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Old Testament: Isaiah 49:1-7

Context: In this passage, we hear the voice of God's Servant—called before birth, shaped through struggle, and commissioned not just for Israel, but for the healing of the nations.

THE SERVANT'S MISSION

Listen to me, O coastlands;
pay attention, you peoples from far away!
The Lord called me before I was born;
while I was in my mother's womb he named me.
He made my mouth like a sharp sword;
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me a polished arrow;
in his quiver he hid me away.
And he said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will be glorified."
But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity;
yet surely my cause is with the Lord
and my reward with my God."
And now the Lord says,
who formed me in the womb to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and that Israel might be gathered to him,
for I am honored in the sight of the Lord,
and my God has become my strength—
he says,
"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob
and to restore the survivors of Israel;
I will give you as a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Thus says the Lord,
the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One,
to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,
the slave of rulers,
"Kings shall see and stand up;
princes, and they shall prostrate themselves,
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

OVERVIEW

Isaiah 49:1–7 is the **second of the Servant Songs** in Isaiah. The Servant speaks in the first person, describing a divine calling established before birth, a season of apparent failure, and a surprising



expansion of mission. What begins as a calling to restore Israel becomes something far larger: **a light to the nations**, a means of salvation reaching “to the ends of the earth.”

This passage holds tension:

- Calling vs discouragement
- Faithfulness vs visible success
- Rejection vs ultimate vindication

It is deeply personal.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before (Isaiah 48)

- Chapter 48 closes with God confronting Israel’s stubbornness in exile.
- Israel is described as resistant, hard-hearted, and spiritually deaf.
- The exile is framed as both judgment and refinement.

Set-up: Israel needs restoration—but cannot fully restore itself.

The Passage Itself (Isaiah 49:1–7)

- The Servant is **called from the womb** (v.1), echoing prophetic call narratives (Jeremiah 1, Psalm 139).
- God’s word is depicted as **a sharpened sword** (v.2), emphasizing truth, not violence.
- **The Servant experiences discouragement:**
“*I have labored in vain...*” (v.4)
- God reframes the mission:
 - Restoring Israel is **too small a thing** (v.6).
 - The Servant’s role expands to the nations.
- Even though the Servant is **despised and rejected**, kings will one day rise in recognition (v.7).

Immediately After (Isaiah 49:8–13)

- God promises restoration, release, and return from exile.
- **The tone shifts from calling to comfort and homecoming.**
- The Servant’s faithfulness becomes the mechanism of hope for others.

Broader Book Context (Isaiah as a Whole)

- Isaiah spans judgment → exile → hope → renewal.
- Chapters 40–55 (Second Isaiah) speak to exiles in Babylon.
- God’s salvation is no longer imagined as ethnic, national, or territorial only.
- Isaiah steadily widens the lens: **from Israel to the world.**

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- Written during or addressing the **Babylonian Exile** (6th century BCE).
- **Israel is displaced, powerless, and politically irrelevant.**
- Empires (Babylon, later Persia) define power by conquest and domination.
- **Isaiah introduces a radical counter-vision:**



- Power through faithfulness
- Influence through suffering
- Salvation through service

Politically, this is subversive theology: God's agent does not conquer nations—he *illuminates* them.

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- Isaiah of Jerusalem: 8th century BCE (chapters 1–39)
- Exilic/Second Isaiah material: c. 540 BCE
- Audience: Judean exiles in Babylon
- Historical backdrop:
 - Fall of Jerusalem: 586 BCE
 - Rise of Persia under Cyrus: shortly after

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language & Dating

- Written in **Biblical Hebrew**
- Poetic structure, dense imagery, parallelism

Key Translation Insights

- **“Servant”**
 - Can mean servant, agent, representative
 - Leaves intentional ambiguity: individual? Israel? future figure?
- **“Light”**
 - Symbolizes revelation, justice, life, and divine presence
- **“In vain”**
 - Not failure, but *emptiness* or lack of visible result
- **“Despised”**
 - Strong social term: rejected, shamed, marginalized

English translations sometimes soften the emotional weight. The Hebrew preserves the raw honesty of discouragement *without* negating faithfulness.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars often see the Servant as:

- Israel itself
- A faithful remnant
- A prophetic figure
- Or all three at once

Metaphorically, the Servant represents **faithfulness without applause**.

