

One of the most difficult things in life is when difficult things don't end. Most can put up with just about anything for a short stint, but enduring ongoing or chronic trials and discouragements is a whole other challenge.

It's been said, "Discouragement usually isn't born in a single bad day – it's born in the thousandth day of the same struggle."

Some of you know the challenges involved in battling ongoing health issues or long chapters of heartache in unhealthy marriages. Sometimes the long periods of discouragement come from a negative work situation where your relationship with your boss or coworkers is always stressed or there is regular tension in the air. Some have chronic financial stress and frustration.

During prolonged seasons of challenge when it feels like life is all uphill, we can become weary and very discouraged—they can simply wear a person down over time. And the longer periods of discouragement go, the more difficult it is to find any comfort or to stay positive in spirit and attitude.

**[Illustration]** - Imagine hiking with a backpack that someone secretly adds rocks to every mile.

At first you manage fine.

Then your shoulders ache.

Then you slow down.

Eventually you wonder if you can keep going at all.

That's what prolonged hardship feels like – increasing emotional and spiritual weight.

**[Transition]** - If you find yourself in that type of situation today then Isaiah has a message for you. Even if you are not currently in discouraging circumstances in your life the message Isaiah brings today is perhaps one of the most encouraging and refreshing parts of the entire Bible. Today Isaiah reminds us God never forgets us during our trials. In fact, he's committed to renewing us, reviving us, and ultimately restoring us. Open your Bibles to Isaiah 40

Let me set some context for us. In many ways the book of Isaiah is the Bible in miniature. Like the Bible, the book has two major divisions, and like the Bible the main theme of the first part is judgment and the main theme of the second is hope.

In our study of Isaiah, today Chapter 40 begins a whole new section of the book. It's interesting to note, that the historical time context for Isaiah 40-66 is entirely different than the first 39 chapters. As Chapter 40 opens, it's addressing issues that happen about 300 years after chapter 39.

Obviously, Isaiah was not alive then. Scholars have offered different explanations for this, but to me the best explanation is that God has given Isaiah the ability to see into the future and speak to those who will live through the coming decimation and downfall of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians in 586BC.

Beginning in Isaiah 40, Isaiah is giving this prophetic message of assurance and promise for his people of the Southern Kingdom of Judah who would eventually be exiled to Babylon once the Southern kingdom fell. I know...a ton of history. Sometimes difficult to keep straight.

Bottomline, here's what I want you to hold in your brains. As we come to Isaiah 40, Isaiah is addressing a people who will become very familiar with hardships, chronic discouragement and ongoing disappointment in their lives. But Isaiah is assuring them, God has not forgotten you, and he has not abandoned you—restoration is coming. This message was as vital for them, as it is for us in our day.

**[Transition]** – As you may remember from the first half of our series, Isaiah 1-39 was heavy on warning and judgement. It emphasized God as holy and just, worthy of obedience. But now, beginning with Isaiah 40 the prophecy shifts to consolation, hope, and promise, and God as redeemer and comforter. It's a great day to be in church. Read verses 1-5

### **People of God...take heart (1-5)!**

Comfort in Hebrew means to "to turn away suffering—either by ending it or coming along side and helping them through it."<sup>1</sup> Once God calls out to comfort his people, it's as good as done. The repetition of it indicates urgency. The exile brings tremendous suffering on his people, but now they have suffered enough. Their discipline is over. They have endured double trouble for all their sins. But now it's restoration time. Comfort, tender care, and renewal is promised.

The restoration starts with a declaration that one is coming who will fully resolve their sin issues and lead them back to God. They will recognize this Savior because one will precede him, and will come to prepare a way for the deliverer. Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed.

These verses might sound familiar to you as each of the four Gospel writers-Matthew, Mark, Luke and John refer to them as they describe the ministry of John the Baptist. And in John, the Baptist himself quotes it saying, "I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness."

Isaiah wants to target those who are feeling weighed down, worn down and run down from the burdens in their lives. Those who are struggling and stumbling can take heart. God is about to reveal something big. Discouraged heart...disappointed heart, perk up, lift your head and be encouraged.

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<sup>1</sup> Westermann, Claus. The Old Testament Library. Isaiah 40-66. Westminster: Philadelphia. 1969. P.34.

