

GROW YOUR CAPACITY

living a life bigger than yourself

DAY 1 *enlarge your tent*

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:1-3

1 "Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the Lord. 2 "**Enlarge the place of your tent**, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. 3 For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited."

(Note: whenever you see the word "nation" in scripture, it is referring to people more than geographical boundaries.)

MAIN POINT

In Isaiah 54, God speaks to His people and tells us to **enlarge our capacity**; and He also tells us how to do it.

The Hebrew people understood this tent analogy because when their nation began they were nomadic Bedouins who lived in tents. When Abraham's family and his people had more children or took more people in, they would sew flaps into their tents to create more space. They had to lengthen the ropes, and a larger, heavier tent required stronger stakes in the ground.

This picture of a tent being enlarged is a picture of the potential for our lives. What God is saying through Isaiah to all of us is: Grow your life to provide a space and shelter for others. It will require us to change, to stretch and to be strengthened.

A big capacity will look different in each of us and is a process of growing our lives. It starts when the love of God touches our hearts and begins to affect the way we think and the decisions we make, which then shows up in very practical ways in our lives, like how we spend our time and our money.

If we're honest, left to ourselves, we all default to our own mission, goals and feelings. We're all very aware of ourselves and our own lives. Rather than causing us to grow, this can keep us small if it's all we focus on. (Self care has a place and we'll get into that later this week.)

The KEY to growing your capacity is to begin to shift your focus away from yourself and towards God and what He's doing, which is always about people.

EXAMPLE

In 2008 I believe I heard God speak this phrase to me: "enlarge your capacity" as a directive, which played out a few months later with a move across the Atlantic. My husband and I and our two sons (ages one and four at the time) "enlarged our lives" to include another nation when we moved from the USA to South Africa. We sold all of our belongings and left with 6 suitcases. Then, in 2016 we were given the opportunity to make more room in our lives for a new city, and a new mission, when we moved back to the USA and planted Border City Church in Detroit.

Growing your capacity will not always look dramatic, but it will always be about loving people, and it will always include change.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

In what ways might God be asking you to make more room in your life for others?

It might seem small, it might be big. You'll know by paying attention to what has "leapt" in your heart as we've looked at God's Word today.

PRAY

Talk to God about your response to the question. Voice how you feel about it. Listen for any response He wants to speak to your heart.



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DAY

2

fruitfulness

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:1

"Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For **more are the children of the desolate** than the children of the married woman," says the Lord.

MAIN POINT

In Isaiah 54, God begins by speaking to our barrenness, "Sing, O barren..." and then prophesies our fruitfulness "more are the children..." That's what capacity is for: **FRUITFULNESS**. It is not just so that we can do more, or be busy, just for the sake of activity.

God loves to bring fruitfulness from barrenness. It's His specialty! Scripture records true-life story after true-life story of nation-changing figures who were born from barren women and couples: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist were all born from impossible situations. Even Jesus was born to a virgin.

Wherever you feel barren or small, it is through that very place of your life that God wants to bring His life, His anointing, His salvation through you and to the world around you.

It may be in the area of your spiritual life, your marriage, your relationship with your kids, your work life, friendships, or in the area of your time. God wants to bring fruitfulness to all these areas.

Do not be limited! A limit is defined as – a point beyond which something may not extend; a restriction. I want to ask you, did God set those boundaries around your life, or did you set them by believing something small or negative about yourself?

Isaiah 57:15 describes God as "the One who inhabits eternity" – and the One who inhabits eternity is our Father. We have His "big" DNA. Ecclesiastes 3:11 says "He has planted eternity in the human heart."

EXAMPLE

Luke 1:30-38 gives the account of Mary who was told by an angel that she would conceive the Son of God! She wondered how this could be possible since she was a virgin, but Mary conceived when she said, "yes." Her capacity was literally enlarged for her to carry what God wanted to bring through her life. The same is true for us. We should be hungry to hear what God is speaking to us. Then, we "conceive" when we say, "yes" to Him. And we have the same calling as Mary: to bring Jesus to the world.

As we determine to live lives bigger than ourselves, to shift focus off of ourselves alone and onto Jesus and what He's saying, and to move in the direction of "for others," the impossible becomes possible. Dead things come alive and new life is born... new vision, creative ideas, new relationships, new businesses, new churches, and more. Capacity is for fruitfulness.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

Are there any areas in your life that are "barren" right now?

