



# SUNDAY SCHOOL MAY 25, 2025

Prayer:

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## Old Testament

Isaiah 26:1-4, 8

### JUDAH'S SONG OF VICTORY

On that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

We have a strong city;  
he sets up walls and bulwarks as a safeguard.

Open the gates,  
so that the righteous nation that maintains faithfulness  
may enter in.

Those of steadfast mind you keep in peace,  
in peace because they trust in you.

Trust in the Lord forever,  
for in the Lord God  
you have an everlasting rock.

In the path of your judgments,  
O Lord, we have placed hope;  
your name and your renown  
are the soul's desire.

### OVERVIEW

Isaiah 26:1-4, 8 is part of a larger prophetic poem often referred to as a "Song of Trust." It anticipates a future time of divine peace, safety, and justice. The passage emphasizes the steadfastness of faith, the security found in God, and the desire to live in accordance with God's will. It celebrates God's enduring strength and the righteousness of those who remain faithful.

### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Isaiah chapters 24–27 are sometimes called the "Isaiah Apocalypse" due to their eschatological tone—describing a future where **God triumphs over evil and establishes peace**. Chapter 26 continues this vision by offering a hymn of thanksgiving and trust. This "song" is envisioned as being sung by the redeemed community in Zion (Jerusalem) after divine deliverance.

- **Verse 1** speaks of a *strong city*, a metaphor for the secure community of the faithful.
- **Verses 2–4** call for trust in God, likening Him to an "everlasting rock"—a symbol of unshakable stability.
- **Verse 8** reflects the longing of the people to live according to God's will and to await His justice.

These verses function both as worship and instruction, encouraging the people of Judah to trust in God amidst turmoil.

### HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

Isaiah was prophesying during a turbulent time for the Kingdom of Judah—roughly the 8th century BCE. Politically, Judah was under threat from expanding empires such as **Assyria**, and later **Babylon**. The promise of a "strong city" would have deeply contrasted with the fear of invasion and destruction that loomed over Jerusalem.



- **Cities with walls** were essential for safety and survival. Isaiah here uses that imagery to portray God's *spiritual* protection.
- The **righteous nation** mentioned (v.2) likely contrasts with the disobedient leadership and people of the time who had failed to live up to God's covenant.
- These chapters likely gained new meaning during and after the **Babylonian exile** (6th century BCE), when hope for restoration and divine justice was paramount.

#### HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Original Prophecy:** 8th century BCE (Isaiah's ministry c. 740–700 BCE)
- **Immediate Context:** Assyrian threat to Judah
- **Post-exilic Application:** Around 6th century BCE, during or after the Babylonian exile (as redacted by later editors)
- **Liturgical Use:** Likely recited or sung during temple worship or festivals celebrating God's deliverance

#### SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

Scholars see these verses as a metaphor for **spiritual resilience and communal faithfulness**. The "strong city" is not just Jerusalem—it represents a **community grounded in justice, faith, and God's presence**.

Modern interpretation can apply these metaphors as follows:

- **The "strong city"** = a society built on righteousness, inclusivity, and trust in something greater than human systems.
- **"Steadfast mind" and "everlasting rock"** = inner peace and emotional resilience derived from trusting in eternal values (e.g., love, justice, truth), rather than fleeting worldly power.
- **"Waiting on God's judgments"** (v.8) = a call for patient advocacy for justice, resisting the temptation to take vengeance or shortcuts.

In today's world of political instability, violence, and injustice, Isaiah's message reminds communities to stay rooted in faith, long for peace, and live in ethical alignment with divine values—even when the fulfillment seems delayed.

#### SUMMARY

Isaiah 26:1-4, 8 is a prophetic hymn of hope and trust in God's eternal power and justice. It paints a vivid image of a future community where righteousness prevails, and those who remain faithful are kept in peace. The passage calls on people to trust in God as their everlasting foundation and to desire His name and justice above all else. It remains a timeless reminder that true peace and security come not from human constructs, but from a deep, abiding trust in the divine.



