

# Living at a Distance from God

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Let us turn back to Isaiah chapter 63. And I want to consider some thoughts from the verses that we read together beginning at verse 15 of chapter 63.
- Now this is a prayer that Isaiah made. The prayer begins at verse 7 of chapter 63 right through to the end of chapter 64.
- And he prays this prayer because he finds that the church in its own day were in a dire situation.
- The chapters prior to this, Isaiah has been given visions of the glorious days that lie ahead of God's people in the future.
- At the beginning of chapter 63, he has a vision of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment. And when Christ comes again, he will deliver the kingdom up to the Father.
- [ 1 : 22 ] Where there will be a complete overthrow of all the enemies that were opposed to God and his people. It will be an awful experience for those that are still living in denial of Christ and are still in open rebellion against God.
- But it will be a glorious day for God's people. But that's not the situation when Isaiah prays this prayer.
- Isaiah knows that they're under the chastisement of God because they've strayed from God. He knows that things aren't the way they ought to be.
- Because there doesn't appear to be any evidence of God's love for them and God's protection at this present time. And Isaiah knows that only God can deliver them.
- Only God can take them back to himself. In verse 15, he calls upon the Lord, Look down from heaven and behold from the habitation of thy holiness and thy glory.
- [ 2 : 42 ] Where is thy seal and thy strength? The sounding of thy bowels and of thy mercies towards me. Are they restrained? It's as if the Lord has withdrawn into heaven.
- And as if he's removed a sense of his presence from his people. And Isaiah is aware of that.
- And he's crying out to God, Where is your seal? Where is your strength? Where is your tender mercies towards us? Why aren't you revealing these things to us now?
- Now he knew the answer to these questions. And when he makes his appeal to God, He addresses him as his father.
- And that's an important thing for us to understand. Because when we're not aware of God's presence, And when we do fear that we might not be one of his own, And if we were, Why are we experiencing the adverse things that we're experiencing?
- [ 4 : 01 ] Why isn't he exercising his power on our behalf? Why isn't he making his mercy and his love known to us? Satan can convince us, The reason he's not going to hear your prayers is because you don't belong to him.
- And he's not going to answer your prayers. But if we are aware of who it is that we're praying to, It'll encourage us in our prayers.

And that's why we need to know, In this relationship that he has with his people, He is our father. And that's how Isaiah pleads with him, Doubtless thou art our father.

In our prayers to God, We need to focus on why God should answer us.

We need to focus on our relationship with him. Because this is the relationship that God has been pleased to enter into with his people.

[ 5 : 18 ] It's an intimate relationship. It's not just that he's their God, That he is the creator, That he is the sovereign ruler. He's entered into an intimate relationship with them.

He is their father. And if we're his, He is our father. And regardless of what our circumstances may be, If he was once our father, He is still our father.

Things have not changed. Things have not changed. And that's why he should hear our prayers. This is how he revealed himself to Moses.

This is how he told Moses to speak to Pharaoh when he sent him down into Egypt. Tell Pharaoh that Israel is my firstborn.

In other words, In other words, He's making known to Pharaoh, These are my children, That you're afflicting. And my children, Because they're my children, Are precious to me.

[ 6 : 29 ] And he wanted Pharaoh to know that. Israel is my firstborn. And before they went in to possess the promised land, This is what Moses had recorded in the song that he composed for the people as they were going to go in to possess it.

We have these words, Is he not your father who bought you? Has he not made you and established you? He's reminding the children of Israel, Whatever happens when you go in there, Never forget this.

He is your father. He is the one that went to great expense to purchase you. He has bought you. It is God who has established you.

You are his people. You are his children. He is your father. And we should always lay hold of that.

Because it is God who has made us, It is God who has made us, It is God who has made us, It is God who has made us, At a great price to himself.

[ 7 : 54 ] And he redeemed his people, So that they may be his witnesses. This was what he required of his people of old, That they may be a light to the Gentiles, And that they may make known his salvation.

And that's not altered. He still wants his children to be a light, To those that are not his children.

We are to be a light to this world. The people of this world ought to see, That we are God's redeemed people. They ought to see, That we are not like the children of this world, Because we are the children of God.

