

**Context:**

This passage is the second of the four “Servant songs” embedded in the section of Isaiah we believe addresses the Jews exiled in Babylon, calling them to take heart and get ready to go home because Yahweh God has returned for them. The Servant of Yahweh is a puzzling figure. Is he a person or the personification? Sometimes he seems to be an individual, but at other times a personification either of the whole people or of the exiled community being called to show the rest of Israel and the nations the grace they receive from God who leads them home. What we can say is that in these four passages or “songs,” we see one who takes “the form of a servant” (see what Philippians 2:1-11 says about Jesus) and gives himself to suffering for the sake of the others.

**This “song”:**

The Servant is discouraged. Neither his sense of calling from God nor his efforts to teach the people are producing any apparent results. Convinced of his calling, he struggles with his disappointment and frustration. If God has given him the task, surely he must be able to do it successfully, but success is not forthcoming.

In a seemingly harsh irony, Yahweh God responds to the Servant’s frustration by giving him more to do.

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.

Actually, the response from God does not say the Servant will have to work harder; it says God will make more of what the Servant does. God is going to do something bigger than the restoration of Israel. What God will do with the Servant’s struggle and suffering will reach out to all people.

**A couple thoughts on a passage that could generate many, many ideas and applications:**

In our outcome-based, data-driven society, success-oriented society, we miss things that matter to God: relationships, the rescue or growth of one person, understanding shared, empathy and compassion, prayer, and faith itself. Life is not outcome-based. God will take care of outcomes, and we can’t measure them accurately on God’s terms, anyway.

In a time of desperation for church renewal, too easily miscast in terms of numerical increase or even restored influence in the society, we easily miss what God is really calling us to do. God turns us outward, not to calculate our own gains, but to reach out to people in ministry and service. Like a person, a church must lose itself in service in order to find itself.