

FROM THE MINISTRY OF



THRUtheBIBLE

WHAT TO DO
WHEN YOU WANT
GOD'S WILL



DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU WANT GOD'S WILL

What brings life's greatest satisfaction? Ask anyone who has walked with God for a long time, and they'll likely say a similar thing: To know you are doing what pleases God. But how do you know God's will?

In this survey of Isaiah 6, Dr. J. Vernon McGee leads us through the process the prophet Isaiah went through in hearing God's call on his life and then knowing how to live it out. "It's an exciting thing for us to find out what God wants us to do. Nothing is as thrilling. The important thing for us is to put ourselves in His presence. He doesn't want us to try to do it ourselves. He gives us Himself."

And with that as our foundation, let's peek into the throne room of heaven at a glimpse of God never seen before

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet,

and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'" –Isaiah 6:1-9

Human nature thinks the best is either already in the past or that a better day is out yonder in an uncertain future. We never think *today* is the best. When we're young, we look to the future, and when we get to be senior citizens we reminisce on "the good old days." It's hard for us to believe that today we might be living the best time of our lives.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah was very human in this respect. In Isaiah 6, we read his melancholy notes of utter despair: "In the year that King Uzziah died"

Uzziah was a good king. He ruled Judah for an impressive 52 years during the period when Israel was divided into two kingdoms. He led his people into one of the most prosperous times in their history. He led military victories and technology advances. He followed God's ways. Uzziah "did what was right in the sight of the Lord" (2 Chronicles 26:4), except for once when he got too big for his own britches and usurped the priest's duty. His punishment was leprosy for the rest of his life.

In college I took a course called “Freshman Bible,” and from time immemorial one question was sure to be on the exam: “Name the kings of Israel and Judah and briefly describe the reign of each.” Some ingenious freshman had discovered that if you just memorize the names of the kings and write after each one of them “a bad king,” you couldn’t make less than a B. So that’s what we did. But we were wrong to write “bad” after Uzziah’s name. When I eventually studied the life of this man, I was amazed to discover what a wonderful king he was.

At some time during Uzziah’s long, impressive reign, Isaiah was born. As a young man, Isaiah was called by God to be a prophet, and it happened at the time of Uzziah’s death.

Isaiah begins this account on a sorrowful note. He takes us to a funeral. We may also catch a hint of pessimism going through his mind and heart: *Good old king Uzziah is gone. Now what will happen to our nation? The next king will likely plunge us into idolatry again. We’ll no longer prosper. There will be famine and, as before, the enemy will come in from the outside and we’ll be subjected to their power.* Someone has defined a pessimist as one who blows out the light that the optimist thought he saw in the dark. Indeed, these were the beginning of dark days for Israel.

With this in mind, Isaiah enters the temple. This is a good place to go, by the way, because the psalmist says “in His temple everyone says, ‘Glory!’” (Psalm 29:9). There in the temple Isaiah makes a two-fold discovery, one that God’s people also need to make today.

ISAIAH'S FIRST DISCOVERY: THE THRONE OF GOD

Isaiah's first discovery was that the real king of Israel and Judah was not dead, and not even sick. The real king was still on the throne.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. –Isaiah 6:1

Isaiah realized that behind Judah's earthly throne was the heavenly throne, and God was still sovereign and ruling over the affairs of this world.

A great many people today share Isaiah's feelings of hopelessness. Just look at the news—the world looks dark, even frightening. Isaiah seemed to feel hopeless about the future. A golden season in Israel's history ended with Uzziah's death, and no one could take his place.

However, God reminds Isaiah that *He* is still on the throne. And friend, He is still ruling in the affairs of men today.

Many people hold out the belief that someday there will be someone who will solve the world's big problems. During an election year, we're given the impression that the people running for office will have the answers to financial issues and health issues and solve everyone's conflict. My friend, don't be deceived by the fantasy that any man or woman can replace God, create a new age, a better and beautiful world, or bring about a perfect society. Behind the thrones of this world is the throne of God. And God is still on it. He still rules in the affairs down here. This little universe has not slipped from His control.