**[Transition]** – But why? On what basis can real encouragement be taken? What will stir real hope in the sleepy heart? How can we know for sure God will bring comfort? Read verses 6-8.

### **Though humankind is finite and frail, God is everlasting and strong (6-8).**

God is not calling us to hope in our human ingenuity. Or to hope in our human strength. He's certainly not expecting us to hope in our own ability.

The charge to take heart, take comfort is not based on the power of positive thinking. It is not dependent on anything generated by human effort. It's not based on pulling yourself up by your own bootstraps or practicing the principles of Tony Robbins or any other "success is in the mind" or "power of positive thinking" motivational podcast.

Here's the reality: Life is crazy sometimes. Fire stations burn down. You guys remember when that happened here in Cameron Park? That was ironic. Man's efforts have very finite limits.

We're like the grass of these foothills around us. Our faithfulness is green for a brief season then it withers. We're like flowers that bloom for short time then dry up. Isaiah makes a powerful contrast here. He contrasts the helplessness of humankind with the infinitely powerful Word and presence of God.

Here's the point: The basis for taking heart, being encouraged and taking comfort is because the unfailing, everlasting word of God is behind it. There is no surer guarantee than that. God's word is his work! It's his action. There is no difference between what he says he will do and what he does. All our efforts as people, are finite, limited and frail, but God is absolutely majestic and everlasting.

**[Transition]** - And God is so excited about this message of comfort, restoration and healing. He wants it shouted from the mountain tops. Read verses 9-11.

### **Though he's the majestic God of the universe, he's a tender, gentle shepherd (9-11).**

In the past weeks in our series in Isaiah...I think you will agree...we've heard a tremendous number of tough warnings and judgments being declared from God. But now, more clearly and loudly than the word of judgment was proclaimed, the word of comfort and hope is to be proclaimed.

Though God is all-powerful and the majestic God of the universe... he is gentle like a shepherd as he tenderly cares for his flock. Notice verse 11...he's a gentle shepherd gathering his lambs in his arms...carrying them close to his heart...gently leading them. For sure our God is holy and just, but here Isaiah reminds us he's so gentle, so tender, so kind and loving. This is the message he wants to resonate in their hearts.

The New Testament speaks to the specifics and minutia of this tender care from our magnificent God. It even comprehends the smallest bird and the finest hair of your heady head head.

Matthew 10:29-31 says, *"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of you heard are all numbered. So, don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows."*

**[Transition]** - To be sure, our God is a tender, gentle shepherd but, make no mistake he's not a lightweight. He's not weak. We're not placing our hope in some namby-pamby God. Our confidence in his promises can be strengthened as we remember how all-powerful and capable he is. Notice what Isaiah declares in verses 12-26.

## **Everything is nothing compared to God (12-26).**

He is absolutely incomparable. Everything amazing about creation is less than nothing compared to him – they are a minus.

This is one of the central OT passages on creation. Every last, minute bit of creation was measured out, weighed out, and placed out by God; all in the unbounded, unsurpassed wisdom of God who did not need anyone to fine-tune him. God originates everything, maintains everything, controls the operation of everything and directs all of it to the end he appoints.

And what's more, the text says that creation in all its glory is a drop...a dust...a nothing...worthless, a minus when compared to the matchless majesty of God.

Isaiah is not implying that creation is bad or that humankind has no value. But, compared to the supreme majesty of God, creation and even humankind in all its glory pales in comparison.

**[Transition]** – Now, with all that being true...friends, there's no need to every fret, or wring our hands, or let ourselves believe that God has forgotten us, disregarded us, or isn't capable of renewing us and reviving us. Notice verses 27-31.

## **God is tireless in his care for those who hope in him (27-31).**

### **I think God has forgotten about me and my situation.**

Boy, how many times have you and I thought that? We get into tough situations in life, and they go on and on for awhile and we pray and we wait and we start to get a little frustrated and we say, "I don't think God is hearing me." "I don't think God sees me or cares about me."

**[Illustration]** - Here's how the internal progression can unfold:

- Faith – "God will handle this."
- Confusion – "Why hasn't He yet?"
- Fatigue – "I'm so tired."
- Discouragement – "Maybe nothing will change."