In what places do you feel "small?"

Where do you want to see growth and fruitfulness?

In what area/s of your life can you say "yes" to God?

PRAY

Talk to God about your response to the questions. Give those areas of your life to Him and invite Him to bring His life. Say "yes" to Him.

Listen for any response or direction He wants to give you.



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DAY **3** *stretch*

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:2

"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them **stretch** out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; **lengthen your cords...**"

MAIN POINT

As we established on Day 1 of this study, when God says "Enlarge the place of your tent, He is saying, "Grow Your Capacity."

This passage was written in the language of Hebrew. When we study the Hebrew word for "enlarge" it means to make room and open wide. So, God is calling us to make room and open up our lives to others.

In English, the word "capacity" is defined as – the potential or suitability for holding and accommodating. To me, this says that we are to grow on the inside to be able to bring more in from the outside.

Verse 2 of Isaiah 54 goes on to say, "do not spare" which speaks of a generous heart posture - God's heart posture.

Once again, this tent analogy is so helpful. As a tent grows in size and capacity, its cords have to be lengthened to support the heavier weight of a larger tent (see image on page 2 below). Likewise, as we grow our capacity, we will feel a corresponding **stretch** on our lives. The stretch that is required may even seem unreasonable at times.

EXAMPLE

When my husband and I moved our family to South Africa, I didn't know how that would affect the futures of my sons who were ages one and four at the time and how we would handle the inevitable changes in their education, experiences and upbringing. When I said "yes" to what I knew God was asking us to do, our kids experienced so much opportunity and blessing during those years in South Africa, that they never would have, if I had held us all back in fear.

In January of 2015, while living in Johannesburg, I experienced an armed robbery when I was alone in our home. Two men came into our house with a gun, pulled my wedding ring and watch off of me, and held me back as they stole all my jewelry and some of our valuables. They left me in my bathroom without harming me. For days I was in shock and my biggest fear was that I would live in fear for the rest of my life. A week or so after the robbery, I realized that it had taken place on January 15th, the sixth anniversary of our family's move to South Africa. In South Africa that date is written as 15/1. I had just begun a one-year Bible reading plan and since I was reading through the book of Genesis I felt prompted to see what Genesis 15:1 said. I felt God speaking directly to my heart as I read, "Do not be afraid... I am your shield..." I knew God was showing me that He had been present in that fearful moment as a shield and had protected me. I could trust Him. I didn't have to be afraid, or let fear become my new "address" in life.

I didn't know at the time that God was going to call us next to Detroit, which has a reputation as the most dangerous city, with the most incidence of violent crime in the USA. If I was afraid, I wouldn't have been able to say "yes" to God and make that move.

The obstacles we face will try to keep us small, but every time we trust and follow God, our cords are lengthened. Turn your experiences, your fears, your situations over to God and ask Him to use those challenges to lengthen your cords and increase your capacity for what He wants to add to your life.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

What fears are you facing that could be used to grow your capacity, if you will turn those fears over to God?

How is God stretching you in life right now? Can you see His purpose in it?

Are you willing to let God stretch you and grow your capacity?

PRAY

Talk through your fears with God and turn them over to Him.

Ask Him to show you His purpose in stretching you.

If you are willing to allow God to stretch your life and grow your capacity, tell Him that you are willing.



GROW YOUR CAPACITY

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DAY 4 *strength*

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:2

"Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and **strengthen your stakes.**"

MAIN POINT

A larger tent will not only need longer cords, but also its stakes will need to be stronger and go deeper into the ground, able to support the increased weight of the enlarged tent. In the same way, an enlarged life capacity has to be built on something deep and stable. Where does that **strength** for the bigger "tent" come from? How do you "strengthen your stakes?" Let's look at two ways scripture shows us.

1. Ephesians 3:16, 17 says, "to be *strengthened* with might through His Spirit... that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being *rooted and grounded in love*..." Our strength comes from faith in Jesus and God's love for us. We can drive our stakes into that love more deeply each day, simply by believing in Jesus with faith and trust. When His love touches us it reveals places of insecurity in our lives and gives opportunity for those places to be strengthened.
2. Psalm 92:12-14 teaches us more about how we can root our lives. "The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, they shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh and flourishing."