The first truth Isaiah discovered in the temple was that "in the year that King Uzziah died," the Lord was "sitting on a throne"



God is still
ON THE THRONE,
AND HE IS A
holy God.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

ISAIAH'S SECOND DISCOVERY: GOD IS HOLY

Next, Isaiah saw that the One sitting on the throne was “high and lifted up”—He was a holy God. When we learn this about God, we have no excuse for being pessimists. Every child of God should be an optimist. Our God is a holy God. Isaiah’s prophecy teaches us in Isaiah 53 that God is the Savior on a cross, and now in Isaiah 6, we learn that God is the Judge on the throne, high and holy, whose sovereign will prevail down here in the end.

In every generation people ask the question, “What is right and what is wrong?” Isaiah says, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil ...” (Isaiah 5:20). Today we are led to believe that the criminal is right, that the man who is wrong is the man who is right. Our entire system is morally upside down. But this is not the end of the story. Not only has God put down certain laws that reveal He is a holy God, but when His laws are broken, He doesn’t have to reach in and execute judgment. The sin works itself out. Sin carries its own penalty. The wages of sin is death—it just works out that way. Our contemporary culture demonstrates this.

God's laws are being ignored, and we have problems we cannot solve. We live in a broken and corrupt society (and I wonder if every generation has thought this).

But God is still on the throne, and He is a holy God.

Next Isaiah tells us that above God's throne "stood seraphim." What exactly is a seraphim? Here's the truth—none of us know exactly. We can guess from context in Scripture that the seraphim are highly created intelligences, above the average angel. The Word of God describes several orders of angels or spiritual creatures, and it speaks not only of seraphim but also of cherubim who protect the holiness of God. In the temple were the likenesses of two gold cherubim with wings stretched over the mercy seat, which is symbolic of their service. Although it appears that the seraphim have this same service, they also seem to reach out in judgment, dealing with sin. The word "seraphim" means "burning," indicating perhaps that they are on fire to protect the holiness of God.

Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!"

—Isaiah 6:2, 3

This is a tremendous picture of the holiness of God. These creatures in the presence of God repeat over and over, "Holy, holy, holy is God." Their purpose is to communicate to mankind that you and I stand before a holy God.

We live in a day when people think they can rush into God's presence and treat the Lord Jesus as if He is a buddy. May I say to you that Jesus is high and holy and lifted up. If He should appear in your church next Sunday morning, nobody would rush up to Him and slap Him on the back. Everyone would be on their faces before Him. That is the picture the Word of God gives of Jesus' holiness.

When Jesus walked the earth as a man, no one was as close to Him as His disciple, John. John would sometimes offer Him advice and make suggestions. (Notice the Lord Jesus never asked for advice, nor did He follow man's advice, but John was there to give it.) On His last night before the cross, in the upper room John even leaned back on Jesus' chest, as was the custom at the table when you ate with family and friends. John was close to Jesus. But, my friend, when John saw the glorified Christ on the Isle of Patmos, he fell at His feet as dead (Revelation 1:17). He didn't rush into His presence or shake His hand.

You and I deal with a holy God who made it clear that He can save us on only one basis—by grace. Though He loves us, He doesn't *save* us by love. Certainly, He does love us. It would break your heart and mine if we knew how much He loves us, but He cannot save us by love. He saves us by grace, by paying the penalty for our sins Himself.

The forgiveness of God is not sentimental. He didn't save us because He is big-hearted. God's forgiveness is different from human forgiveness. For instance, if you step on my toe and ruin my shoeshine, and you say, "Forgive me," I certainly will. I won't ask you to pay for another shoeshine. Human forgiveness may rest on no payment at all. But God never forgives until the penalty is paid—never. The reason He can forgive your sin and my sin is because His Son, nearly 2,000 years ago, paid for it on the cross. He redeemed us—bought us back from the penalty we deserved.

