

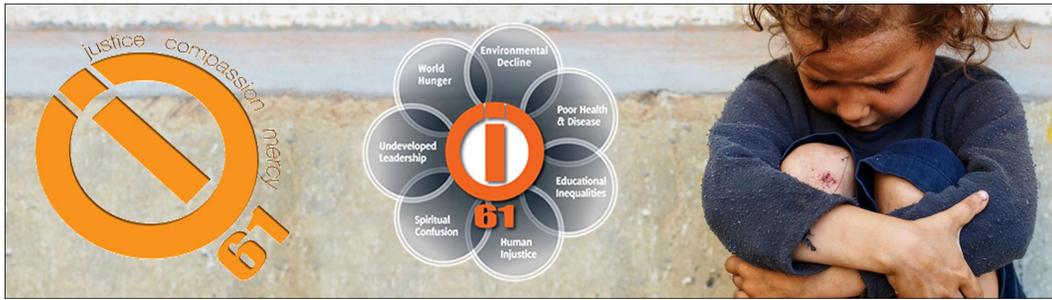
## **Our Heart for the Series:**

In i-61 ministries, we want groups and individuals to grow in awareness of the world's growing crises, deepen in compassionate love that comes from our Creator, and feel empowered and inspired to go and make an impact for the kingdom of God. We believe it is worship to God to love the poor, and we hope to present some holistic and effective ways to do that. Our prayer is that you grow closer to Jesus during these next nine weeks, experiencing Him in spirit and in truth. We as the church are commissioned to be His hands and feet to the "least of these". May He help us all to do that each day!

*How to Use this i-61 Small Group Series:* This is a nine-week series that includes: weekly videos for your group to watch together and daily devotions for you to do personally. The videos are meant to evoke discussion; they include pauses with directed questions on the screen so that the group can interact and personalize each topic. The devotions are meant to help you explore God's word on the topic and get you to the ultimate point of application, which is where all the real life-change happens. There are five daily devotions per week and we encourage you to begin each one with prayer, inviting God to guide you where He wants you to go.

## **Week One: Overview**

This week, we will explore the roots of global poverty, God's heart for our broken world both locally and abroad, and the hope we have in Jesus.



**MONDAY**

## To bring good news to the poor

### **Reflect**

- <sup>1</sup>The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me,  
for the Lord has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted  
and to proclaim that captives will be released  
and prisoners will be freed.
- <sup>2</sup> He has sent me to tell those who mourn  
that the time of the Lord's favor has come,  
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.
- <sup>3</sup> To all who mourn in Israel,  
he will give a crown of beauty for ashes,  
a joyous blessing instead of mourning,  
festive praise instead of despair.  
In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks  
that the Lord has planted for his own glory.
- <sup>4</sup> They will rebuild the ancient ruins,  
repairing cities destroyed long ago.  
They will revive them,  
though they have been deserted for many generations.

Isaiah 61.1-4 | NLT

### **Receive**

Jesus quotes Isaiah 61 at the very start of his ministry in Luke 4:18-19 when he reads the scroll of Isaiah out loud. Why? Jesus was proclaiming that he had come to fulfill this prophecy as the awaited Messiah. The chosen Savior who had come to bring life where there was only death.

N.T. Wright describes the awesome magnitude of this event:

*The resurrection of Jesus offers itself, not as an odd event within the world, but as the utterly characteristic, prototypical, and foundational event within the world as it has begun to be. It is an absurd event within the old world but the symbol and starting point of the new world. The claim advanced in Christianity is of that magnitude: Jesus of Nazareth ushers in not simply a new religious possibility, not simply a new ethic or a new way of salvation, but a new creation.*

