

**Title:** Sanctuary, Scorn or Stumbling? // **Scripture:** Isaiah 7-8

**ARRIVAL / SOCIAL TIME** *15-20 minutes*

Spend the first 15 minutes or so of your time together catching up and socializing with one another. Also find time to catch up together on how the assignments from last week turned out.

**SERMON REVIEW** *5-10 minutes*

Isaiah 7–8 is a text drenched in the language of both fear and faith. The question that arises in the story of Ahaz is: how is it possible to trust God in the midst of a crisis of fear?

Fear is usually something we try to avoid but still run into with frustrating frequency. Sometimes it rushes over us in an instant, and other times it grinds away at us from the margins of our minds until we can barely generate an idea that isn't shaped by its shadow. We often find ourselves attempting to justify, magnify and, at times, even amplify our fears to support fearful alliances of our own making. In the face of pending crisis, Ahaz is invited to show quiet confidence in the powerful presence of God for protection. Instead of trusting a faithful God, Ahaz makes a fateful choice to fall back on fearful alliances with future enemies.

Trusting God in the tension of wild uncertainty and fear doesn't free us from difficult circumstance, or even from suffering or pain, but with firm reliance in "God with us" we can confidently choose to become people of faith in the midst of fear, people of trust in the midst of trauma and people of hope in the midst of hard moments. The words of Isaiah summon all readers to a radical faith in the only God truly worth fearing. It is up to each of us to decide if his presence will result in scorn, stumbling or sanctuary as we respond to "God with us."

**THE MAIN THOUGHT** *keep this in mind as you facilitate discussion*

In a world full of fear, every unknown can be measured against the faithfulness of our well-known God.

**SEE IT – Questions** *10-15 minutes*

**Picture** (What is the story saying?): What was the decision that fear was pushing Ahaz to make? What was the word of the Lord that Isaiah brought to Ahaz? What was the sign that God gave Ahaz? What was the meaning of that sign? What was Ahaz's response?

**Mirror** (Where am I in the story?): What part of the story do you most identify with? How can you demonstrate faith in the face of fear? When was the last time you chose firm reliance on God over fearful alliances with the world around you? What was the outcome?

**Window** (How does the story change how I see those around me?): What are the greatest fears right now in your family, community, neighborhood, workplace, etc.? What would it look like for you to demonstrate quiet confidence in God in those environments of crisis or unknown fears?

**BE IT – Practice**

**Change UP // Exercise** *5 minutes*

What do David and Solomon say about the fear of God in the Psalms and Proverbs? Share some of those passages together. Spend some time in prayer together. Ask God to help you fear him like that! Invite him to transform your life from one of fearful alliances in the world to faithful reliance on God.

**Change IN // Group Activity** *5 minutes*

Take a moment to identify a "tree-shaking" fear that you are currently facing. Take turns sharing a corresponding truth of God that you could fully rely on in the face of this fear. What is one way you could show that trust today?

**Change OUT // Life Application Assignment** *5 minutes*

Take up the challenge to refocus your fears by faith. If you are overwhelmed by media, choose a day to pray with a friend while commuting to work instead of listening to talk radio. If you are concerned about immigration, choose a time each week to volunteer with refugees in Clarkston. If you are dismayed by corruption, commit to start each day with the Lord's Prayer and invite His kingdom to come. Be ready to share your stories next week!

**CLOSING PRAYER** *5 minutes* May you see God clearly, hear His calling clearly, and may He help you fulfill that calling in faithfulness, trusting no matter how bleak things may appear, we trust the God who raises the dead.