Modern parallel (Grant County):

- Churches doing quiet work that never makes headlines
- Volunteers who serve faithfully without visible “results”
- People who feel called, but wonder if it matters



Isaiah 49 reframes success:

- Faithfulness is not measured by scale
- Small communities can carry global light
- God's work often looks unimpressive before it looks inevitable

This passage pushes back against a culture obsessed with growth metrics, attendance numbers, and visible wins.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

Reevaluate Success

- Faithfulness is not the same as productivity.
- *God values obedience over outcomes.*

Resist Small Visions

- "Too small a thing" applies to how we imagine our impact.
- Local faithfulness can ripple outward in unseen ways.
- **Stay Faithful Through Discouragement**
- Feeling ineffective does not mean you are ineffective.
- Even God's Servant questioned the fruit of his labor.

Embrace Inclusive Hope

- God's salvation always pushes beyond borders.
- *The church exists not to protect insiders, but to illuminate others.*

Trust God's Timing

- Vindication belongs to God, not us.
- Recognition is delayed, but not denied.

DISCUSSION

- *What does "church" mean to us?*
- *What do you think Jesus would have thought of churches today?*
- *If Jesus was to start a church, what would it look like? Think of the parallel to his life ... humble beginnings, scholarly & hardworking, traveling ministry.*



Gospel: John 1:29-42

Context: John the Baptist publicly identifies Jesus as “the Lamb of God,” and two of John’s disciples respond by following Jesus - the first ripple of discipleship that turns testimony into relationship.

THE LAMB OF GOD

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’ I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Chosen One.”

The First Disciples of Jesus

The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, “Look, here is the Lamb of God!”

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, “What are you looking for?”

They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?”

He said to them, “Come and see.”

They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon. One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.

He first found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah” (which is translated Anointed).

He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, “You are Simon, son of John. You are to be called Cephas” (which is translated Peter).

OVERVIEW

This passage moves fast, almost like a sequence of snapshots:

- John points to Jesus: “Here is the Lamb of God.”
- John explains why he knows: he saw the Spirit descend and remain on Jesus.
- Two of John’s disciples pivot from John to Jesus.
- Jesus asks the first, clarifying question of the Gospel: “What are you looking for?”
- They stay with him, and one (Andrew) immediately brings another (Simon), whom Jesus renames Cephas/Peter.

Big theme: faith begins as witness, but it matures through “come and see.”



BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Immediately Before (John 1:19–28)

Religious authorities question John the Baptist: *Who are you?* John denies being the Messiah, Elijah, or “the Prophet,” and describes himself as a “voice crying out.” He also hints that “one among you” is already present - meaning the decisive moment is close.

The Passage Itself (1:29–42)

- **Public declaration:** “Lamb of God” + “takes away the sin of the world.” John’s claim is cosmic, not just local.
- **Identity + validation:** John ties Jesus’ identity to a sign he received: Spirit descending and “remaining.”
- **Discipleship as transfer:** John’s disciples shift allegiance. That’s not betrayal - that’s the point of John’s ministry.
- **The first invitation:** “Come and see.” John’s Gospel loves this pattern: not “win the argument,” but “enter the experience.”
- **Naming as vocation:** Simon becomes Cephas/Peter - identity re-formed around mission.

Immediately After (John 1:43–51)

- Jesus calls Philip; Philip brings Nathanael. The same chain continues: **witness** → **invitation** → **encounter** → **confession**. John’s Gospel is showing how disciples multiply: not through pressure, but through personal testimony.