And the children of God do not behave like the children of this world. They are different. They have light.

And they have joy. And they have peace. Which this world doesn't possess. So Isaiah emphasizes that God is their father.

[ 9 : 06 ] He is their father in a spiritual sense. And that's made clear in his explanation, Though Abraham be ignorant of us, And Israel acknowledge does not, Thou, O Lord, art our father, Our redeemer, Thy name is from everlasting.

In other words, He's reminding God, You are our spiritual father. Yes, we've descended from Abraham. Yes, we've descended from Israel. But that's not what brings us into a special relationship with you.

It's a spiritual relationship. And even if Abraham or Israel were still living, They couldn't help us.

Because they are just human beings like we are. That's not what's made us a special people. The fact that we've descended from Abraham or Israel.

And the same is true of ourselves. It doesn't matter who we've descended from. It doesn't matter if our parents were renowned for their spirituality or our grandparents.

[ 10 : 29 ] It doesn't matter what position they may have had in our communities. That's not going to stand us in any stead before God. It wasn't them that established this relationship.

It was God. It wasn't the fact that we descended from these godly people. That carries no weight.

It's the fact that God has chosen us to be his children. And it's only God that can bring us into that spiritual relationship.

It's not our parents or grandparents or anybody else that we may have descended from. Because they're going to pass away. Abraham and Israel passed away.

Isaiah is saying, where are they now? That's not what's important. What's important is that you're our redeemer. You're the one who purchased us.

[ 11 : 28 ] You're the one who saved us. And your name is from everlasting. You have entered into a covenant to redeem us as your people.

You are our redeemer. Now, the kinsman redeemer in the Old Testament was required to help out any of the family that fell on hard times.

And his reputation was at stake. If he failed to help a member of his family, then he would be disgraced in the community.

And this is the argument that Isaiah is using. Remember your reputation. Remember the covenant that you've made. Remember, although we've strayed, that it's not us that's going to lose our reputation.

It's you. Because you're our redeemer. Remember your own name. Remember your glory. And this is what's at stake.

[ 12 : 41 ] It's God's reputation. He has staked his own reputation on our salvation. And nobody that belongs to him will be lost.

Because if any of his children are lost. Because they've strayed. And they've become spiritually bankrupt. And they've got themselves into difficulty.

Yes, they might lose their reputation. But there's somebody who's going to lose a lot more. And that's God. And God will never lose his reputation.

Even though we might deserve to be cast off and sent to hell. God's reputation is at stake. This is the same argument as Moses used.

When the people rebelled against God. And God said, I'm going to destroy them. Moses said, you can't destroy them. Think of your reputation.

[ 13 : 49 ] Think of what the Egyptians will think if you destroy them. You took them out of Egypt. And if you took them out of Egypt into the wilderness. Just to destroy them.

What are the Egyptians going to think of you then? Your reputation is at stake. Remember your own name. This is the argument that Isaiah is using here.

O Lord, our Father, our Redeemer. Thy name is from everlasting. You've always had this reputation.

You've always had this glorious name. This is what's at stake if you don't hear us from heaven. And if you don't answer the prayers of your people.

So it's important for us to know where we stand with God. What covenant he has made on our behalf.

[ 14 : 48 ] And as our Redeemer. What relationship he's established. So that when we fall on hard times. Even when we backslide.

That we remind ourselves. God is still our Father. God is still our Father. God is still our Father. And if we lose our souls.

Yes, we'll suffer great loss. But he'll have suffered a lot more. And he's not going to do that. In other words.

He will remain our Father. He will remain faithful to himself. Even when we're unfaithful. And Isaiah knows that.

So he addresses God as Father. The second thing that I want to mention is. That he's aware that they've strayed.

[ 15 : 52 ] From the Father's house. In verse 17 he says. So Lord, why hast thou made us air from thy ways. And hardened our hearts from thy fear.

Return for thy servant's sake. The tribes of thine inheritance. Now at first glance. You would think that Isaiah. As blaming God.

For their waywardness. But that's far from the truth. Because what we have here. Is a cry from the depths. A cry from the realization.

