging to Jesus***

When the seed of God's Word falls into the good soil of a humble, faith-filled heart - it bears a great harvest. The Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to totally transform us - taking proud, selfish sinners and making us into joyful, fruitful saints.

One of the greatest gifts of my teen years was Scripture memory. I admit that I memorized lots of verses more to win trophies and impress girls than to please God and see the image of Christ more realized in my life - but God used even my impure motives to get His Word into my head and that has borne a great deal of fruit in my life.

God's Word will change you and fill you increasingly with joy. Pastor Colin Smith tells people in crisis - don't stop reading God's Word. Read, study and pray MORE in a crisis - because God's Word is your IV. Hydrate on Scripture. Take in the Word of God. It WILL accomplish the purposes of God. His Word never fails. Verse 12.

Responding to God's Call

5. Rejoice

"For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth in singing..." Isaiah 55:12

- ***As we follow Him, the Holy Spirit makes us fruitful***

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace and so on. If your life does not overflow with the joy of the Lord, go back and listen to this message again. Study Isaiah 55. Study, memorize, meditate on God's Word. Keep studying, discussing and processing Scripture until the light of the gospel comes on in your heart and mind. God's Spirit will give you the fruit of JOY as you follow Him - as you trust in Him and obey His leading.

I have experienced this over and over in my life - from those teen years when the light of God's grace first came on for me, through 20 years of ministry. As I take steps of faith and obedience, the Holy Spirit gives the fruit. He does the work - both in me and through me.

God is doing something here at Oakwood and in the city of Tampa. Don't make any mistake - ***this is not about me.*** If it was about me the whole thing would grind to a halt. God has worked in my life for 43 years to get me out of the way - and I still falter and fall down and cause trouble. But the Holy Spirit is so patient and He just moves me aside so He can work.

Do you hear God calling you?

God's Open Invitation

"Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." Isaiah 55:1

The grace of God is available for free in Christ. The only thing keeping you from drinking these streams of living water is YOU. Get out of your own way. Let go of your selfishness and sin. Turn away from all other allegiances and take hold of the only life that is truly life - and that is in Jesus.