Broader Narrative and Theology of John

John is written so readers will believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and have life in his name (John 20:31). Early on, John frames Jesus with layered titles:

- Word, Light, Son, Lamb, Rabbi, Messiah, King, Son of Man
John 1:29–42 is where those titles start becoming *relationships and followings*, not just ideas.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Roman occupation + public anxiety:** First-century Judea lived under Roman power, with heavy taxation, political tension, and occasional repression. “Deliverance” language was easily heard politically.
- **Temple system and sacrifice:** “Lamb” imagery lands in a world where sacrifice is an everyday religious reality. Whether readers connect it most to Passover, daily temple offerings, or Isaiah’s suffering servant, it carries the weight of substitution, deliverance, and holiness.
- **Purity and repentance movements:** John’s baptism fits a wider Jewish world of ritual washing and repentance. John isn’t inventing repentance; he’s intensifying it and pointing beyond himself.
- **Teacher-disciple culture:** Rabbis gathered disciples. “Where are you staying?” isn’t small talk - it’s the opening of apprenticeship: *How do we live with you?*

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **John’s ministry:** early 1st century, likely late 20s AD.
- **Jesus’ public emergence:** roughly around the same period, shortly after baptism.



- **Gospel of John composed:** commonly dated toward the **late first century** (often around 90s AD), reflecting mature theological reflection on earlier events.
- **Setting within the Gospel narrative:** the opening “week” of John’s story (a deliberate structure), where identity is revealed through witness and first

BIBLE TRANSLATION UNDERSTANDING

Original Language and Dating

- Written in **Greek**.
- John’s style is “simple Greek, deep theology”: short words, layered meaning.

Major Stages of English Translation (very brief)

- Early English streams include **Wycliffe** (from Latin), then **Tyndale** (from Greek), then the **King James Version** tradition, and later modern critical-text translations (RSV/NRSV, NIV, ESV, NASB, etc.) that draw on a wider range of Greek manuscripts and updated scholarship.

Theologically Significant Translation Choices (where one English word carries layers)

- **“Lamb of God”:** straightforward phrase, but it pulls a *web* of biblical associations (Passover lamb, sacrificial lamb, suffering servant).
- **“Takes away”:** can mean *lift up, carry off, remove*. It can suggest both **bearing** sin’s weight and **removing** sin’s power.
- **“Sin of the world”:** singular “sin” can sound like a collective condition, not just individual misdeeds - the world’s bent-ness that needs healing.
- **“Remain/abide”:** one of John’s signature words. Not a drive-by spiritual moment, but a **continuing presence**. It foreshadows John 15: “Abide in me.”
- **“Rabbi”** is kept as a transliteration in many Bibles, reminding us this is a Jewish teacher-disciple setting, not an abstract philosophy seminar.
- **“Messiah / Christ”:** John often translates “Messiah” for his readers. It’s identity *and* expectation.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

1. The Lamb as “God’s answer to the world’s broken cycles”

In John’s framing, Jesus doesn’t just scold sin - he interrupts a whole system of guilt, blame, scapegoating, and retaliation. The Lamb is not a mascot for passivity; it’s a symbol of nonviolent, self-giving love that absorbs the worst and still offers life.

Grant County angle: communities like ours know cycles: family conflict, addiction, poverty, generational grudges, “that’s just how it is.” **The Lamb of God signals: God’s way is to break the cycle, not keep score.**

2. Witness that points away from itself

John the Baptist’s greatness here is that he *de-centers himself*: “Look - him.” That’s rare. Most public voices point back to themselves.



Local angle: churches, nonprofits, and leaders can accidentally become the brand. John models a healthier posture: *We exist to direct attention toward Christ, not toward our own importance.*

3. “What are you looking for?” as a diagnostic question

Jesus’ first question in John isn’t “Do you believe?” It’s “What are you seeking?” That puts motives on the table: comfort, meaning, belonging, truth, status, a cause, a cure.

Local angle: In a town where people are often tired, stressed, and carrying a lot, this question lands gently but firmly: *What do you actually want from God - and are you willing to follow if the answer isn’t what you expected?*

4. Discipleship spreads through “come and see,” not pressure

Andrew doesn’t deliver a lecture. He brings Simon. The movement is relational.