## New Testament (Gospel)

### John 14:23-29

#### JESUS TALKS OF PEACE

Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

“You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I.

“And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur you may believe.”

#### OVERVIEW

This passage is part of Jesus’ *Farewell Discourse*—a deeply intimate and theological section in John’s Gospel. Here, Jesus reassures his disciples that though he is going away, they will not be abandoned. He speaks of love as obedience, promises the coming of the Holy Spirit (the Advocate), and offers peace—not as the world gives, but divine peace. It’s a powerful blend of relational theology and spiritual preparation for what is to come: his crucifixion, resurrection, and the eventual indwelling of the Spirit.

#### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Location in the Narrative:** These verses fall within **John 13–17**, known as the Farewell Discourse, delivered during the Last Supper.
- **Key Themes:**
  - **Love and obedience:** Love is expressed by keeping Jesus’ word.
  - **The indwelling of God:** The mutual abiding of the Father, Son, and believer.
  - **Promise of the Holy Spirit:** A helper to teach and remind the disciples.
  - **Peace and reassurance:** An antidote to the fear of Jesus’ departure.
- **Audience:** The disciples—those most devoted and close to Jesus—are the immediate recipients, but John’s Gospel frames this for the early Christian community facing uncertainty.

#### HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Time of Writing:** Likely around **90–100 CE**, long after Jesus’ death and resurrection.
- **Context for Readers:** Early Christians were facing persecution (social and political), the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple (70 CE), and the challenge of preserving Jesus’ message without his physical presence.
- **Political Landscape:** Roman imperial power was at its height; the emperor cult pressured Christians to profess loyalty to Caesar. Peace was often imposed violently through Roman control, contrasting sharply with the peace Jesus offers in this passage.
- **Religious Climate:** Jewish-Christian divisions were growing. This Gospel’s strong emphasis on love and Spirit over law likely responded to growing rabbinic Judaism and the marginalization of the Johannine community.



## HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Event Time:** Around 30 CE, during the final days of Jesus' earthly ministry.
- **Gospel Composition:** Between 90–100 CE.
- **Key Contemporary Events:**
  - Persecution under Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE).
  - Theological development of the Holy Spirit doctrine as the Church separated from Jewish synagogues.
  - Christianity evolving from a sect within Judaism to a broader religious identity.

## SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY CONTEXT

Scholars see this passage as metaphor-rich:

- **"We will make our home with them":** This suggests not a temporary visit but a permanent *abiding* presence of God in the believer—interpreted metaphorically as the divine life growing in one's daily living. Today, this resonates with the idea of God being present not in temples or churches alone, but within and among people.
- **"The Advocate, the Holy Spirit":** Seen as a divine guide, counselor, or legal helper, this metaphor can be applied to modern believers facing moral, social, and emotional complexity—God is not silent but actively present through Spirit-led conscience and community.
- **"Peace I leave with you":** Jesus contrasts worldly peace (often temporary or political) with a lasting, internal peace rooted in relationship with God. In today's anxious and polarized world, this verse offers a radical invitation to stillness, resilience, and spiritual confidence.
- **"Do not let your hearts be troubled":** Interpreted both literally and metaphorically, this assurance speaks to any person facing grief, transition, or fear. Jesus invites us not to be naïve but to find courage in the divine presence.

Modern believers can see this passage as a promise that God remains present amid change, and that love and obedience open the door to deeper peace—not through external control, but inner transformation.

## SUMMARY

In **John 14:23–29**, Jesus promises that those who love him and follow his teachings will not be alone. He speaks of divine indwelling—God making a home in the believer's heart. He assures them of the Holy Spirit's coming presence, offering guidance and remembrance of all he has taught. Most importantly, Jesus gives peace—not the world's fragile version, but a deep, spiritual peace that calms fear and anchors the soul. This passage prepares believers to endure hardship with confidence, grounded in divine presence and love.



