

Isaiah Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations-Our Daily Bread

- Devotionals from Moody Bible Institute's Today in the Word - Isaiah 1 - 44
- Devotionals from Moody Bible Institute's Today in the Word - Isaiah 45-66

Below is a compilation of more than 300 "Our Daily Bread" Devotionals arranged by chapter. These devotionals make excellent sermon illustrations. Updated January 26, 2016

Isaiah 1

- [Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)

Isaiah 1:1-9 The Teacher Is An Animal

The ox knows its owner ... ; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider. —Isaiah 1:3

Animals sometimes seem to have more sense than people. Because of their alertness to natural phenomena, they have at times helped us to avoid disaster.

In northeastern China, officials were able to warn and evacuate people from high-risk areas hours before a killer earthquake struck. They were alerted to the disaster by cattle that mooed more than usual and chickens that refused to roost. And in Japan, 20 small quakes within a few months were accurately forecast because observers noted that catfish swam frantically, as if chased by sharks.

From the prophet Isaiah we learn that observing animals can even teach us how to prevent a ruined life (Isa 1:2-9). He noted that an ox knows its owner, and a donkey knows where its food comes from (Isaiah 1:3). These animals know who takes care of them.

God's people, however, often aren't smart enough to remember their Owner. Hundreds of years after Isaiah, the apostle Paul reminded the Corinthian Christians that they were not their own. They had been bought with a price and were to honor God in all they said and did (1Cor 6:19-20).

Take a lesson from the animals and remember your Owner and Provider. Live wholeheartedly for Him.

I am Yours, Lord, yet teach me all it means,
All it involves of love and loyalty,
Holy service, absolute surrender,
And unreserved obedience to Thee. —Anon.

Live so that others know whom you belong to

Wash yourselves and be clean! (Isa 1:16).

I accidentally dropped my cell phone into the garbage can. It slid straight to the bottom, and when I pulled it out, it was covered with some kind of disgusting mystery goo. Horrified, I set to work spraying, scrubbing, and disinfecting. I didn't stop until the phone was spotless.

God called the people of Israel to "sanitize" themselves. They'd been living as a nation of spiritual renegades (Isaiah 1:4) even as they continued to observe their religious ceremonies. God was seriously fed up with them. He said, "I am sick of your burnt offerings" (Isaiah 1:11), and "When you lift up your hands in prayer, I will not look" (Isaiah 1:15). God didn't want an outward show of confession without an inner commitment to act differently.

Fortunately, God outlined a couple of steps to help the nation get right with Him. He began by saying, "Give up your evil ways" (Isaiah 1:16). As believers in Jesus, we have the same responsibility to knock off the sin that separates us from God. Anything less is abusing God's grace. Paul asked, "Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of His wonderful grace? Of course not!" (Romans 6:1-2).

Once we discontinue specific sinful actions, it's important to replace them with activities that please God. Getting clean involves

"[learning] to do good" (Isaiah 1:17). Specifically, we can lend a hand to the poor, defend orphans, or champion the rights of widows.

Like the Israelites, many of us sin like crazy, and then supposedly come clean before God every Sunday. With the Holy Spirit's help (Ezekiel 36:27), we can stop that cycle and align our actions with our repentant hearts. We can follow God's command: "Wash yourselves!" (Isaiah 1:16), and He will make us truly spotless.

Isaiah 1:1-9,16-20 Unruly Children

I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. —Isaiah 1:2

I once had a pet raccoon by the name of Jason. Having affectionately cared for this "little bandit" for several months, I was amazed and frustrated when he forgot my friendship and turned on me. In fact, there were occasions when he sank his teeth into the very hands that fed him.

The prophet Isaiah emphasized the unruly behavior of the people of Israel in the first chapter of his book. He said that a dumb ox recognizes his owner, and the stubborn donkey knows enough to come home to his own stall (Isaiah 1:3). But Israel ignored God's tender care and eventually provoked Him to anger (Isaiah 1:4).

The people of Israel turned away from the Lord like rebellious children. Their worship and sacrifices became a stench in the nostrils of God, for their hearts were far from Him. They resisted His gracious warnings and finally experienced divine judgment. The land of milk and honey was looted and ransacked before their very eyes.

As believers, we should tremble at the thought of spurning the grace and mercy of God. By yielding to Christ and heeding the warning of the Spirit when we sin, we can avoid His chastening and instead enjoy the blessings reserved for His repentant children.