When forgiveness is mentioned in Scripture it always references the blood of Christ. We have forgiveness of sin. How? Through the blood of Christ. The *penalty* has been paid. My friend, that is God's method. In substance, God is saying to a lost world today, *"I love you. I want to save you. I gave My Son to die for you. You accept Him or reject Him. If you reject Him, you'll not be saved. If you accept Him, you will be saved. This is My salvation. Take it or leave it."* He is doing it without any sentimentality. He is doing it on a righteous basis, because He is a holy God.

Our God is moving in this world against sin even at this very hour. He is moving forward undeviatingly, unhesitatingly, uncompromisingly, against sin; and He will not stop until He drives it from His universe. He will not even accept the white flag of truce. He will not make peace with it. He intends to remove it from His universe. He makes that very clear.

I'm grateful to Him for that promise, because sin has brought wreckage to the human family. Sin puts grey in our hair, a totter to our step, and a stoop in our shoulders. Sin breaks our hearts. Sin brings horror and suffering. It fills the cemeteries. I thank God He will not compromise with sin! It will not be in His universe for eternity.

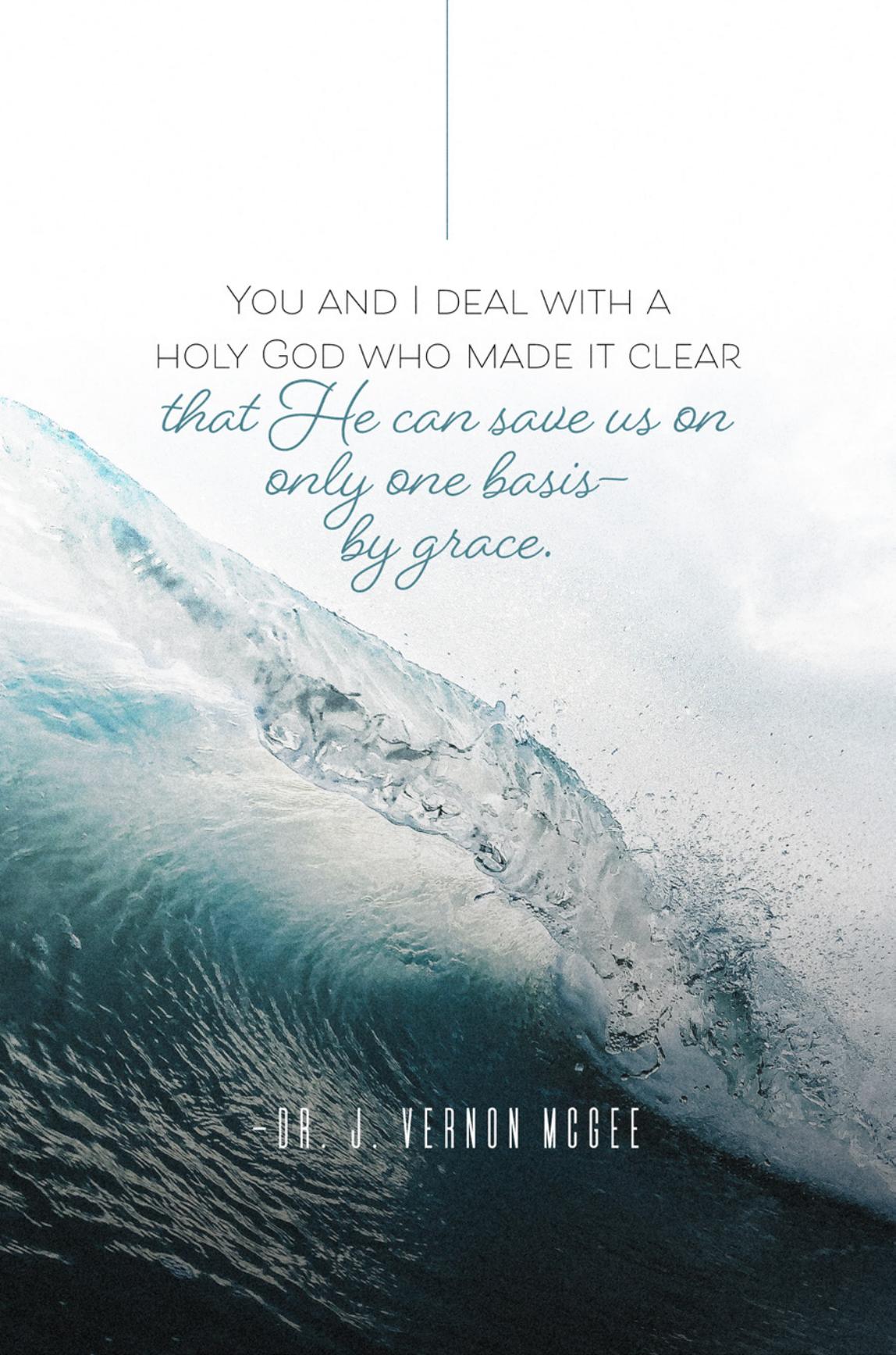
God has made a plan whereby He will redeem those who will come His way and accept His salvation. He is a *holy* God. We need to get this back into our thinking today. God is on the throne, and He is a holy God.

