

HUMANIZE ME



Sometimes people say a public figure needs to be humanized. What could this mean except that there are things in this world that make us less than human? Jesus is on a mission to make you more human—the kind of human who looks more like the Son of God. This series tackles the forces that keep us from being just as human as God always intended us to be. And it leads us to discover that when we are humanized, we get to humanize others.

HUMANIZE ME • Isaiah 58:1–14 • Tim McConnell • October 6, 2019

A few months after Abigail and I moved our family from Atlanta to Colorado Springs, we decided to attend the city Christmas tree lighting in Acacia Park. In Atlanta, going to an event like that meant an hour traffic each way, \$30 for parking and fighting the throngs to get a glimpse of the action. We were resolved. We left our house 45 minutes early, talking all the way about where to park and walk, but we drove downtown in 15 minutes and when we got to the park, there was a parking spot literally right next to the tree. We couldn't believe it! We said to each other, and have said since, this is truly a human-sized city. It's a city where humans can live. "City" is from the Latin "civitas." In Greek it is "polis" where we get our favorite word "politics." City doesn't just mean a point on a map. City is about how we intend to live together. How should we live together, Colorado Springs? What kind of city should we be? We want to be a city where humans can live. Humanizing.

What is a church like ours doing in a city like this? We are called to be Light and Life for the City. Jesus Christ is the Light of the world and he is Life, so we want to reflect Jesus. And we are "for the City." That doesn't mean we blindly support every action of the city government or unthinkingly promote our city over other cities, but that we believe the role of the church is to love and serve the city where Christ has put it—and to love and serve the city where Christ has put it in a way that promotes life in the way it will be lived in the coming City of God. Remarkably, as we are faithful to Christ and His mission for us right here in Colorado Springs, it has an impact not only here, but straight around the globe. That's what we are celebrating today. World Communion Sunday. CityServe Sunday. Compassion Sunday. It's all one day. The impact of faithfulness to Jesus right here in these hours of worship spills out those doors into the streets of our own city and flows to change lives around the world. What's a church like ours doing in a city like this? Lifting the Light and Life of Jesus Christ and watching Him lift the city and change the world.

First Pres is known as a force for good in our city. Believer or non-believer, ministry leader or city official, everyone I introduce myself to as pastor of First Pres at some point says what a force for good this church has been, and is, in Colorado Springs. Yesterday for CityServe Day we had 400 of our own out serving. Because we shared this movement with other churches, and helped launch COS I Love You, and joined forces with others, yesterday 36 churches sent out nearly 4,000 people to bless the city in Jesus' name.

Isaiah asks us again this morning, what's a church like you doing in a place like this? What is First Pres doing in a city like Colorado Springs? "Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?" (Isaiah 58:5). Fasting is a type of religious devotion, withholding food and physical things to make room for spiritual food and spiritual things. But the people of God were using it to prove something to God and get something out of God. "Didn't you see us fasting?" they asked up in verse 3. "Aren't you going to give us what we want?" But that's not the point of devotion to God. The things we do to seek God are not bribes. You can't bribe God. The point of worship and religious devotion is to submit ourselves into His hands to be changed, to be transformed. When we are changed, it changes the world.

The first half of the passage describes a people attempting to enlist God in their plans, trying to get God to sign off on their agenda. This is the recurring temptation to use religion as a way to push God into our plans. It doesn't work. In fact, it hurts us and hurts those around us. Apparently, in their show of devotion, they were making their laborers work overtime to cover their spiritual observance. The net result was an angry and bitter people who were at each other. The second half of the passage is the opposite. Not trying to enlist God in our agenda, but seeking the agenda of God and submitting ourselves to

it. There is a huge difference between asking God to bless our agenda and asking, "What is God doing and how can we be a part of it?" It takes self-forgetfulness, self-sacrifice, leaving our own preferences and predilections behind in order to be a part of what God is doing.

This is not a passage offering a right set of actions against a wrong set of actions. It isn't just God saying, "don't do spiritual things, do socially-activated things." That's not how to understand Isaiah 58. That would mean exchanging one set of external, hypocritical religious acts for another. It's more than that. It's about the heart. The key is the will. Whose will is it? In verse 3, it says "yet on the day of fasting, you do as you please." Your will. You are not fasting for God; you are fasting for yourself. You are doing what you want to do. This is not self-forgetfulness, this is not submission to the Lordship of Jesus, this is self-serving pseudo-spiritual nonsense. You do as you please. C. S. Lewis wrote in the *Great Divorce*, "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'" If you will only do what you want to do, God will let you do it, and you will be lost. But, says Isaiah, if you give your will over to the Lord, if you join your heart to God's heart, your will to God's will, and submit. ... As he says it, "'If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride in triumph on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.' The mouth of the Lord has spoken" (Isaiah 58:13–14). Different result. What's more, it will change the world.