"We love You, Lord Jesus," we often may say,

But are we as ready His will to obey?

Let's heed what God's Spirit would have us to do,

For that's how we show Him a love that is true. —DJD

Respond to undeserved blessing with unreserved obedience.

Isaiah 1:10-20 Look What's For Dinner

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings. —Isaiah 1:16

A health teacher taught his students the importance of washing their hands before eating. He had them take scrapings from their fingers and put them in an environment that fosters the growth of bacteria. A few days later, they looked at the results through a microscope. The students found critters from their fingers that could have made them sick if they had eaten them with their dinner.

Many people who make sure they wash their hands before they eat are careless about a far more serious kind of contamination. They should heed the advice of Isaiah. He showed God's people the visible evidence of their evil condition. He pointed to their crumbling society and told them it was the result of their moral and spiritual pollution. They had lived for selfish rewards, ignored justice and mercy, and loved material possessions more than people. No wonder Isaiah exhorted them, "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean" (Isa. 1:16).

Behind Isaiah's words is the heavenly Father's love. Because God can see the danger of sin, He points to its visible, physical results. He pleads with us to be as careful with what we take into our hearts and minds as we are with what we put into our mouths.

Lord, grant me grace throughout this day

To walk the straight and narrow way,

To do whatever in Your sight

Is good and perfect, just and right. —Huisman

Keep out of your life whatever keeps Christ out of your mind.

Isaiah 1:1-4,12-17 Imitation Faith

These people ... honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me. —Isaiah 29:13

Tourists throughout the centuries have visited the famous Acropolis, the ancient hilltop religious citadel in Athens. Thousands of sightseers from all over the world have picked up marble chunks as souvenirs.

Why hasn't the supply of pieces been exhausted long ago? The answer is very simple. Every few months a truckload of marble fragments from a quarry miles away is scattered around the whole Acropolis area. So tourists go home happy with what they think are authentic pieces of ancient history.

We can be deceived by other kinds of imitations. Religious language and music, religious objects and services may fool us into imagining that we are experiencing a firsthand relationship with God when in reality we are simply going through empty routines.

During the time of the prophet Isaiah, many of the people of Israel were merely going through the motions. That is why God told them, "Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me... Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates" (Isaiah 1:13-14).

The possibility of religious deception prompts personal soul-searching. Our pious practices may be only imitations of the true heartfelt faith that the Lord desires. —VCG

Hypocrisy is a common sin

That grieves the Lord above;

He longs for those who'll worship Him

In faith and truth and love. —Bosch

A hypocrite has God on his tongue and the world in his heart.

Isaiah 1:1-17 Imitation Faith

These people ... honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me. —Isaiah 29:13

Tourists throughout the centuries have visited the famous Acropolis, the ancient hilltop religious citadel in Athens. Thousands of sightseers from all over the world have picked up marble chunks as souvenirs.

Why hasn't the supply of pieces been exhausted long ago? The answer is very simple. Every few months a truckload of marble fragments from a quarry miles away is scattered around the whole Acropolis area. So tourists go home happy with what they think are authentic pieces of ancient history.

We can be deceived by other kinds of imitations. Religious language and music, religious objects and services may fool us into imagining that we are experiencing a firsthand relationship with God when in reality we are simply going through empty routines.

During the time of the prophet Isaiah, many of the people of Israel were merely going through the motions. That is why God told them, "Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me... Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates" (Isa. 1:13-14).

The possibility of religious deception prompts personal soul-searching. Our pious practices may be only imitations of the true heartfelt faith that the Lord desires.

Deception is a common sin

That grieves the Lord above;

He longs for those who'll worship Him

In faith and truth and love. —HGB

A hypocrite has God in his mouth and the world in his heart.

Isaiah 1:1-17 What Is Heavy When Empty?

Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. —Isaiah 1:17

After reading Isaiah 1, I thought of this riddle: What is heavy for God when it's empty for me?

Nothing is too hard for God to do, of course, but that doesn't mean that nothing is a burden to Him. In fact, one thing I sometimes take lightly is actually a heavy concern to God.

In the time of the prophet Isaiah, the Jewish people followed their religious celebrations to the letter. They showed up at the right time, sacrificed the right amount, and offered many prayers. But when they left the temple, it was as if they left God there.