I've seen over and over again that when a person "plants" themselves in a healthy local church their life begins to take root. They become stable, they flourish and grow fruit; their capacity grows and they become part of that stabilizing, strengthening soil for others, even for generations to come.

A tree that is uprooted and moved around from place to place, will not grow. Likewise, if we move around from church to church and never plant ourselves, we won't grow. No church is perfect. But the Church is Jesus' bride and His Body. As we love Him, we should love, honor and be committed to the local and specific church that he places each of us into as His followers.

EXAMPLE

Every time my life has expanded to include more people (marriage, having kids, moving to a new nation, making new friends, starting a business, leading a church) there had to be a corresponding strengthening of my life "underground."

In each season of growth God has used circumstances and situations to give me a deeper revelation of His love. He has walked me through forgiveness, He has healed past hurts and helped me with insecurities. I've learned that when God is working deeply in me, He must be preparing and strengthening me for growth that is coming.

In every season of my life, God has used the local church to strengthen me, provide accountability and leadership, and has been the perfect "soil" for me to grow in. I can't imagine doing life apart from the local church.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

Are you rooted in relationship with Jesus, receiving His love into your life daily, which gives your life stability and strength?

Are there areas of pain or insecurity in your life that you sense God bringing to the surface so He can heal you?

Are you planted in a local church?

PRAY

Thank God for His love and for your relationship with Him through Jesus.*

As you thank Him, allow His presence and His love touch any places of pain or insecurity you may have. If God highlights something to you that you need to forgive, take a step and pray a prayer, releasing forgiveness from your heart.

Thank God for your local church and ask God to show you if there are ways that you could become more planted in those relationships so you can grow.

*If you don't have a relationship with God, you can receive Jesus today and ask Him to become your leader as you follow Him with your life.



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DAY

5

loving people

SCRIPTURE

Isaiah 54:1-3

1 "Sing, O barren, you who have not borne! Break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who have not labored with child! For more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married woman," says the Lord. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. 3 For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will **inherit the nations**, and make the desolate cities inhabited."

MAIN POINT

In this study of Isaiah 54 we have seen that:

1. God invites us to make space in our lives and grow our capacity
2. a big capacity is for fruitfulness, not just busyness
3. enlarging will cause stretching in our lives
4. a bigger capacity will require more strength and that strength comes from God.

Today we will see the purpose of growing our capacity as we look at verse 3: "For you shall expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited."

As mentioned on Day 1, the word "nations" in scripture is referring to the people in those nations, not so much the geographical boundaries. So when this passage speaks of "inheriting nations" it's saying that God wants to add people to your life and bring them under the covering of your "tent/shelter" of your life so to speak. It means lending our security and strength, giving care, or simply put - growing your capacity is for the unselfish purpose of **loving people**.

EXAMPLE

Before we came to Detroit my husband and I led a church in Johannesburg. A few months in to taking the lead pastor role of that existing church (which already had a significant history, a unique destiny and an established community of relationships) I suddenly began to severely doubt myself. Even though we knew that God had called us to lead that church, it was confirmed by those we partner with, and we had a lot of peace when we stepped in to be the new leaders, thoughts like this began to come to me: "Who do you think you are? You can't do this. You're not even from here. Go back to the USA where you belong."

I told my husband that I'd better get a grip or I wasn't going to be any help to anybody.

I literally went into my closet and got on my knees and said, "God I really need your help with what's happening in my mind." Instantly, this verse came to mind in which the Father is speaking to Jesus: "Ask Me, and I will make the nations your inheritance." Psalm 2:8

I sensed Jesus gently asking me, "How do you think I receive my inheritance in the earth?" I knew the answer, and as it is every time Jesus speaks, the truth settled my heart, silenced the voices racing through my head and restored my courage. I answered Him, "You receive your inheritance in the earth through me."

Scripture calls us the Body of Christ - Jesus is literally here in the earth through us. As His followers we are His ambassadors to the world and our mission is to receive Jesus' inheritance on His behalf. Let's willingly represent Him and generously open the "tents" of our lives wide to receive His inheritance, all the people He loves so dearly, loving them and serving them with our lives in whatever spheres of influence God has placed us so that more and more people would know His love and salvation.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

What are the spheres God has set you in where you could potentially be an influence for His purposes? (work, business, school, neighborhood, hobbies, friendships, etc.)