ISAIAH, A MAN OF UNCLEAR LIPS

This vision of God on His throne, high and lifted up, had quite an impact on Isaiah. We look around for him and we can't find him. Why? Isaiah has dropped down on his face before God. Listen to him:

So I said, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." –Isaiah 6:5

Before this experience in the temple, I wonder if Isaiah considered himself a pretty good guy. He likely worshipped at the temple, followed the rules under the Mosaic system, brought all the proper sacrifices. But now he goes into the temple and sees God on the throne. Isaiah not only realizes that God is a *holy* God, but he sees himself as he really is.



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Too many of us in the church today follow God from a distance. We've not gotten in close to the Lord Jesus, and we don't see ourselves as we really are. John puts it very bluntly:

If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. –1 John 1:10

That's not very polite. I wouldn't say it—but John did. John also adds some light:

But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. –1 John 1:7

That light is the Word of God. My friend, we live most of our lives too far from the Word of God. We think if we go through some little ritual, or follow some system, or some easy, fast course that promises answers to all the problems of life, then that is all we need. A man once came to evangelist Dwight L. Moody when he began his crusades and said, "Mr. Moody, I hope to get enough religion during this campaign to last me the rest of my life."

Mr. Moody said to him, "Did you eat enough breakfast this morning to last you the rest of your life?"

"Of course I didn't."

"Well, neither will you get enough 'religion' in this meeting to last you the rest of your life."

We don't grow in faith in one or two doses. Rather, when we walk in the light of the Word of God, we begin to see ourselves as we really are. That's when we also see that God has a remedy for us. That remedy is for lost sinners. He also has a remedy for His own who are out of fellowship, who are not in a place of service, who have no witness, and whose lives do not count for God. We need to get into our Lord's presence, and the only way we can do this is by spending time in the Word of God.

Let me illustrate. When I was a pastor in Tennessee, I used to go squirrel hunting with a friend in an area called Woodbury. On this one occasion in the fall of the year, we went out on a gloomy, dark day, that looked like it might rain at any moment. We parked in a friend's barnyard, got our guns, and started down the creek.

Hunting was good and after about a mile we came to a fork of the creek. My friend suggested that I take the left fork, go around the mountain, and back to the barn, and he would take the right fork and come around the other way.

So, I started out. It was still good hunting, but it began to sprinkle. I kept thinking it would let up. Then all of a sudden, I discovered that the squirrels had all crawled into their hollows. The best they could tell, there was only one *nut* outside, so they went in. I decided I'd better start looking for a shelter, too. Alongside a big cornfield there were caves; I scoped out a good-sized one to crawl in and wait out the rain.

