



DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR SMALL GROUPS
23 & 24 OCTOBER 2021
ISAIAH 54-55

The main study guide material for the sermon series “Seeing the Light through Isaiah”, is to be purchased at <https://www.ivpress.com/isaiah-40-66-ebook>

The material in this document is intentionally brief. It is intended as a supplement only.

- **Begin by reading the Scripture passage together.**
- **Review the video of the sermon if needed (see <http://www.brmc.org.sg/category/resources/sermons>).**
- **Refer to the [main study guide](#) **Chapter 7** as well as this supplementary material.**
- **Feel free to discuss as few or as many questions as best fits your group’s current context and present stage in life.**
- **Remember to budget some time (15-20 min) to pray with and for one another, before ending your group session.**

Sidebox: A Message to the Barren One, The Widow, and The Divorcee

Three metaphors in Isaiah 54:1-10 evoke the strong emotions that came with falling short of the two primary roles of Old Testament women – mother and wife.

In ancient societies like Israel's, bearing children was highly important and viewed as a valued contribution to the family. In Genesis 16:5, we see how Sarah, unable to bear a child with Abraham, was described as experiencing suffering and was despised. In Hosea 9:11, unfaithful Israel's pride and honour is described as departing like a winged bird, for there will be "no birth, no pregnancy, no conception". The absence of offspring was viewed in Israelite society as being distressing and disgraceful.

Widows are often mentioned together with other vulnerable groups, like "the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless" (Deuteronomy 14:29). Such widows, especially those without grown-up sons, typically had no one to protect or provide for them. The book of Ruth describes the great difficulties and challenges faced by widows.

In Isaiah 54:6, the divorced woman is described as "deserted and distressed in spirit...rejected". Divorced women similarly had no one to protect or provide for them, and were often regarded as a disgrace to their families. Overall, women who were childless, widowed, or divorced were treated as second-class members of ancient Israelite society (see Psalm 94:6, Job 24:21).

Exiled in a foreign land, the Israelites would have felt humiliated in defeat, small in number, and weak. Much like the barren, widowed and divorced women, they were isolated, deserted, without support, second-class outsiders in a foreign land. Yet God shows his deep compassion to Israel, refusing to simply abandon them as disgraced women. Isaiah 54:1-10 provided comfort and hope to the Israelites amidst the pain of Exile. For Israel would be cherished by God, just as a husband cherishes his wife (v.5). The nation would grow in numbers, just like the descendants of a woman with numerous offspring (v.1).

At times, and possibly even now, we might have similar feelings as the ancient Israelite women. For some of us, infertility, widowhood, or divorce may be the very circumstances we face. For others, these are symbols of our sense of being isolated, being without support, being treated as second-class. In either of these instances, would you take to heart these living words of Scripture? For the God who redeemed the Exiles also promises to redeem us, to comfort us, and to love us with an everlasting love (v.8).

Response, Application, Prayer

1. Consider Isaiah 54:1-8. Just as we may have enjoyed God's "deep compassion" and "everlasting kindness" (vv.7-8), we may also have experienced deep disappointment, loneliness, or distress. How do the promises Isaiah 54-55 provide comfort for such times? Pray for one another, that we would experience God's comfort in times of distress, and for joyful surrender even as we receive God's blessings.