- Distorted thinking – “God doesn’t see me.” (Isaiah 40:27)

Here’s something important to keep in mind; the hardest trials in life are rarely the explosive ones – they’re the slow ones. The ones that last months... or years... where you wake up every morning and the situation is still there. And somewhere along the way, exhaustion starts whispering lies about God.” “I wonder if God has forgotten about me?”

**[Transition]** - Thinking that God doesn’t see you or hear you is so totally impossible that Isaiah asks, “how can you think that? That’s a lie from the pit of hell and it smells like smoke. Here’s the truth that counters that lie. Don’t you know? Haven’t you heard?” Look at his description of God.

- a. The Lord is *everlasting*.
- b. God is *tireless*.
- c. His understanding is *limitless*.
- d. He gives power and strength to all who hope in Him.

“He gives power to those who are tired and worn out; he offers strength to the weak...those who wait on the Lord will find new strength. They will fly high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint” (NLT)

### 1. **Renewal starts by opening your heart to Jesus.**

The text says that kind of personalized care and renewal from the majestic God of the universe is available to each person who hopes in God. Hope in God starts by placing your trust in God’s Son, Jesus. Have you done that yet? If not, this is your first important take-away from this message today.

Jesus himself said, “...no one comes to the Father, but through me.” And when you walk with Jesus and put your hope in him...he leads you like a gentle shepherd, loving on you and renewing you through the struggles and disappointments in your life.

For some of you today is where it can all begin to change for you—today you can open your heart to Jesus and ask him to be your leader and

forgiver. When you do that, his Spirit sets up residence in you and makes you his own. Then he goes to work. Sometimes he changes your circumstances, and sometimes he changes you and gives you everything you need so you're not fighting the battles in your own strength.

When you open your heart to him, and many of you already have, let me suggest three additional takeaways from this important chapter in Isaiah.

## **2. Remember Who God Is (Refocus Your Mind Before You Fix Your Situation)**

Notice, Isaiah 40 spends far more time describing God than solving Israel's problems. That's not accidental! Weariness shrinks our vision. Knowing God restores it.

Here's a practice I'd recommend:

- Spend some time this week reading verses 12-31 slowly.
- Write down every description of God you see (Creator, Shepherd, Everlasting, Powerful, Attentive).
- When discouraging thoughts come, intentionally replace them with one truth about God's character.

Remember, your strength will not return because your circumstances improve. Your strength returns when your vision of God grows bigger than your circumstances.

## **3. Practice waiting on the Lord with bite-sized faithfulness.**

When people are exhausted, they often think they need some sort of massive, dramatic spiritual effort. But notice, Isaiah's promise is for those who simply wait. God is not asking you for impressive faith. He is inviting you to dependent faith.

Maybe try some small bite-sized spiritual practices:

- A short daily prayer: "Lord, I am tired. Be my strength today."
- Read one Psalm per day.
- Listen to worship music during a commute.
- Sit quietly before God for five quiet minutes before bed.

The goal isn't intensity – it's connection.

#### **4. Take the next step, not the whole Journey**

Remember what Isaiah says:

- Walk and not faint
- Run and not grow weary
- Mount up with wings like eagles

Notice: all movement, but at different speeds. It's a progression. Start small.

So, for some of you it's going to be most helpful for you to focus on one small step in the right direction. So, this week ask God, "What is the next faithful thing God is asking of me?" Not next year. Not next month. Just next.

It might just be:

- Make the phone call
- Show up to church
- Decide to forgive one person
- Rest one evening
- Pray one honest prayer

Remember how Jesus taught us to pray... "Give us this day our daily bread."

You don't need strength for tomorrow yet. God gives strength in daily portions. When people feel hopeless, the future feels overwhelming. But God gives strength for the next step, not the entire path.

Some of you came in today tired in your soul. You love God... but you're worn down. Please realize: your weariness does not disqualify you from God's promises – it only qualifies you for them! The promises Isaiah gives us today were not for the strong. They are for the weary who wait!

If you're weary of trying to make life work on your own, I'd invite you to open your heart to Jesus. You can pray something like this:

*Jesus, thanks for loving me no matter what. I've realized today how tired I am trying to make life work on my own. I really need you. I need you to forgive my sin and I need you to fill me with your Spirit. I need you and I want to follow your leadership in my life from this day forward.*