

Background Scripture: Isaiah 51

Print Passage: Isaiah 51:1-8

Teaching Freedom



AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR, BENSON SAW A SIGNUP SHEET POSTED ON THE COMMUNITY BULLETIN BOARD AT SCHOOL FROM A COMMUNITY-SERVICE ORGANIZATION. They were looking for youth to provide help in neighborhoods or at school, and Benson signed up. Benson was not going to be supervised

because his service would have the freedom of an honor system. An honor system meant that Benson would log in to the community-service organization online and record his hours each time he performed one of the acts of service. Benson also wouldn't be paid since he was volunteering his services. Benson chose volunteering at school once a week. Benson would do anything from wiping down the desks and chalkboards to picking up trash in and around the school building.

One day, when a few of Benson's classmates saw him cleaning up around the school, they invited him to jump in for a game of pickup basketball. Benson explained to his buddies how he had signed up to do an hour of community service once a week, and today was his day. Benson's buddies said that he shouldn't take the service so seriously since, after all, it was on the honor system. They were hinting that if no one is keeping track, who cares if Benson didn't do the whole hour?

Benson said that he signed a promise pledge, and he was going to keep his word. Even though his buddies ridiculed him for doing the community service without pay, Benson went back to work and remembered something his grandmother said when he told her he had signed up. She told Benson that one day, doing the right thing will pay off. Benson's grandmother was talking about integrity.

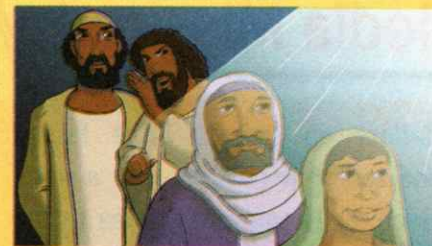
At the end of the school year, Benson's mother gave him an envelope that came in the mail. The community-service organization had sent Benson a thank-you letter along with a gift card for \$100 for school supplies for the fall. Benson remembered what his grandmother said and smiled.



WORD UP

Isaiah 51:1-8

1 "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which you were hewn; 2 look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave you birth. When I called him he was only one man, and I blessed him and made him many. 3 The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing. 4 Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. 5 My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. 6 Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail. 7 Hear me, you who know what is right, you people who have taken my instruction to heart: Do not fear the reproach of mere mortals or be terrified by their insults. 8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment; the worm will devour them like wool. But my righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations."



KEY VERSE:

"Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: Instruction will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations." (Isaiah 51:4)



THERE'S AN APP FOR THAT!

WORK OUT

ISAIAH 51 BEGINS WITH WORDS MOST OF US HAVE HEARD AT SOME TIME IN OUR LIVES: "LISTEN TO ME." Isaiah had something important to say to those who were seeking after righteousness—those who were committed to doing the right thing—even during the captivity. The Israelites were to look at their ancestors Abraham and Sarah, to whom God had promised blessings—which He fulfilled! Isaiah wanted those who kept the faith not to lose faith now, but to look at what God had done with their ancestors. Isaiah reassured the Israelites that God would comfort Israel. Jerusalem would be restored. The desert places would become like Eden, which refers to the Garden of Eden and the river that God placed in Eden that watered the beautiful Garden of Eden. In Zion, joy, gladness, thanksgiving, and singing would return. In verse 4, Isaiah says, "listen" once more. God's commandments will establish His justice and become a light to show the Israelites what God expected of them and the lives they were to live. The reference to the "arm of God" signifies God's strength, might, and power. God's power will make sure that justice is done. Finally, in verse 6, Isaiah encourages the people to "lift up your eyes to the heavens," as one day what they see now would vanish; but one thing is for certain: God's salvation will last forever. God's righteousness and salvation will not vanish, wear out, or die, but will last throughout all generations!

Your teacher will write the word *listen* on the board or newsprint in several languages. In another column, your teacher will write synonyms for the word *listen*. The class will be invited to add other translations or synonyms. Feel free to use your smartphone to help you. After the lists are composed, discuss the possible reasons for why the author used the word *listen*, and consider whether you oftentimes want to listen or be heard. Next, share a time when someone made such a command or request of you to listen.

INSIDE OUT

Put yourself in the crowd. If you were listening to Isaiah speak the words of our Print Passage, what would you be thinking? Would you be excited? Would you be saying to yourself, "Really?" Or would you, by faith, accept what Isaiah is saying, knowing that God is a faithful God, and His promises are true? On a separate sheet of paper, write your own response to Isaiah based on any portion of today's lesson. Afterwards, you will be asked to share your story with the class.



Verse 1 is addressed to those Israelites who were following righteousness. They were urged to continue seeking God. These words are to encourage you today that God wants you to keep the faith and continue following Him. You can follow righteousness by obeying God's Word and trusting Him to lead your life every day, which pleases Him.