Local angle: In Grant County, people sniff out “salesmanship” fast. This passage validates a quieter approach: invitation, hospitality, honest testimony, time with Jesus.

HOW SHOULD WE ACT AND REACT TO THIS SCRIPTURE TODAY?

1. Practice John’s kind of humility: point away from yourself.

Try: *“I’m still learning, but here’s what I’ve seen God do.”*

2. Let Jesus’ question search you: “What am I looking for?”

Name it plainly (security, control, relief, purpose), and bring it to prayer without dressing it up.

3. Choose “come and see” discipleship: less debate, more presence.

Replace one argument impulse with an invitation: coffee, lunch, church, a walk, *a conversation that isn’t trying to win.*

4. Live as people who don’t need a scapegoat.

If Jesus is the Lamb who takes away sin, we don’t need to dump our frustration onto “those people.” Practice responsibility, confession, repair.

5. Become an Andrew this week: bring one person closer to Jesus.

Not by force - by relationship. A simple “Want to come with me?” can be holy.

DISCUSSION

- *If Jesus asked you that question today (“What are you looking for?”), how honestly do you think you could answer it?*
- *Where is it hardest for us to “point and step back” — in family, church, politics, or work?*
- *Andrew doesn’t argue Simon into belief; he invites him to meet Jesus. Why do you think that approach is still effective — or difficult — today?*
- *Does this passage challenge us more toward humility, courage, patience, or something else?*
- *Which person do you relate to most in this passage right now: John the witness, the curious disciples, Andrew the inviter, or Simon being renamed?*



Addendum

The Golden Rule Vs. The Platinum Rule

This is one of those ideas that sounds like a tweak, but actually shifts the whole center of gravity.

1. The Golden Rule

Definition

"Treat others the way you would like to be treated."

This is the version most of us grew up with.

Key idea

- The moral reference point is **you**.
- It assumes that what you want is what others want.

Strengths

- Simple, memorable, portable across cultures
- Encourages empathy and restraint
- Works well when people share similar norms and expectations

Limitations

It assumes sameness where there may be difference

"I'm helping you the way *I* think help should look" can miss the mark

2. The Platinum Rule

Definition

*"Treat others the way **they** want to be treated."*

Key idea

- The moral reference point is **the other person**.
- It requires listening, curiosity, and humility.

What it adds

- Moves from empathy to **being deeply aware to another's feelings**
- Recognizes differences in culture, personality, trauma, needs, and values
- Asks not just "*What would I want?*" but "*What does this person need right now?*"

Practical implication

The Platinum Rule is less about intention and more about **impact**.

3. Origins of the Golden Rule

The Golden Rule is ancient and remarkably universal.

Ancient & Religious Roots

Versions appear across civilizations:



- **Judaism** (c. 1st century BCE)
"What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor." — Hillel
- **Christianity** (1st century CE)
"Do to others as you would have them do to you." — Jesus (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31)
- **Confucianism** (c. 5th century BCE)
"Do not impose on others what you do not wish for yourself."
- **Ancient Greece** (Isocrates, Seneca, others)
Similar formulations appear in Stoic ethics

Since so many cultures came up with it on their own, the Golden Rule looks more like a common human realization than a rule someone invented.

4. Origins of the Platinum Rule

The Platinum Rule is **modern**.

Modern Development

- Popularized in **business, leadership, and communication theory**
- Often attributed to **Dr. Tony Alessandra** in the 1990s (personality-based leadership and sales training)

Unlike the Golden Rule, it does **not** originate as a religious axiom. It's a response to pluralism: *one size no longer fits all*.

5. A Subtle but Important Tension

The Platinum Rule isn't simply "better" — it carries a risk if misunderstood.

- If taken too far, it can slip into **people-pleasing**
- It still requires **ethical boundaries**
- Wanting something doesn't automatically make it good

So many ethicists (someone who specializes in Ethics) see the Platinum Rule as a **refinement**, not a replacement.

