

A FIERCE FLOURISHING

A Theme Explanation for Leaders

This is for you to use with your Leadership Team to dig deeper into the 2015-16 Theme. Use our resources at mops.org/onlinekit2015 to share the theme with moms in your group.

Isaiah 55:12 – The Great Invitation

For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Theme Section: Isaiah 55

“Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.

2 Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.

3 Give ear and come to me; listen, that you
may live. I will make an everlasting covenant
with you, my faithful love promised to David.

4 See, I have made him a witness to the
peoples, a ruler and commander of the
peoples.

5 Surely you will summon nations you know
not, and nations you do not know will come
running to you, because of the LORD your
God, the Holy One of Israel,
for he has endowed you with splendor.”

6 Seek the LORD while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.

7 Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts. Let them
turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on

them, and to our God, for he will freely
pardon.

8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,” declares
the LORD.

9 “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

10 As the rain and the snow come down from
heaven, and do not return to it without
watering the earth and making it bud and
flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower
and bread for the eater,

11 so is my word that goes out from my
mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will
accomplish what I desire and achieve the
purpose for which I sent it.

12 You will go out in joy and be led forth in
peace; the mountains and hills will burst into
song before you, and all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.

13 Instead the thorn bush will grow the
juniper, and instead of briars the myrtle will
grow. This will be for the LORD’s renown,
for an everlasting sign, that will endure
forever.”

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Sometimes we need new eyes. A perspective shift that recalibrates our hearts to the rhythm of God's goodness that surrounds us. To tune our hearts to better hear the music of the divine that echoes throughout this world. That we might let that goodness seep into our bones and into our hearts so that we can remember what it feels like to flourish.

We think flourishing looks a lot like:

- **Celebrating lavishly:** Celebrating breathes life into our days. Could it be that commemorating moments might help us to become more alive, to remember what is good and become masterful at recognizing it? How would life change to regularly invite friends into our stolen moments with uninhibited dancing, the best food, while gathered around the biggest table with the deepest conversations? Lavish celebrations can be sacred markers that help remind us who we are.
- **Embracing rest:** Perhaps it is time to let go of exhaustion as a status symbol and productivity as a measure of worth. What if one of the most life-giving activities that would contribute to our flourishing is welcoming rhythms of rest and play into our lives? Creating healthy rhythms in our life is one way we nourish the weary spots in our soul.
- **Noticing goodness:** Could it be possible that we don't need new things but rather new eyes to see what we already have? What if we regained our sense of vision, an acute resolve to find hope in the cracks and mire of the mundane? Noticing what is good, gives us the gift of perspective and reminds us that the sacred is closer than we think.

We become more ourselves when we celebrate, rest and notice... and that looks a lot like flourishing. But this flourishing isn't the precious or exhausting kind. This is a fierce flourishing. It is a deep in your guts experience of gratitude and hope that compels you to raise your hands and dance freer than you ever have before. It is a fierce protection of your most important moments, an invitation to rest and an opportunity to enjoy the people who are right in front of you.

Why A Fierce Flourishing?

Because Jubilee. September, 2015 ushers in the 70th year of Jubilee. According to Jewish culture, every fiftieth year is declared a year of Jubilee. This is significant in that during a year of Jubilee, liberty is proclaimed "throughout the land to all its inhabitants". Jubilee means that debts are forgiven and slaves are set free. Additionally, it is a year of rest where the land is not to be worked so that it can be replenished. This is a year of freedom. Freedom to celebrate lavishly, freedom from not noticing the goodness before us and freedom to rest.

What's the deal with Isaiah 55?

Isaiah 55 is often referred to as “The Great Invitation.” We like to think of it as an invitation to a great party. A kingdom party, where God shows up and everyone can't help but join Him on the dance floor.

What we read in Isaiah 55 is an account of God's people being freed from captivity and called to uproot themselves in order to claim their ancestral homeland. Their welcome home party is imagined as a bountiful feast of satisfying foods, hosted by none other than God himself.

The bold call in the beginning of the chapter is to “come ... come ... come”, it is an invitation to all. Everyone is invited, including the thirsty and broken. We all have thirsty hearts, spots in our souls that are bone dry. Old hopes that have dried up, or dreams that have wilted. We are tired, but rest eludes us. We are haunted by an unquenchable thirst. God is inviting us to a party and He is serving a banquet of water, milk and wine. (Verse 1) Maybe in some way through this celebration, God is providing refreshment to the longings that each of us has.

Creation celebrates with us.

Throughout Isaiah 55 we see how creation notices the goodness of God. Another cool thing about Isaiah 55 is how it talks about creation noticing the goodness of God and showing us what it looks like to flourish. We read that the trees clap their hands and mountains sing and perhaps the most profound part of all is where we read that the thorns become cypress and briar becomes myrtle.

This is important because in Genesis a curse came on all of creation. And part of that curse was that man's labor would be made hard and frustrating by thorns and briars. Genesis 3:17-18 says, “Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you.”

So what Isaiah 55:13 is saying is that the curse will be lifted. Thorns and briars will be forgotten and in their place will come things of beauty and usefulness, as evidenced by the cypress and myrtle.

Here is the coolest part of all. When Jesus was crucified, he wore a crown of thorns, which was a graphic way of saying, he is carrying the curse for us and ushering in a new experience where we are freed from the curse and can enjoy the cypress and myrtle in their full flourishing.

What holds us back from flourishing?

We have no margin in our lives.
We get stuck in the past (regret) and the future (anxiety).
We can't see the normal everyday goodness of God.
We are consumed by the urgent demands of the day.

This is the year to experience flourishing by celebrating lavishly, embracing rest and noticing goodness. This year at MOPS, may we become a home for found wanderers, redeemed prisoners, explorers at the edge of their comfort, all of us who were one time captives now dancing with unearned freedom, because we have regained the eyes to see.