I sat there in the dark for about 45 minutes. It didn't quit raining, and I was getting cold, so I scraped leaves together and put a match to them. Then by the light of the fire, I looked around the small cave. Spiders and lizards were everywhere! They were above me, they were all around me, then over in the corner coiled up was a little snake. I could have reached out and put my hand on it. Since I have always felt that possession was nine-tenths of the law, I got out of that cave in a hurry and turned it over to them. They were there first.

Now notice that I had sat there for 45 minutes, as comfortable as could be, until I got the fire going. The light of the fire didn't *make* the little snake, the lizards, and spiders—it just revealed them.

Today people sit comfortably in church, thinking everything is all right. But if they would get into the light, they might say as Isaiah did, "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips."

You may wonder, as I have, what Isaiah meant when he said he had unclean lips. What was his sin? We only know it was the sin of a believer. We can speculate all we want, but I don't think he was much different from those around him. He just saw his true self in light of God's holiness.

It was the same thing Paul experienced. Remember Paul was a believer when he said, "O, wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Romans 7:24).

How many Christians today want to live for God yet feel the weight of some sin?

For decades I've received letters from people who have drifted away from God, but they were coming back. One young man wrote, and I could almost feel his anguish, "Dr. McGee, I want to live for God! I want it better than I've had it. I want something worthwhile." When we see ourselves in the light of the presence of God, what a difference it makes!

Isaiah was brought into the presence of God and it both showed him who he was (a sinful man) and also revealed the Savior. When you respond with humility and repentance to a holy God, He transforms you.

Both in the Old and New Testaments we see that those who come into the Lord's presence are transformed. As we have already discussed, John fell at His feet. Ezekiel, when he saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD," fell upon his face (Ezekiel 1:28). Daniel said, when he saw the glory of the Lord, "No strength remained in me" (Daniel 10:8)—and when there is no strength in you, you aren't perpendicular with the ground, you are horizontal with it. He had gone down on his face before God.

Job is another one. I believe the primary message of the book of Job is not that of suffering, but *repentance*. You see, God has used books in the Old Testament to illustrate every great doctrine we have. For example, *redemption* is illustrated in the book of

Exodus, and the *love* side of redemption in the little book of Ruth, and the *providence* of God in the book of Esther. The book of Job illustrates repentance. God didn't select the worst person in the world to show repentance. Instead, He chose probably the best man who ever lived and showed that even *he* needed to repent. Job is that man.

But wasn't Job an upright man? Why would he need to repent? Well, *I'm* not the one who said he needed to repent, the book of Job says that. Job *was* upright. He could stand against his three so-called friends and refute their accusations. Although they insisted there was some secret sin in his life, they could not pin anything on him. Job said his life was an open book. Even his enemies couldn't charge him with wrongdoing but were forced to praise him.

But one day Job, like Isaiah, came into the presence of God and said:

“I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” –Job 42:5, 6

In the first part of the book of Job there's a whole lot of “I, me, and my” going on. By the end he gets into the presence of God, and what a difference it makes! Only God is worthy of our worship.

One more example. Joshua, the general following Moses as the leader of Israel's army, confronted a mysterious man in his camp who had drawn his sword. Joshua came to this man and demanded, “Are you for us or for our adversaries?” (Joshua 5:13). In other words, “*Are you on our side? If you are, don't you know who's in charge here?*”

Then that One turned, and when He did, Joshua found himself looking into the face of the One who said, “No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come” (Joshua 5:14). That One who was the captain there is the One who, according to Hebrews 2:10, is the Captain of our salvation, the pre-incarnate

Christ. And Joshua went down on his face before Him. He found out that headquarters was not in his tent, it was up yonder. He found out he was not *giving* orders, he was *taking* orders. He found that the *Lord* was still in charge. He learned to say “Yes, Sir” and “No, Sir” to the true Commander.

