

# Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



## "Whose Will is Driving My Spiritual Pursuit?"

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### Devotion and Discussion Questions

**Key Texts (TLV):** Isaiah 58:1-5; Isaiah. 1:13-17; 55:1-9; 56:1-3, 10-11; 57:15, 17-19; Matt. 23:23-26; James 4:2-4

Isaiah 58 is such a weighty and piercing passage because it does not come to the openly rebellious first. It comes to people who appear serious about God. That is part of what makes it so searching. These are not people who seem careless or indifferent. They declare that they seek God day after day—that they want to know His ways. They ask for righteous judgments. They delight in the nearness of God. And yet the Lord tells Isaiah to raise his voice like a shofar and not hold back. That alone should arrest us. It means ***it is possible to be deeply engaged in spiritual activity and still be missing the very heart of what God wants.***

That is why this passage must not just be heard as a word for “those people” out there. It has to be heard personally. Isaiah 57 ended with that beautiful tension: the righteous enter into shalom, but there is no shalom for the wicked. And in the middle of that chapter, the Lord gives that breathtaking invitation: *“For thus says the high and exalted One who inhabits eternity, whose Name is Holy: ‘I dwell in a high and holy place, yet also with a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and revive the heart of the contrite’”* (Is. 57:15). That is the heart of God. He is not standing at a distance, waiting to pounce. He is calling, inviting, reviving, healing. And Isaiah 58 cuts right to the heart of whether our spiritual pursuit is actually responding to what HE wants—or still quietly being driven by what *we* want.

#### 1. THE LORD SOUNDS THE ALARM AGAINST RELIGIOUS SELF-DECEPTION

The opening of Isaiah 58 is startling: *“Cry aloud, do not hold back! Raise your voice like a shofar. Tell My people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins”* (Is. 58:1). The Lord does not tell Isaiah to whisper this. He does not tell him to ease into it gently. He says, in effect, “Sound the alarm.” This is not because God delights in harshness, but because His people are blind to what is really going on. Their *watchmen* are blind. Their *leaders* do not know. And when blindness settles into religion, sometimes the Word of the Lord has to come like a blast from a shofar. Stop. Pay attention. You are not seeing yourselves clearly.

What makes this especially sobering is that the people being addressed do not look like rebels by ordinary standards. They look devout. They look serious. They look committed. They are the kind of people others might point to as examples. But the Lord sees deeper than appearances. **He sees when outward devotion has become disconnected from inward surrender.** He sees when people are very active in spiritual things and yet are still operating from the old center of self. That is why familiar passages like this one need to pierce us again. We can become so used to hearing rebukes against hypocrisy that we assume they belong to someone else. But the cry of Isaiah 58 is meant to wake us up and make us ask, “Lord, is any of this living in me?”

#### 2. IT IS POSSIBLE TO SEEK GOD DAILY AND STILL BE SEEKING OUR OWN WAY

Verse 2 is one of the most sobering verses in this whole section because it describes people who seem to be doing everything right on the surface: *“Yet they seek Me day to day and delight (חפץ, Chafetz, “will/delight/want”) to know My ways, as if they were a nation that did right and had not forsaken their God’s justice. They ask Me for righteous judgments; they delight (חפץ, Chafetz,*

“will/delight/want”) in the nearness of God” (Is. 58:2). That sounds beautiful. These are not pagan outsiders with no interest in God. These are people who investigate, inquire, pursue, and WANT to know His ways. They are spiritually active. They are religiously engaged. They look like a people who do righteousness and have not abandoned the mishpat of their God.

And yet that little phrase “as if” exposes everything. They are acting like a nation that does righteousness, but something underneath is off. This is exactly the danger the prophets confront again and again. It is possible to do the forms of faithfulness while missing the heart of it. It is possible to know the language, keep the customs, value the externals, and still be living from a center of self-will. That is why the Lord had already said, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous one his thoughts” (Is. 55:7), and “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Is. 55:8). It’s similar to the rebuke of Psalm 50, where the Lord says, “I’m not rebuking you because you are lacking in sacrifices” (Ps. 50:8, *paraphrase*). “You say the right words—my laws are in your mouth—but you don’t let my discipline form you (Ps. 50:16-17, *paraphrase*). The problem? The LORD says, “You thought **I** was like **you!**” The danger for the for the “righteous” – for the religious – is that we can commit the idolatry of mentally shaping the LORD into our own image, assuming His ways and His thoughts are just like ours. And so He keeps calling us to abandon our own ways and our thoughts for His. In our devotion, are we actually being formed by His heart? Have we confused being around the things of God with truly yielding to God.