**N.T. Wright**, *Surprised by Hope*

**A new creation.**

**A prototypical and foundational event.**

**The starting point for the new world.**

The message and ministry of Christ is nothing less than the world remade, creation's landscape renewed, humanity redeemed, man restored and released into the reality intended from the beginning. Jesus showed the fullness of God's powerful redemption! This path of life, which Jesus lays out here for himself, also paves the way for all of his soon-to-be disciples. It is not a path distinguished by an inward exploration of personal salvation status or one leading into gated religious sanctuaries with their services. It is a movement **outward**: outward among the poor, among the brokenhearted, among the prisoners, among the captives, among those crushed by life, among the weeping, among the hopeless. Christ's followers will be found in the ruins of the world, not in its great halls. As followers of Christ on this path, Christians are to be the rebuilders, the repairers, the revivers in the wide world, not sour prophets positioned on high religious ground, waiting and calling for judgment upon it.

“Jesus of Nazareth, anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil,” says Peter as, years later, he summarizes the ministry of Christ.

It is Isaiah 61 not merely idealized, but realized, actualized in his personal walk among his generation.

This is the path of discipleship.

This is the dust of our rabbi that will cover us as we follow him and “walk as he walked.”

This is our road.

**Relate**

How is Isaiah 61, and this path of Jesus, challenging you to expand your vision and perspective? How does it resonate with your soul?

**Respond**

*Father, awaken within me the vision. Anoint me with the Spirit that doesn't take me out of this world but, rather, into the very heart of it; that takes me not into heavenly, glorious domains, but into earthly fields of pain and poverty. Teach me the heart of Christ and show me my own path as I follow Him.*

Listen throughout the day to His quiet invitations, and follow Him in faith, reaching out to those He reveals to you.

## TUESDAY

# Why are you standing here staring into heaven?

### Reflect

<sup>6</sup> So when the apostles were with Jesus, they kept asking him, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?”

<sup>7</sup> He replied, “The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

<sup>9</sup> After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. <sup>10</sup> As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. <sup>11</sup> “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”

Acts 1.6-11 | NLT

### Receive

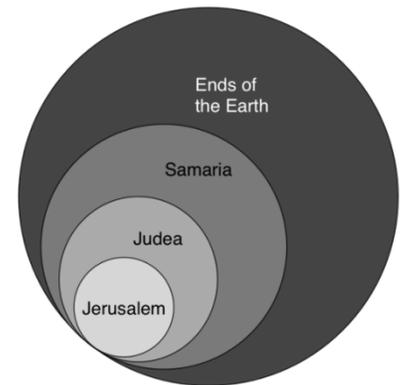
This text contains one of the great comic moments of the entire Gospel narrative. Jesus’ disciples have followed him as he pursued the vision of Isaiah 61 along the dusty back roads of the Galilean countryside and beyond. He has been preparing them, steadying them for their own expression of this same mission. And now the moment has come. Now it’s *their* turn.

And all they can do is ask about when *their* national fortunes would be restored – and they can’t stop staring into heaven.

Perhaps this is more tragic than comic!

Christ is pointing them outward in ever-expanding earthly dimensions and directions, but they can only turn inward and look upward. Yes, we know these people. We see them each morning in the mirror when we wake up. There’s certainly nothing wrong with looking inward or upward – as long as both movements lead us into the primary outward movement laid before us in the call of Christ. And, yes, it is a *layered* outward movement from *local* to *global*, and back again.

Generally, we gravitate towards one or the other: dealing with what’s right before us at home, or leaping to desperate needs crying out from the ends of the earth. The outward movement of God into our world covers the whole gamut. Each of us individually may not span the whole, but collectively that’s just what the community of Christ postures itself as doing. It’s what we pray for, yearn for, sweat for, groan for, and work for. Religious bodies primarily gather. Christ followers *gather to scatter*. We are a scattering people: in this neighborhood, beyond that region, across that border.



“The kingdom of heaven is like a woman who hid yeast in the midst of three measures of flour until it spread through the whole batch of dough,” says Jesus.

Kingdom people are a yeasty, “glocal” (global + local) people. We can’t help it. We must *go*.

