



EAGLE DEVOTIONAL

ISAIAH 40:31

“But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary they shall walk and not faint.”

EXPERIENCE

Taking off from a perch high in the treetops, the eagle never flapped its wings. Instead, this noble bird spread its wings wide and rode the wind. Slowly the currents took the eagle higher and higher until it soared out of sight.¹ An eagle possesses powerful wings, yet an eagle’s strength to soar is a clear emblem of trusting in a power outside itself. Eagles entrust themselves to the wind. They instinctually understand how to navigate the currents of air to rise higher and higher, relying upon the strength of the wind to carry them, rather than the flapping of their wings. Expending little energy, the eagle stays aloft. It can easily soar away from any ground level

¹ My friend Steve related this recent eagle encounter described above to me as we spoke about an eagle that flew directly over my head.

danger, and there are few birds in the sky that pose a threat to bald eagles. As it soars over water it vigilantly keeps its eagle eye (they have amazing vision) trained on its prey and dives to catch a fish! Eagles are awe-inspiring to watch whether perched on a tree, diving for a fish, or soaring in the skies. What a majestic and noble looking bird. It is no wonder that America's founders picked the eagle as our national symbol. However, our Creator designed the eagle to symbolize important theological truths for his people to ponder.

CONTEMPLATION

An eagle that recently flew over my head at a local summer camp prompted me to meditate about renewed strength in the face of weariness. I was preparing for a volunteer work weekend because the camp's property was devastated by a tornado last fall. The amount of work necessary to get the property back up and running for this summer is overwhelming. In the face of many obstacles, it would be easy to feel a bit of hopelessness. With such a wearying task list, camp staff and volunteers might question at times whether they have the strength to press on.

Seeing the eagle reminded me of Isaiah 40:27-31. In this text, God's people fell into the temptation to think God had disregarded their plight. The nature of their difficult circumstances created a degree of hopelessness and despair. Yet, Isaiah reminded the people of God's character and used the emblem of eagles to encourage them to hope in the Lord, trusting in his strength to empower them to soar in the midst of trials. Isaiah's use of the eagle to remind and encourage is reminiscent of God's statement to the Israelites in Exodus 19:4, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you

on eagles' wings and brought you to myself."² God used the eagle as a metaphor for his lifting them out of bondage.

The eagle is an emblem of God's strong power to save. God not only frees his people from bondage, he also renews them from weariness. According to Isaiah 40, the Lord "gives strength" and "increases the power of the weak" (v. 29). For those who hope in the Lord, God renews strength. As I have walked through a particularly wearying season, eagles have been a great reminder to me of the truths communicated through these birds and God's Word. At three different bodies of water, in a matter of just a few weeks, I have observed eagles—what a treat! An eagle soaring represents the Lord lifting believers up from a fallen state of exhaustion and elevating their spirits too. Soaring also symbolizes God-given insight to put hard circumstances into the proper perspective. Eagles are a profound inspiration to encourage believers to trust and hope in the Lord's strength and understanding (v. 28).

Where do you find yourself weary, exhausted by current circumstances, and in need of God's strength and wisdom—of mounting up on wings like eagles?

PRAYER

Gracious God, you are the everlasting God. From one end of the earth to the other, you have created it all and oversee it all. Who can fathom your power and understanding? My hope is in you Lord. Renew my strength. Give me strength that I might run and not grow weary, that I might walk and not be faint. Fortify my trust in you and

² Note the intertextual echoes and overlapping themes in Isaiah 40:27-31 from Exodus 18:17-19:4.

in your sovereign strength, that I might mount up with wings like eagles. I ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

CONFIRMATION

The Bible references eagles at least thirty times. Eagles serve as a Scriptural metaphor representing a variety of concepts. As stated above, the eagle is an emblem of God's saving his people from Egypt and bringing them to himself (Exodus 19:4). Moses expanded this metaphor of God's rescue and protection in Deuteronomy 32:10-11, describing how, like an eagle, God found, encircled, picked up, and bore them on his wings. The Apostle John writes similarly in Revelation 12:14. The eagle is a symbol of human swiftness in 2 Samuel 1:23 and human pride (lifting oneself up) in Obadiah 1:4. However, my current favorite is the eagle as an emblem of renewal in Psalm 103:5 and Isaiah 40:31. The picture of soaring like an eagle with renewed hope and trust in the Lord is profound and powerful, especially in the face of weakness and weariness.



Charles Spurgeon

From Sermon #3417 "Our Youth Renewed".³

Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon on spiritual renewal, using Psalm 103:5. The verse says, ". . . who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's." He preached as follows: "The eagle is a bird of strong flight, and that flight may be reckoned as a part of its youth which is renewed. Large as it is, sometimes measuring from

³ <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs3417.pdf>

six to eight feet broad when its wings are outspread, yet as soon as it vanishes out of sight it is lost in the blaze of the sun. At another time the eagle is on its flight, simply making progress. So with the Christian. His youth is renewed. He mounts upwards in communion with God, higher, higher, higher. His motto is— ‘Nearer, my God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee; This still my cry shall be, Nearer to Thee, nearer to Thee.’ Up he mounts like the eagle, or at other times he goes onward in his Christian pathway, going from strength to strength until he appears before his God. Now, it is a mercy for us that the Lord is pleased to renew our power of fellowship with Himself, our power of making progress in the divine life, just as He renews the eagle’s youth.”



John Stott

From his book, *The Birds Our Teachers*”.⁴

After doing my own meditation on eagles, my mother-in-law reminded me of Stott’s book on birds. Sure enough, he had a chapter on eagles and the continuity between his meditation and my own is uncanny. Our parallel thoughts are another confirmation of the strikingly obvious characteristics of so many of God’s emblems in creation. Furthermore, I hope this inspires you to go outdoors and do your own creation meditation.

Stott writes: “The biblical symbol of true freedom is not the flight of the seagull but the flight of the eagle. The false gospel of *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* is that ‘we can lift ourselves’ out of ignorance,

⁴ John Stott, *The Birds Our Teachers*, Collector’s Edition (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007), 56-57.

materialism and failure . . . the true gospel of Jesus Christ is that *he* is able to lift us.⁵ So flight in Scripture is not a symbol of self-effort but of salvation. The picture it presents is not the strenuous flapping of wings, but the spreading of wings to catch the wind, and effortless soaring into the sky.

There are two notable references to the flight of eagles in the Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, both of which emphasize its mystery and majesty. 'Does the eagle soar at your command', God asks Job, 'and build his nest on high?' (Job 39:27). The expected answer is plain. The flight of eagles is beyond human understanding and control. So one of Israel's wise men confessed that, of four things which were 'too amazing' for him, one was 'the way of an eagle in the sky' (Proverbs 30: 18,19).

Nevertheless, in spite of the enigmatic nature of eagle flight, it remains a visual emblem of strength. It illustrates the saving power of God displayed in the experience of both the nation and the individual. In describing his rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, God said he had carried them 'on eagles' wings' and brought them to himself (Exodus 19:4). And when even his own people are conscious of their weakness, they can have no higher aspiration than to 'soar on wings like eagles' (Isaiah 40:31; compare Psalm 103:5). This does not represent self-effort, however. For the only people who 'renew their strength', who walk and run without growing tired and who even fly like eagles, are those who wait patiently for the Lord, and put their trust in him (Isaiah 40:29-31)."

⁵ Jonathan Livingstone Seagull is the name of a seagull in the allegorical tale written by Richard Bach which is a reflection upon flight, freedom, and human nature.