BEHOLD...A NEW THING

Isaiah 43:19

ADULT
BIBLE STUDY

2024-2025

cbf OFFERING FOR GLOBAL MISSIONS

BECAUSE **PRESENCE** MATTERS

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Behold...A New Thing
INTRODUCTION

Isaiah 43:19
"I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

FORMAT

These Bible study sessions invite the community gathered together to wonder together. Each session will introduce a Bible story and focus on an impact story provided through the videos of the Offering for Global Missions. There will also be questions to encourage participants to engage with the biblical text, and then additional questions to prompt a conversation and imagining among the class present.

As the leader of a session, you are encouraged to read the biblical text and watch the impact story ahead of time. You are also encouraged to read through the provided commentary and questions. Within the classroom, your role will be as a facilitator of the conversation. You are invited to present the commentary available in your own words and to make additional connections for your class. You can use the questions to engage participants and to allow them to answer authentically. This may mean there are times of silence and pause as participants consider their answers. That is okay, and is not a judgment on your role or their response. Allow for this space and encourage people to answer.

The questions are central to these studies. There may be questions that remain unanswered and instead remain with the participants. This is not a failing, but instead a way to continue the practice of wonder as participants leave the space.

Each session has **Questions for the Text** and **Questions for the Community**. The Questions for the Text provide an opportunity for participants to connect with the text. The questions are based on the idea of wonder and encourage emotional connection to the characters or communities in the Bible. The Questions for the Community are meant for the participants to imagine a way forward together. They take the ideas of the text and the testimonies from the video and encourage the class to express their strengths and their needs. In this expression, the participants can better support one another.

THEME

The theme for this year's Offering for Global Missions is taken from Isaiah 43 where the prophet declares that God is about to do a new thing. Reflecting on this theme, we can find the energy and the hope to see solutions and ways forward in the complex and difficult situations present in our world.

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The original hearers of this passage were Jewish people in Exile. They had been taken captive by Babylon and held away from home, not knowing what had happened to their loved ones or if they would ever return. The people are fearful and in a situation that is daunting, difficult and complicated.

Amid this fear, Isaiah shares that God is not absent and God is not deterred by the setting of the people. Instead, God is working to make a new way. Just prior to this verse, the people are encouraged to forget about the past and are told to prepare for what is to come.

Today, the world is more complex than it ever has been. And yet, the needs of people are the same. People need a home; they need healthy bodies; they need a place to rest and food to eat. Throughout the world and, for our focus now in Togo and the Southwest United States, CBF field personnel are present to meet the needs of people. They are present to embody the new things of God

While watching these videos and reading these passages, remember the request from Jesus in Matthew 6:10: "Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

When we hear the stories of people with injuries or who have gone through difficult journeys to immigrate to a new country, we can either let the complex nature of these stories paralyze us, or we can look toward what presence with God looks like, and work to bring that about here and now, one person and one step at a time.

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Session 1 Togo

READ
2 Kings 5:1-19; Isaiah 43:19

WATCH
Afro Story Video

STUDY
In 2 Kings, we read what may be a familiar story to many in the narrative of Naaman. Naaman was not an Israelite, but he still found favor with God. He was the general of a Syrian army and a man of great power who had a debilitating disease.

Leprosy during this time was a disease that was detrimental to an individual—not only because of the physical malady, but also because of the fear that surrounded it. People of this era did not have a full understanding of the disease, their fear and limited knowledge making leprosy a disease of social isolation. Naaman, who would have been separated from family and loved ones because of this skin condition, went to Elisha seeking healing.

But first, he went to the King of Israel. Because, Naaman, as a powerful man, first approached another powerful man for help, he did not think to approach Elisha out of equality or humility; he went with wealth, honor and power to the King of Israel. Naaman was not thinking about himself as person in need. He was thinking of how he was a representative of the might of an army, and he wanted to be respected as such.

But Naaman, through a servant, was instructed to go and bathe and cleanse himself. Elisha did not see Naaman until he had done this. The experience of washing in the river cleansed Naaman of his grandeur, letting him know that he could speak with Elisha on a level of equality rather than as one of two representatives of powerful structures and kingdoms.

Naaman continued to proffer gifts and offerings to Elisha, but that was not the meaning of this exchange. There was no need for grand gestures or elaborate rituals. Naaman needed healing and restoration, and Elisha was there to offer it.