My will or Thy will? Maybe religion is just about me. Maybe fasting is just to set my own soul right. Maybe worship is just about my personal spiritual fitness program. Not according to Isaiah. Worship ought to produce life, not only for us but for others. When

we submit our will to the Lord's will, here's what it looks like: "Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 58:8). Light will break forth from you. Like a hatched egg. Like rushing water. Do you pray for our church to be such a light? "Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I" (Isaiah 58:9). You will walk with God in His purposes. You'll know communion with God. "And if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10). "Spend yourselves"—that is more than your money. That's sacrificial investment. Your light, a reflection of Christ's light, will not only be a sunrise breaking the horizon but enduring like midday sun. Finally, "The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings" (Isaiah 58:11–12). That's my prayer for us, church.

When God is glorified, lives are transformed. That flows right out of these doors into the streets and into the world. And then, when those stories of transformation start to be told, people who don't know the Lord start to see His goodness. When lives are transformed, God is glorified. A virtuous cycle of the glory of God begins. What kind of city do we want to be? What kind of church do we want to be in the city? One that glorifies God and sees lives transformed by His love. I get into many conversations around homelessness in our city. How can we address this problem? Well, the first thing is to see people, not problems, and then ask, "How can we be a humanizing city?" Some city in the world is the absolute best city at lifting people out of dehumanizing poverty and setting them on their feet again. I want that city to be

Colorado Springs. I want it in Jesus' name. We work with Family Promise to intervene for families in desperate need of shelter. In partnership with them and a network of churches, we provide temporary housing for homeless right here in our own building four weeks per year. I want you to meet one woman whose life was changed forever by that ministry (Video plays). When God is glorified, lives are transformed. When lives are transformed, God is glorified. What's a church like ours doing in a city like this?

That's Isaiah, and that's Family Promise. A third and final challenge: Compassion. What we are doing here stretches from these halls of worship around the globe. One of the easiest ways to participate in global impact from First Pres is to begin a relationship today with a Compassion child. Compassion reaches out in Jesus' name to lift children up out of poverty, children who live on less than \$2 a day. A small monthly commitment begins a relationship that transforms lives. We focus our Compassion efforts in Guatemala. There is no reason why every family in this church doesn't have a Compassion kid. Stop by the Welcome Center today and learn more.

What's a church like yours doing in a place like this? As we turn to the table of our Lord, we know what we do here is just the beginning, just the source. This table stretches straight around the globe. A city lifted means people lifted, lives transformed by the light and life of Jesus. Jesus came to a city named Jerusalem. It's still there. You can go see it if you like. There He set a table, there He made a sacrifice, there He took on Himself all the injustice and sickness and brokenness of the city. He took it all on His own flesh until, in Him, it died on the cross, and rising from the grave, a new city was born, a city we can't quite see yet but we know it is coming, a human-sized city where humans can live and be children of the Living God. This table is a taste of that.

STUDY GUIDE
HUMANIZE ME • "A City Lifted"
Isaiah 58:1-14

UP: Connect With God Through Spending Time in His Word

Read aloud the passage for the week: Isaiah 58:1-14. Allow a few moments to silently reflect on what you heard. Underline or note any words or phrases that seem meaningful.

- 1) This is a challenging passage. God is calling out His people in the first half of the text. What are some of the grievances against the people that you see in verses 1-7?
- 2) Which of these could be applied to the United States, to the American church, to the church in Colorado Springs?
- 3) Where do you see injustice in the world? In our nation? In our city?
- 4) Reread verses 9b-10. What is God calling the people to? When have you seen the church participate in these sorts of things?
- 5) Reread verses 11-14. What images are the most encouraging or attractive to you? When have you experienced this?
- 6) In what ways might this passage challenge you to think differently about what it means to be human?

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

Once again, close your time by praying for these things. Pray that God would bring justice to our city, nation and world.

IN: Connect with Each Other

Take a few minutes to consider which instances of injustice weigh most heavily on you. What breaks your heart?