### **Relate**

Is your Christianity mostly about looking inward and upward? How is the call of Christ challenging you to look outward? To what “Jerusalem,” “Judea,” “Samaria,” or “ends of the earth” is the Spirit of God summoning you? What call are you hearing?

### **Respond**

*Jesus, save me from a primary posture of staring upward and from what can be a paralyzing inward gaze. Even as you drew the eyes of that early circle of disciples, draw my eyes outward across boundaries, beyond borders, into the guts of this wide, wild world, as far as you would lead me, wherever you would take me. Let me feel your love and grace personally now, so that I can GO and extend that to those you lead me to today. Continue to reveal to me how I can make a difference across this wide world.*

What dreams has God given you to go locally and globally? Begin to take steps towards being obedient to that call.

## WEDNESDAY

# Moving towards upstream solutions

### Reflect

<sup>13</sup>“From the least to the greatest,  
their lives are ruled by greed.

From prophets to priests,  
they are all frauds.

<sup>14</sup> They offer superficial treatments  
for my people’s mortal wound.

They give assurances of peace  
when there is no peace.

<sup>15</sup> Are they ashamed of their disgusting actions?  
Not at all—they don’t even know how to blush!  
Therefore, they will lie among the slaughtered.  
They will be brought down when I punish them,”  
says the Lord.

Jeremiah 6.13-15 |NLT

### Receive

Imagine walking beside a river, enjoying the cool of the evening, when suddenly the calm is pierced by a loud shriek, drawing your attention to someone thrashing in the water. You find yourself looking to see who else is nearby to help, but you appear to be it. There is no time to call anyone, there is nothing to do but jump in and help. You furiously paddle through the surging waters until you reach the flailing soul, and then you successfully help him swim to shore. You both splash ashore on the bank, breathing heavily. No sooner have you recovered than you hear another cry for help. Others have gathered now so it becomes a team effort to rescue this one. While that rescue is in progress there is another cry. And then another. The team of rescuers grows along the banks, swimming relays to help people in distress. As the bodies multiply in the river, you become wet and exhausted. Finally you pause to take a moment to look upstream with one burning question: *who or what is dumping all these people in the river?*

It is a staggered, outward movement into the wide world – from “Jerusalem” to “Judea” to “Samaria” to “the ends of the earth.” But it’s not just staggered. It’s also layered. There are layers of problems. We live in a world caught in an intricate web of issues that defy simple solutions. As Richard Stearns observes in *The Hole In Our Gospel*:

*Poverty is highly complex and there are no simple and quick fixes. When we prescribe one particular “pill” because we see one particular symptom, the poor never seem to get well. In fact, they find themselves gulping down handfuls of pills prescribed by too many would-be doctors with too little real understanding of their lives. The poor are not lab rats on whom we can experiment with our pet theories; they are human beings with rich cultural and personal stories of their own.*

This applies to any of the areas of world need and crisis we can uncover – which means that as Christ followers, we are not only engaged in an ever expanding outward movement into the world, but an ever more diligent, careful, prayerful, creative move *upstream* into the unique

origins of these problems/crises that we face in the world. Yes, we are called as the church to help downstream by offering relief to people in immediate need. But we are unable to offer the poor real, long-term solutions if we only jump in from one crisis to another without pausing to look at what has been causing these crises. As the body of Christ, we are called to love the poor better than we have by going upstream and making spiritual, practical, and sustainable changes, so that more lives might be redeemed and saved.

In pausing and identifying what is causing the each crisis, the church can cultivate real change and lasting peace. This is the place where “peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of justice.” Even as Jesus stops to help with immediate needs along the way, he is constantly moving *upstream* for the purpose of conquering the cause or removing the rotted root and creating life-long change and eternal peace.

### **Relate**

Personal: How do you typically respond when faced with a problem, be it big or small? Do you go for the quick solution? Do you pause to see what is really going on?