### **3. FASTING (“Acts of Worship”) BECOME EMPTY WHEN THEY ABOUT GETTING OUR WAY**

The complaint in verse 3 reveals what is going on inside: “Why have we fasted, yet You do not see? Why have we afflicted our souls, yet You take no notice?” (Is. 58:3). That question exposes a deeply transactional spirituality. “We did the religious thing. Why are You not responding the way we wanted?” That is what makes this so searching. Their fasting was not truly about surrender. It was about leverage. Instead of being about being brought into alignment with the desires of God’s heart, it was about trying to move God toward the desires of *their* hearts. And the Lord answers plainly: “Behold, in the day of your fast, you seek your own pleasure delight (חפץ, *Chafetz*, “will/delight/want”), and exploit all your laborers” (Is. 58:3). On the very day that is supposed to be about humbling the soul, they are still pursuing their own desire, their own delight, their own will.

That is why the Lord says, “Behold, you fast for strife and contention and to strike with a wicked fist. You should not fast as you do today to make your voice heard on high” (Is. 58:4). The point being made is is not that they somehow aimed for contentiousness in their fasting – in their acts of spirituality. It is that contentiousness and strife are the fruit of self-centered religion. When our cravings are denied, what is in us gets exposed. If fasting is merely outward, the physical hunger just makes our flesh louder. But if fasting is joined to humility and surrender, it becomes a way of quieting our cravings so that we can hear the Lord more clearly. The Lord says that the goal of fasting is not for me “to make my voice heard on high.” The goal is that **His** voice would resonate more deeply **in me**. Not, “Lord, how do I get You to do what I want?” but, “Lord, what are You wanting to form in me? What do You want? What is Your delight? What is Your will?”

### **CONCLUSION**

Verse 5 brings the Lord’s explicit rejection of empty performance: “Is this the fast I have chosen? A day for one to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a reed, and spreading out sackcloth and ashes? Will you call this a fast and a day acceptable to Adonai?” (Is. 58:5). The Lord is not interested in religious theater. He is not impressed by outward signals that do not reflect inward reality. Sackcloth, ashes, bowed heads, and bodily self-denial all have their place when they express

genuine humility. But once they become substitutes for actual repentance, surrender, justice, mercy, and a broken heart, they lose all currency in heaven. The Lord is after something deeper than formalism. He is after the heart. He is after truth in the inward parts. He is after a people whose spiritual pursuit is no longer driven by self, but by a real desire to know Him, to be shaped by His thoughts and to walk in **His** ways.

So the call is not merely, “Pray more” or “Fast more.” It is, “Let the shofar of God’s Word expose where self is still driving your spirituality.” Let Him uncover where our prayers, our fasting, our disciplines, even our hunger for spiritual things, may still be quietly centered on getting our own way. And then do not run from that rebuke. Hear the heart behind it. This is the same God who said, “*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the water*” (Is. 55:1). The same God who says He dwells with the crushed and humble to revive them. The same God who says, “*I have seen his ways, but I will heal him. I will lead him and restore comfort to him*” (Is. 57:18). Let’s offer up the sincere prayer, “Lord, search me. Know me. Strip away every religious game. Give me ears to hear Your voice and a heart to do Your will. Let my life be shaped by what delights YOU not by what delights me.”

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why do you think the Lord told Isaiah to raise his voice like a shofar in Is. 58:1 instead of speaking more softly?
2. In what ways can a person “seek God day to day” and still be missing His heart?
3. What does this passage reveal about the difference between spiritual activity and true surrender?
4. How can fasting become transactional, and what does biblical fasting seem meant to produce instead?
5. Where do you sense the Lord inviting you to exchange your own will and delight for His?

#### **CLOSING PRAYER:**

*Avinu Malkhenu, Our Father, Our Kings*, thank You that Your heart is not distant, cold, or unwilling, but full of mercy, truth, and invitation. Thank You that You call the thirsty, the hungry, the empty, and the broken to come. Thank You that You do not leave us in our blindness, but You love us enough to speak clearly, to correct us, and to expose what is false so that You can heal what is real.

Lord, we ask You to search us deeply. Expose every place where our spiritual pursuit has quietly become about our own will, our own comfort, our own desire, or our own gain. Forgive us for the ways we have gone through motions, worn religious forms, or tried to move You toward our agenda instead of yielding ourselves to Yours. Give us contrite and humble hearts. Teach us to hear and obey. Let Your voice become louder in us than our cravings, our fears, and our flesh. And may our lives reflect Your heart—the heart that welcomes the thirsty, relieves the oppressed, and delights in truth. In Yeshua’s name, amen.

*B’Shem Yeshua*, In the name of Yeshua, amen.