## Addendum

### Current Reflections on Isaiah 26 in Today's World

#### 1. Pope Leo XIV's Call for Unity and Peace

On May 18, 2025, Pope Leo XIV was inaugurated as the 267th pope of the Catholic Church. In his homily, he emphasized themes of unity, peace, and care for the marginalized, urging an end to division and promoting love over hatred. His message aligns with Isaiah 26:3–4, which speaks of perfect peace for those whose minds are steadfast and who trust in the Lord.

#### 2. National Day of Prayer Emphasizes Trust in God

Earlier this month, the United States observed the National Day of Prayer, highlighting the nation's reliance on divine guidance throughout its history. The proclamation emphasized that prayer is the foundation of America's past, the guiding hand of its present, and the light of its future. This national reflection mirrors the call in Isaiah 26:4 to "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock."

#### 3. Gen Z's Renewed Interest in Faith

A surprising religious revival is occurring among Generation Z (born between 1997-2012), with increasing numbers turning to Christianity and spirituality. This shift is reflected in lifestyle changes, as Gen Z seeks deeper meaning in life amidst mental health struggles and online comparison culture. Their pursuit of purpose and community echoes the sentiments of Isaiah 26:8, where the faithful wait for the Lord and desire His name and renown. Here's a bit more on Gen Z:

- **Digital Natives:** First generation to grow up with smartphones, social media, and constant internet access.
- **Socially Aware:** Known for valuing diversity, mental health, social justice, and climate action.
- **Cautiously Optimistic:** Grew up during the Great Recession, global instability, and pandemic—often more pragmatic than Millennials.
- **Faith Trends:** While often labeled as "less religious," there's a growing trend toward spiritual curiosity and authentic expressions of faith, especially in online communities and non-traditional settings.

### Peace, Power & Money in Rural Indiana (through John 14:23–29)

#### PEACE – A LONGING FOR STABILITY

- **Rural communities** often equate peace with *stability*—stable families, farms, weather, and social traditions.
- Jesus' words about peace **not being as the world gives** may challenge this. He isn't offering predictable crops or family harmony—but rather the deep peace of *God's indwelling presence*, even when external stability falters.
- In communities affected by:
  - Economic shifts (e.g., farm debt, factory closures),
  - Drug abuse or mental health struggles,
  - Congregational decline or church division (e.g., UMC disaffiliations),the **peace of Christ is countercultural**—it doesn't depend on outward control but inward assurance.



## POWER – COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & CONTROL

- In smaller towns, power often resides in longstanding families, business owners, or respected elders.
- There's sometimes unspoken tension between **spiritual authority** and **social influence**.
  - A person may hold church leadership because of social standing, not spiritual maturity.
  - Jesus reframes power here: it comes not from title or control, but from **loving obedience and hosting God's presence** (v. 23).
- The Spirit becomes the **true guide**—not politics, wealth, or tradition. This can comfort some and unsettle others.

## MONEY – SCARCITY & GENEROSITY IN TENSION

- Many rural Christians understand money as a **blessing to be stewarded** but wrestle with fear around scarcity:
  - Limited job opportunities,
  - Fixed incomes (especially retirees),
  - Guilt or pride tied to tithing/giving.
- This passage reminds us that **peace is not tied to income**—Jesus doesn't promise financial protection but **a deep and sustaining relationship with God**.
- The presence of the Spirit might challenge both:
  - The temptation to hoard ("just in case"), and
  - The guilt of not having enough to give.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- *What does peace look like in our lives here? When has it been shaken?*
- *Have we ever mistaken financial or social stability for the peace Jesus talks about?*
- *How do we define power in our church? Who do we turn to when decisions need to be made—and is that the same person we see as spiritually mature?*
- *Do we believe God is really "at home" in us? How would that change how we deal with anxiety, conflict, or generosity?*

## TAKEAWAY PRAYER

*In a place where peace is often tied to predictability, power to reputation, and money to survival, Jesus invites us into something riskier but deeper: a peace rooted in presence, not control.*