Local: What is one crisis your local community is facing today? What is the root of that crisis? (Some examples of the roots: corrupt leadership, spiritual confusion, and educational inequalities).

Global: Think of a foreign nation or community that is undergoing a crisis that pulls at your heart. What are some of the core causes of the problems they face?

### **Respond**

*Spirit of God, teach me to breathe deeply when I encounter the crying needs of my neighborhood, my city, my country, my world. Keep me out of the cave of my own isolation and avoidance; likewise keep me from seeking the quick and easy fix. Lead me in the art of being creatively present in this world that, before jumping in this way or that with both feet, I may see just what it is you are doing in the wide world.*

Go upstream in prayer and action today. Considering the crises in your local community and the international issues that tug at your own heart, ask the Lord to bring his resurrection power to change these roots of poverty and crises. Poverty is really a lack of options. With Jesus, there is always hope and there are always options.

Write one action you would like to pursue either locally or globally:

## THURSDAY

# There should be no poor...

### **Reflect**

<sup>4</sup> “There should be no poor among you, for the Lord your God will greatly bless you in the land he is giving you as a special possession. <sup>5</sup> You will receive this blessing if you are careful to obey all the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today. <sup>6</sup> The Lord your God will bless you as he has promised. You will lend money to many nations but will never need to borrow. You will rule many nations, but they will not rule over you.

<sup>7</sup> “But if there are any poor Israelites in your towns when you arrive in the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hard-hearted or tightfisted toward them. <sup>8</sup> Instead, be generous and lend them whatever they need. <sup>9</sup> Do not be mean-spirited and refuse someone a loan because the year for canceling debts is close at hand. If you refuse to make the loan and the needy person cries out to the Lord, you will be considered guilty of sin. <sup>10</sup> Give generously to the poor, not grudgingly, for the Lord your God will bless you in everything you do. <sup>11</sup> There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need.

Deuteronomy 15.4-11 | NLT

### **Receive**

*Once we understand all of these factors – a deficit of things, a lack of education and knowledge, unjust systems, marred identity, and even spiritual darkness – to be strands in the web that traps the poor, we must next turn our attention to the “spiders” – hunger, disease, exploitation, armed conflict, and a host of others – that scutter across that web to feast on their prey.*

**Richard Stearns**, *The Hole In Our Gospel*

There are far too many “spiders” scuttering along the seemingly ever-present, every-multiplying complex webs of problems and crises in this world, which is one of the reasons we end up with seemingly contradictory assertions in Deuteronomy – practically within the same breath of the author.

“There should be no poor.”

“There will always be poor.”

The first assertion inclines towards a false optimism – and the unrealistic expectation that due to an abundance of opportunities no one needs to be poor if they will only be diligent. The other extreme leads to a fatalism, causing us to shrug our shoulders with a “so what?” response to the begging need before us.

But Kingdom people are radical middle people, poised between the overoptimistic and the fatalistic. Kingdom people live from that in-between place embodied in the rallying cry of Christ: “In the world you will have troubles, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Kingdom people are a blend of the situational (responding to individual, pressing needs) and the strategic (proactively and creatively working on collective, systemic levels).

And Kingdom people follow the heart of their King: to love the poor and to take care of them. It’s a personal and corporate responsibility to care for those in need. And this command reveals the heart of our King: He is full of mercy and steadfast love. He is always generous and gracious,

especially to the needy. And when we follow His lead in this and obey His commands, we participate in seeing the Kingdom here on earth as it is in Heaven. When the church unites in addressing upstream and downstream issues of poverty, we portray a clearer reflection of Christ's heart for the broken and for the nations of the world.

### **Relate**

Which do you tend to more readily see at work within yourself when confronted by this world and its problems: a false optimism that minimizes the issues and their severity or a sober fatalism that shuts us down and overwhelms us? In which ways is God challenging your mindset? What is **HIS** heart for a community in terms of taking care of the poor? How does my local church reflect **HIS** heart for the poor?