Oh, my friend, how we need today to see the living Christ. And when we do see Him, we are bound to go down on our faces before Him.

We don't grow in faith
in one or two doses.

RATHER, WHEN WE WALK IN THE
light of the Word of God,
WE BEGIN TO SEE OURSELVES
AS WE REALLY ARE.

- DR. J. VERNON MCGEE

PSALMS 117:1-118:29

117 *Oh praise, ye saints,
for his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

118 *Oh give thanks unto the Lord,
for his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

119 *That his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

120 *Let the house of Adinow say,
That his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

121 *Let them now that four Jahoh
voh say,
That his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

122 *Out of my distress I called
upon Jahohvoh:
Jahohvoh answered me and
set me in a large place.*

123 *Jahohvoh is on my side: I will
not be moved.*

124 *Thou didst threaten mine
enemies,
But I rose up as a lioness,
and I will roar.*

125 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

126 *The right hand of Jahohvoh
hath exalted me above all mine
enemies.*

127 *I shall not die,
because the Lord is with me,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

128 *Jahohvoh hath exalted me
above all mine enemies,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

129 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

130 *Oh give thanks unto Jahohvoh:
for he is wonderful in his
works.*

131 *For his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

132 *Thou shalt say,
because the Lord is with me,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

133 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

134 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

135 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

PSALMS 118:29-119:29

136 *Oh give thanks unto Jahohvoh:
for he is wonderful in his
works.*

137 *For his lovingkindness endureth
for ever.*

138 *Thou shalt say,
because the Lord is with me,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

139 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
because he hath exalted me
above all mine enemies.*

140 *I will open my mouth,
and I will praise the Lord,
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146 *I will open my mouth,
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147 *I will open my mouth,
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THE CLEANSING COAL

Now, back to Isaiah's experience in the temple, a burning coal is taken from the altar and is touched to his lips.

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth with it, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." –Isaiah 6:6, 7

He is cleansed. Cleansing for us today comes as we confess our sins:

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. –1 John 1:9

That live coal was the judging of Isaiah's sin. The lips have to confess.

THE HEART RESPONSE

Had Isaiah been called by God before? Some scholars think yes, but he had not heard it; that is, he had not heeded it. But now that Isaiah is cleansed, he can hear and he can heed this voice that asked, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” And we are told his response: “Here am I! Send me” (Isaiah 6:8). This establishes Isaiah’s call from God.

In this next verse, God tells him what to do:

And He [the Lord] **said, “Go, and tell this people ...”** –Isaiah 6:9

This is to be his ministry. Relaying God’s message to his people is to be Isaiah’s life. This is what God called him to do.

Today we hear a great deal about finding the will of God for our own lives. All sorts of little hoops are set up for us to jump through. It reminds me of setting up dominoes so that one touch will cause them to fall right in line. I don’t believe determining God’s will is quite like that.

I am confident that God will lead you, but He will lead you differently from how He leads me. He will use me differently from the way He will use you. The important thing for us to do is put

ourselves in His presence. When we live in His presence, we will see that we're just not capable—that we don't have the ability to do God's will on our own. Nor does God want us to try to do it in and of ourselves. When He saves us, He puts us into something new: The body of believers. He places us as a member of that body to serve a function for Him.

The most exciting thing for us to find out is what God wants us to do. Nothing is as thrilling as that. When we get into His presence, see ourselves as we really are, come in confession to Him, it is then that we are able to hear His call and His commission.

What was true for Isaiah, is true for us. Seek the Lord, listen for His voice, remain in His Word, and live honestly before Him. Do these things as a matter of habit, and then you'll sense His direction for your life.

A photograph of two men, one Black and one white, smiling and talking to each other outdoors. They are gesturing with their hands as if in conversation. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people in a park-like setting.

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