That if we are the children of God. Things are not right. And after careful examination. He realizes.

That we are not living. In the comforts that the covenant affords us. We have strayed from the relationship. That God has established.

[ 16 : 52 ] And we are now not experiencing God's blessings. As a result of our waywardness. They had wandered. Like lost sheep.

They had strayed from his ways. And this is what happens. When people begin to stray from the Lord.

Who are his own. They start losing their fear of God. They start losing their sense of awe. In other words.

In other words. They stop losing their respect. For God. And they become flippant. In the way that they are living their lives.

They start taking God for granted. They stray from his ways. Through their disobedience.

[ 17 : 50 ] And when they start doing that. What does God do? Well Isaiah makes it clear for us here.

God says. Very well if that's what you want. Have it your way. Go your way. And he allows us to harden our hearts against God.

And that's God's chastisement on his people. Who does God chasten? Well he only chastens his own children. Because he loves them.

And it's a sore chastening. And the people of God experience that. When they do stray from God.

That it's a sore experience. To lose a sense of communion with God. That's what Isaiah realizes. We have lost our communion with God.

[ 18 : 51 ] We have lost this sense of relationship with God. As his children. And he has withdrawn his blessings from us.

He has allowed us to go our own ways. He is allowing us to harden our hearts. Because.

He is chastening us. To teach us a lesson. And Isaiah knows. We will never return to him.

Just as we never came to God. We did not choose God. God chose us. The natural man will never choose God.

And the backslider will never choose to come back to God. God has to intervene. It is God himself that needs to take the initiative.

[ 19 : 57 ] To return his people to himself. Return for your servants sake. The tribes of your inheritance. The only remedy for backsliding.

It's not for us to try harder. It's not for us to try and reform our outward lives. We can't deal with the heart.

It's the heart that needs to be dealt with. Only God can deal with it. Just as we could never save ourselves. We will never be able to return to him.

Unless he helps us. So we need to look to him. We don't need to look to strategies. And to plans. And to outreach activities.

That's not what's going to bring us back into our relationship with God. We need to look to him. And we need to bow the knee before him. And we need to acknowledge.

[ 21 : 02 ] Without you we can do absolutely nothing. You need to intervene here. You need to draw us back to yourself. You need to exercise your power.

Otherwise we will keep going astray. We will never return to you. Unless you intervene in our experience. Return for your servants sake.

Now notice the language that Isaiah is using. Return for thy servants sake. He's not now saying return for your children's sake.

He knows that they forfeited that right to be called the children of God. Because they haven't been acting like the children of God. And this is exactly the kind of language that we see the prodigal son using.

When he realized that he had sinned against God. That he had gone astray. He said I will return to my father's house. And when he comes back.

[ 22 : 07 ] He doesn't ask to be taken back as a son. He's asking to be taken back as a servant. Because he realizes that even a servant in the father's house is better off than those that are out with the house.

Even the doorkeeper is better off than the father's house. That's what the psalmist understood. A servant in God's house is better off than being out with the house.

And he's pleading with them to remember them as servants. The tribes of thine inheritance.

They had already tasted the sweetness of God's promises. They had already possessed the promised land.

The people of thy holiness have possessed it. But for a little while. Our adversaries have trodden down thy sanctuary. Isn't that how it is with God's people?

[ 23 : 26 ] When they've experienced God's blessing. And they remember that they've had this in the past. And they ask themselves. Why aren't we receiving these blessings today?

The blessings that we experienced in the past. They only lasted for a short while. And they seem to have gone. Well they only lasted for a short while.

Because we strayed. God has not changed. He's still able to bless us today as he was then when we first experienced him.

But our love for him has grown cold. And it's a common problem amongst God's people. That we are apt to stray.

Because we tend to take God for granted. We become complacent. And we start straying from the father's house.