### **Respond**

*Jesus, expand my vision on both situational and strategic levels when it comes to the poor or to any of the needs in this world. Help me to see what is before me and to respond to your call to move; help me to look out towards the horizons of reality and dream the dreams of God.*

How could my local church and/or I reflect God's heart for the poor better? Write one realistic dream you have for your own community in terms of taking care of the poor.

## FRIDAY

# A great famine was coming...

### Reflect

<sup>27</sup> During this time some prophets traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> One of them named Agabus stood up in one of the meetings and predicted by the Spirit that a great famine was coming upon the entire Roman world. (This was fulfilled during the reign of Claudius.)

<sup>29</sup> So the believers in Antioch decided to send relief to the brothers and sisters in Judea, everyone giving as much as they could. <sup>30</sup> This they did, entrusting their gifts to Barnabas and Saul to take to the elders of the church in Jerusalem.

Acts 11.27-30 |NLT

### Receive

IN AT LEAST one German town the railroad tracks ran behind the church. An eyewitness stated:

*We heard stories of what was happening to the Jews, but we tried to distance ourselves from it, because we felt, what could we do to stop it?*

*Each Sunday morning, we would hear the train whistle blowing in the distance, then the wheels coming over the tracks. We became disturbed when we heard cries coming from the train as it passed by. We realized that it was carrying Jews like cattle in the cars!*

*Week after week the whistle would blow. We dreaded to hear the sounds of those wheels because we knew we would hear the cries of the Jews en route to a death camp. Their screams tormented us.*

*We knew the time the train was coming and when we heard the whistle blow we began singing hymns. By the time the train came past our church, we were singing at the top of our voices. If we heard the screams, we sang more loudly and soon we heard them no more.*

*Years have passed and no one talks about it now, but I still hear that train whistle in my sleep.*

**Andy Andrews**, *How Do You Kill 11 Million People?*

In the German church that witnessed the Holocaust literally rolling right by, no one complained the music was too loud in their services. They all intuitively knew they had to sing louder to drown out the screaming world just outside their stained glass windows and their bolted doors. This would be a sad commentary on any institution, but it is the tragedy of all tragedies when it's those purporting to be the community of Christ-followers that we call the "church". For the church in its most hands-on, practical, local expression is the catalyst of Christ in the world: the catalyst for bringing good news to the poor, for binding up the broken, for freeing the captives, for banishing the darkness of prisoners, and for comforting the terrified.

"A great famine is coming upon the entire world." Though undoubtedly they prayed, the prophetic message wasn't a call to prayer. The catalyst of comfort known as the "church in Antioch" did something: they sent relief to Jerusalem. "What she had, she did," said Jesus about Mary after she "wasted" her precious ointment by pouring it out on his feet. So it was also of the church in Antioch. What they had, they did. They responded in action.

No Christ follower – and no community of Christ followers – can do more.  
Or less.

## **Relate**

At the conclusion of his chilling book, Andy Andrews asks his readers, “How loudly are you singing?” How often do you find yourself “turning up the volume” so you don’t have to hear? How is Jesus challenging you and your church community to be a catalyst of hope in the wide world?

## **Respond**

*Father, stir my heart, stir your church, this church, right here in this place, to worship you through our actions. Help us respond by doing something. Show us what we have to give; show us what we can do. Help us not cover our ears and turn away our eyes. Help us hear what you hear. Help us see what you see in our broken community... in our broken world. Oh Lord, let my comforts and fears NOT keep me trapped. Let me not sit on my hands and do nothing. Use my hands, my voice, my eyes, and my heart to reach out and touch the world through your love by the power of your Spirit.*

Resist apathy by acting in the opposite spirit. Do one thing today in faith and action that shows movement toward helping those in need. Write it down now and share how it went with someone today.