Who are the people God has placed on your heart to share your life with, to lend strength to, to influence with love?

How could your talents, ideas, endeavors, your home, your business and anything else be used to serve people?

PRAY

Talk to God about your responses to the questions.



GROW YOUR CAPACITY

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DAY

6

protect
your capacity

SCRIPTURE

Psalm 1:3

"That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its **fruit in season** and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers."

MAIN POINTS

1. Part of growing and maintaining a big capacity is learning to protect my capacity and steward what I've already been given. This is done by knowing what **season** I am in. What is the priority of this season? Just because I CAN do something, doesn't mean I SHOULD (such as serving on all the committees at school or work, or every sports club for our kids). We must learn to steward our seasons well. Havilah Cunningham says it like this, "The only way to have a strong yes is to have a strong no." What is a strong yes? It's having the capacity to say yes to God, being obedient to Him and what He's asking you to do in this season. Some of us need to develop a strong no. No to the things that are keeping you from having that strong yes.
2. To protect my capacity I need to learn how to **rest**. Even Jesus valued rest as we see in Mark 6:7 "And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits... 12 So they went out and preached that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them... (my note: these were all GOOD things they were DOing!) 30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, 'Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.' For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves..." No matter how noble your cause, rest is needed and is holy and godly, modeled for us by Jesus.

3. The most important way to protect and steward my capacity is through my **relationship and connection with God**. We continue reading about Jesus' life in Mark 6:45 "Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. 46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray."

We grow our connection with God by going to scripture and to prayer to hear Him speak, spending time in His presence to be filled with His Spirit. If this isn't a reality in your life, don't feel bad. You can start where you are. What works for me is to have a specific place and a dedicated time every day. For me it's by a window with a cup of coffee first thing in the morning. If you're just starting out, 5 minutes is good. Read a scripture and then talk to God about what you read. Over time you can grow it to 10 or 30 minutes and your relationship with God will grow too.

EXAMPLE

In 2014 one of my dearest friends faced, battled and recovered from cancer, and then in 2015 I had a major surgery that required six weeks of rest and recuperation. It was during those times that I began to blog and write on the topic of this study. At the time of this writing we are experiencing the global Covid-19 pandemic and all of our lives have changed dramatically, giving us an opportunity to reevaluate everything.

In the 21st century we live our lives at an unreasonably fast pace and sometimes it takes extraordinary, jolting circumstances for us to learn the necessary value of slowing down. Good things come when we pause. You can be a big capacity person and not live a frenetic life. God has a better way for us. Remember, growing your capacity is for fruitfulness, not just busyness.

PRACTICAL

Our lives and our capacities are not only like tents, they are also like cups. People come to your "cup" to "drink" from you. Your family, your work colleagues, your friends. Often times we feel like we are only pouring out. It is my responsibility (no one else's) to make sure that my cup is getting refilled. It is not selfish to make sure your cup gets filled. You cannot pour from an empty cup. You will be the best version of you, and you will love others well by keeping your cup full.

What are the things that fill your cup? There are various areas of our lives that need to be replenished and cared for. We all need to be filled spiritually, we have relational needs, some need time alone, some of us are recharged by the outdoors or hobbies, we all need rest. Knowing what fills your cup and then making sure those things actually end up on your calendar (even if it means saying "no" to something else) is an essential part of growing your capacity.

So, it is within this context that self care finds its place. It is essential, but even that is not ultimately "for" me. As we have seen throughout this study, God calls us to live selfless lives, to grow our capacity for the sake of OTHERS.

QUESTIONS - take some notes on your phone or in your journal

What do you need to say "no" to, so that you can say "yes" to God and to your priorities?

Are you getting enough rest (sleep and down time)? Do you need to make any adjustments there?

Are you prioritizing your connection with God, treating that relationship as the main factor that will grow your life?

Make a list of the areas of your life that need refilling regularly and the frequency you need those things to stay healthy spiritually, mentally and physically. (Be as specific as you can, like a daily debrief with your spouse, going for a run three times a week, checking in with your mom once a week, taking a class on a hobby once a month, or going on a vacation once a year.)

Take time to discuss these things with the people in your life so that these things can realistically begin to happen. Then, put them on your calendar.

PRAY

Talk to God about any of the decisions you've made today.

Let God know your heart's desires and ask Him what His desires are for you.

Ask God to grow your capacity.

