

Isaiah 55:6-9

⁶Seek the LORD while he may be found!

Call on him while he is near!

⁷Let the wicked man abandon his way.

Let an evil man abandon his thoughts.

Let him turn to the LORD,

and he will show him mercy.

Let him turn to our God,

because he will abundantly pardon.

⁸Certainly my plans are not your plans,

and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD.

⁹Just as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so my ways are higher than your ways,

and my plans are higher than your plans.

Higher

I.

Many of you, I'm sure, have climbed the stairs at Mount Pisgah over in Holland. Almost every time I have been there I have seen a few people going up and down multiple times. It's a great place to train for something higher.

Perhaps they're getting ready for *this* stairway. This is a piece of the Manitou Incline near Colorado Springs. Those who choose to climb it gain more than 2,000 feet of elevation in less than one mile.

There comes a time when high is no longer just high. Up in a plane, you look down at the clouds; clouds are no longer high. Make a deal with Elon Musk to ride on one of his Dragon rockets to the International Space Station and you will be higher than nearly any human being has ever gone.

The Psalmist asks: "Who is like the LORD our God? He is seated on high. ⁶He bends down to look at the heavens and at the earth" (Psalm 113:5-6, EHV). Even those who live and work on the Space Station have only a tiny glimpse of God's creation. God is higher still. He looks down from on high at all of creation—the entire universe.

Solomon finished the temple project his father David had begun by gathering the materials. At its dedication, Solomon said: "Will God really dwell with man on the earth? Truly, the heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you! How much less this house which I have built!" (2 Chronicles 6:18, EHV).

God is much different than we are, isn't he? The words Isaiah writes confirm it: "My ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans" (Isaiah 55:9, EHV). He is beyond comprehension. He is out of reach. God is higher.

II.

Trapped in the realities of the moment, one tends to start looking for answers in the wrong places.

A bookstore customer asked the clerk: "Where's your self-help section?" The smart-aleck clerk responded: "That would defeat the whole purpose, wouldn't it?" Self-help books or YouTube videos might be useful when it comes to DIY projects, but they aren't the place to

look for guidance to life's larger questions.

"Look inside yourself; examine your feelings," intones a character in one of the most successful movie franchises in our lifetime. Art mimics life. Authors and celebrities are constantly telling us to get in touch with our inner self—that will give us answers to our questions and bring the peace we seek.

If you *really* want the answers, you turn to science and technology. Pull that device out of your pocket and ask your question. It will dig through billions of pages on the internet and come up with all kinds of suggestions for an answer. But sometimes the answers will be conflicting. And while science has made tremendous strides in healing diseases and giving solutions to troubling problems, no solution has been found to death. Death still comes to every human being.

"Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts" (Isaiah 55:7, EHV). Do-it-yourself books give answers that follow human ways, as does science. Introspection—looking inside oneself—means that each one follows his or her own thoughts. Are you wicked? Are you evil?

After the great flood, God said: "I will never again curse the soil anymore because of man, for the thoughts he forms in his heart are evil from his youth" (Genesis 8:21, EHV). By nature each one of us is evil from the time we were born. Looking inside ourselves and looking to human ideas and innovations simply will not satisfy; it will not bring the answers to life's most serious questions.

Where can we go? What can we do?

III.

"Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near!" (Isaiah 55:6, EHV). Every human being has a natural knowledge of God. Without being taught, we know that certain things are right and wrong. The conscience inside every person tells us that there is a God who holds us to that standard of right and wrong. The conscience and the natural knowledge of God direct every person to seek God.

God wants us to seek. He wants to be found. While God is higher than the highest heavens, Isaiah says he is near. He has spoken to us; he revealed to us his plan of salvation in his Word.

A few weeks ago Paul reminded us: "Who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his adviser?" (Romans 11:34, EHV). Today, through Isaiah, he tells us: "Certainly my plans are not your plans, and your ways are not my ways, declares the LORD" (Isaiah 55:8, EHV).

Thank God his plans are not our plans and his ways are not our ways! Take a look at any non-Christian religion. The plan in every single one of them is for you to find your *own* path—to make your *own* way. You must achieve it by being good enough to earn the favor of their gods.

"Let the wicked man abandon his way. Let an evil man abandon his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will show him mercy. Let him turn to our God, because he will abundantly pardon... "9 Just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my plans are higher than your plans" (Isaiah 55:7, 9, EHV). In contrast to any world religion, God's plan points the mirror of God's Law squarely back at yourself. The law exposes your wicked and evil thoughts. Rather than eliminating all hope from your future, the true God promises to show mercy; he promises to pardon your sins.

Does God's plan mean that he will overlook sin so that he can show mercy and grant pardon? Not at all. God's plans and ways are so much higher than your plans and ways that

he came up with a perfect solution: *Jesus* earned God's favor in your place. Jesus had all the power and might and perseverance to do what not one of us could ever hope to do.

Thank God his plans are not our plans and his ways are not our ways!

IV.

“Seek the LORD while he may be found! Call on him while he is near!” (Isaiah 55:6, EHV). God is near, but he is not found in our thoughts and ways. Isaiah encourages us to seek him and call on him while he may be found and while he is near.

Seek God in his Word. “Your words are a lamp for my feet and a light for my path.” (Psalm 119:105, EHV). He has given you the perfect set of information you need to strengthen and nourish your faith. Right after today's text God promises: “Just as the rain and the snow come down from the sky and do not return there unless they first water the earth, make it give birth, and cause it to sprout, so that it gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹in the same way my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, it will accomplish whatever I please, and it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it” (Isaiah 55:10-11, EHV).

Call on God while he is near. While he is near means while you have life in your body. God says: “Call on me in the day of distress. I will deliver you, and you will honor me” (Psalm 50:15, EHV). Call on him in repentance when you know you have done something contrary to his perfect will. Call on him in faith as you confess the great things he has done for you in giving you salvation in Christ Jesus. Call on him in prayer, asking him to bless you, but also thanking him for all the many ways he has already blessed you to this point in your life.

God's plans and ways are higher. Perhaps too often we set our sights too low. We get so caught up in the way we are going to go in the immediate future that we make plans that are shortsighted—low-sighted. Set your sights higher. Make your plans higher. Realize that God's plan for you is the highest and best and that one day he will fulfill his highest plan for you and bring you home. Amen.