- [ 24 : 37 ] And we need to return. Because we become more and more like the world. And that's what Isaiah is saying in verse 19.
- We are thine. Thou never bearest rule over them. They were not called by thy name. He's saying. He's saying.
- We have become like those whom you never rolled over. In other words. We've become like the world. But we're still lying.
- And we need to come back. But only you can take us back. And he cries out to him. Oh that thou wouldst rend the heavens.
- That thou wouldst come down. That the mountains might flow down. At thy presence. Coming back to the father's house.
- [ 25 : 42 ] And that was answered most spectacularly. In the Lord Jesus Christ coming down to where the people were.
- The heavens were rent. And he did come down. He came down to where we had fallen. And the only way that we're going to come back.
- Is to remind ourselves. That this is how we were purchased. This is why we need to. Remember the Lord's death.
- Because it took that. To redeem his people. And we need to continually. Remind ourselves of that.
- And that we never lose sight of the fact. That it was. As a result of what Christ has done. That this relationship was established.
- [ 26 : 44 ] In the first place. This was the covenant. That was fulfilled. On our behalf. This is the only way. That any sinner.
- Can come to God. And this is the only way. That any sinner can remain. In a relationship with God. That we exercise faith.
- In the Lord Jesus Christ. That we remind ourselves. Continually. Of his death. And what his death. Has purchased.
- That he has redeemed us. And that we are still his. So that we might.
- Be restored. To the greater privileges. That we once experienced. And it ought to be a great lament for us.
- [ 27 : 40 ] If we are not experiencing God's blessing. We ought not to be content with that. We are his children. He has not changed.
- But we have. We could ask. Isaiah.
- As Isaiah does. Why does God allow us to go astray? Why does he do that? Why didn't the father say to the younger son.
- When he asked for his inheritance. No. Because I know. What's going to happen. If I give it to you. But he didn't. He gave it to him. Even though he.
- Knew that he would squander it. Why did he do that? Well. We can't always.
- [ 28 : 46 ] Be certain. Of why God. Allows certain things. In our experience. But we can be assured. Of this. That because.
- The father. Gave the prodigal son. The inheritance. That he asked for. That he came to a place. Where he realized. That. I was far better off.
- When I was in the father's house. Than I am now. Living at liberty. Outside of the father's house. I need to get back there.
- And that ought to be a question. On ourselves. Are we living. In the close relationship.

With God. As our father. As we ought to be experiencing. Have we squandered. The many privileges.

[ 29 : 47 ] And blessings. That he has bestowed upon us. And are we better off. Today. As a generation. Than former generations.

That appeared to be closer to God. When they lived. In obedience. With God. Do you think we're better off? Well.

I don't think we're better off. We're far worse off. Because spiritually. We seem to be bankrupt.

When the prodigal. Came to his senses. He realized. I've got nothing.

I need to get back. And I need to plead with God. That he would accept me. Even although I don't deserve.

[ 30 : 45 ] To be accepted. As a child of God. Because of my sin. That I might be accepted. As a servant. For him to do with me. As he will.

We need to plead with him. And we need to be prepared. To recognize. That we will never come back. If we're going to rely.

On our own efforts. We need to cry out to him. We need to pray. And we need to ask. For a spirit of prayer. And we need to ask.

That we would be given. The ability to wrestle with him. Refusing to let him go. Until he blesses us. Because without God's blessings.

We're going nowhere. We need God. Because without him. We can do nothing. We need to come back.

[ 31 : 39 ] To the Father's house. We need to acknowledge our sin. As the prodigal son did. And if we're willing to. Cry out to God.

And acknowledge our sin. Well. I'm quite sure. That we'll find. God. Just as the Father. Dealt with the prodigal.

He's longing for us. To come back. He's watching out for us. He hasn't lost sight of us. Even in the far distant country.

He's still got his eye on us. And he's keeping his eye. On us to return. Not to punish us. But to clothe us.

In his own righteousness. To take away the filthy wags. That we've clothed ourselves with. Not to make us experience hardship.

[ 32 : 35 ] Hardship. But to. Give us the best. That he can afford to give us. Kill the fatted calf. Bring out.

Sandals for his feet. Put my wing upon his finger. Give him the best clothing. Because that's what God desires for his children.

He desires the best for them. And if we're not receiving it. It's not because he's unwilling to give it to us. It's because we're unwilling to acknowledge.

That we're astray. And that we need to cry out to him. So that he will intervene. And bring us back to himself.

May God grant. That he would bless to us these thoughts. Let's pray.