In the testimony video of Afro, we hear the story not of a powerful man traveling for healing, but of a humble man who finds healing and is then able to have his spirit rekindled in a place of service and care. This story is meaningful, showing us the Kingdom of God if we are able to hear it. The complex questions of healthcare, migration and missions can obscure views of Afro and others like him if we keep our mindset on systems and nations. But when we stop and hear what God has done in Afro's life, and what God is now doing through Afro's life, we are reminded of the good things from God. The story of

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Afro can then impact our understanding of systems and nations as we see the Kingdom of God present in his life and work toward spreading the Kingdom of God on earth.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEXT

- Why do you think Naaman first approached the king and not Elisha directly?
- Why do you think Elisha did not speak to Naaman directly?
- How would you feel with this kind of healing directive from a doctor? Would you be frustrated like Naaman?
- If Naaman, Elisha and the Israelite girl all could have read Isaiah 43:19 before Naaman was healed, what do you think they would have felt? What if they had read it after he was healed?

QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

- Have you had an experience where you had to travel a long distance to find what you needed? What was that experience like?
- How do you think Afro felt when he had spent a long time in the hospital and then met Karen at MCDC Clinic? How would you feel in that experience?
- Are there needs in our community? Are there people/organizations who are working to meet those needs? Are there needs that people must travel away from our community to have met?
- Joining with the certainty of a new thing from God, what has a new thing looked like for the people in Togo? How can we join in that new thing of God?
- Learning from the community building and meeting of needs offered in Togo from Karen and the team at MCDC Clinic, how can we meet the needs in our community?

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Session 2 U.S./Mexico

READ
Isaiah 43:15-21; Hebrews 13:1-3

WATCH
Yosenderi Impact Video

STUDY
Isaiah 43 was written to the people in Exile. At this time, they were concerned that (YHWH) had either been killed in battle with the Babylonians or had completely abandoned them. They believed they were beyond redemption and without hope. But Isaiah brought the word of the LORD to say that there is hope. God is doing a new thing and the people are just not able to see it yet.

Until we get to this passage in the book of Isaiah, there has been an ongoing motif in the book that the people cannot see the works of God, and now that is being addressed head on. In verse 19, we read that God says to the people, "Do you not perceive it?" Not only does this passage speak to the forthcoming action of God, but it reveals that God has been active, even if the people have not perceived it.

In Hebrews 13, we have the salutations of a letter written to those who have been persecuted. They have been cast out of their communities because of their faith, and the government does not look kindly upon their activities.

And yet, the author instructs them to continue in their Christian duties, namely hospitality. The expectation of hospitality is not new, but it is stated here against the backdrop of hostility. But in times of hardship, the community is expected to welcome strangers and make sure that all people, not just believers or members of the community, have food to eat and a place to sleep. And in doing so, according to the author, the community may entertain angels.

This notion of entertaining angels is not fully explored in the text, and should not be a distraction to the charge of the passage. Instead, it is a call-back to the story of Abram entertaining angels in the book of Genesis. It is also a short-hand reminder to readers that all people should be treated with honor.

In the connection of these two passages, we see a God who is at work, and who looks to the Church to join in this work. In Isaiah, we see an active God and an invitation and reminder to the people that they too can join in this new thing. In Hebrews, we have a reminder of the character of God and an expectation for God's people to participate in this character by showing hospitality.

By the 21st century, unfortunately, the Church has developed a bad habit of missing the work of God in the world. Through the history of colonization, slavery, women's subjugation, the AIDS epidemic and more, we can find

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ourselves missing the work of God and instead dragging our feet. And then, when the Church arrives at a place of celebrating justice, we discover God has been there all along.

At times, we can miss out on the work of God because we get ensnared in complex questions and issues of societal change and movement, losing sight of the people who are in need. Through the Impact videos of Yosenderi and others, we are reminded that while the questions of immigration, asylum and borders are complex, there are real hurting people in those situations. The passages of Isaiah and Hebrews call us to remember our responsibility to those who are in pain, and invite the readers to join in the work of God.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEXT

- When you read the Isaiah text together in community, what catches your attention? How do you feel after reading this passage?
- Does the idea of a "new thing" bring you joy or hesitation?
- What "new thing" do you hope for in your world or community?
- What does this passage teach us about God?
- In reading the Hebrews passage, what catches your attention? What do you think of "entertaining angels"?
- In this period, hospitality was an expectation and placed guests in a place of honor in the home. Our culture is different in some ways, even though hospitality is still valued. How do the changes in culture impact the way you read the text?
- What do we learn about God from this text?

QUESTIONS FOR THE COMMUNITY

- How do you think your church is perceived when it comes to issues of justice in your community?
- How do you think "The Church" is regarded when it comes to issues of immigration, justice and inclusion? Why do you think that is?
- What might it look like to show hospitality to those we know? What might it look like to show hospitality to those we do not know?
- How can we as individuals work towards a community and a country that is hospitable to our neighbors, and those seeking refuge here in the U.S.?