Nearly 3,000 years later, not much has changed. Sometimes I think my responsibility to God begins and ends with going to church and giving an offering. But this attitude makes me more of a burden to God than a blessing. I'm not accomplishing the tasks that are important to Him—doing good, seeking justice, defending the fatherless, and pleading for widows (Isaiah 1:17).

God is not impressed with a full house at religious gatherings if the people come with empty hearts. God wants worshipers with hearts so full of love for Him that they overflow in good deeds for others.

Oh, are you still wondering what is heavy for God when it's empty for me? The answer is worship.

My heart is filled, dear Lord, with love,

So let it show in words and deeds;

And help me share, in all my ways,

The overflow for others' needs. —Hess

The heart filled with praise brings pleasure to God.

Isaiah 1:13-17 What Does God Require?

Go and learn what this means: "I desire mercy and not sacrifice.. —Matthew 9:13

The mother of four growing children went to a counselor because she felt that she was a failure. She had trained for ministry and had hoped to serve the Lord as a missionary overseas. But instead, she fell in love and married a widower with four children. Barely able to keep her household functioning, she was not able to engage in any formal ministry. She wrongly concluded that God was subjecting her to well-deserved chastisement.

A Christian counselor pointed her to Micah 6:8, which asks, "What does the Lord require of you?" Immediately that question is answered, "To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." Those requirements she could meet without going to a foreign mission field. And meet them she did!

Her experience calls to mind Martin Luther's advice to people who believed they could please God by journeying to a sacred shrine: "Let anyone go on a pilgrimage who feels compelled to do so; but let him remember that God can be served a thousand times better at home by giving the money the journey would cost to his own wife and children and bearing his cross with patience."

Remember, God requires justice, mercy, and humility—no matter where we live.

O Master, let me walk with Thee

In lowly paths of service free;

Tell me Thy secret, help me bear

The strain of toil, the fret of care. —Gladden

What God requires, God provides.

Isaiah 1:18 - Scarlet

Bible commentators say that scarlet portrays sin, not only to denote its dreadful character, but also to emphasize its indelible nature. They tell us that you can immerse a cloth in any other color and the stain can be removed. Once red dye has been thoroughly set in a piece of goods, however, no scientific method is known that can successfully eliminate it without damaging the fabric. Even if the material is rubbed and scrubbed until threadbare, the fibers that are left will still retain their crimson hue. Sin is thus pictured as being indelible as far as human efforts to remove it are concerned. There is nothing man himself can do to change his evil nature and turn it into the white purity of holiness. God alone has the power to erase the terrible stain of our sin. Our Daily Bread

See related discussion of Hebrew Word Tola/towla' - The Hebrew word for WORM is TOLA, which most scholars associate with a CRIMSON WORM (*Coccus ilicis*) that in ancient times was crushed to procure its blood-red SCARLET dye (Hebrew for "scarlet" is same word TOLA), the SCARLET dye used to adorn the "ten curtains" of the Tabernacle (Ex 26:1), "the screen for the (one) doorway of the" Tabernacle (Ex 26:36, cp "I am the door" Jn 10:9), the Veil separating the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (Ex 26:31, cp Jesus' cry with a loud voice, yielding up His Spirit and the Veil of the temple tearing from top to bottom, opening "a new

and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His [torn] flesh" - Mt 27:50-51, Heb 10:19-20) and the beautiful garments of the high priest (Ex 28:5-6, Jesus became our "merciful and faithful high priest" Heb 2:17). Indeed, how deep is the mystery of these OT uses of TOLA which depict a WORM in Ps 22:6 and in 33 OT passages (most in Exodus) depict the blood-red SCARLET material which foreshadowed the Messiah, even His work of redemption on the Cross! Little did the Roman soldiers comprehend the deep significance of the SCARLET robe they placed on Christ, mocking Him with their cry "Hail, King of the Jews" (Mt 27:28-29)! And so we see the Holy One of Israel Who was "made for a little while lower than the angels" (Heb 2:9), then even lower than man, and yes finally made like a mere TOLA, a helpless "crimson worm," a WORM that was crushed beneath the load of our sin, "having become a curse for us." (Gal 3:13) "Well might the sun in darkness hide, And shut His glories in, When Christ, the mighty Maker died, For man the creature's sin." (I. Watts) [Psalm 22:6-I Am a Worm](#)

Isaiah 1:1-4,12-18 As White As Snow

Your sins ... shall be as white as snow. —Isaiah 1:18

I was driving my son home from school one day when snow began to fall. The cottony fluff came down steadily and quickly. Eventually, we slowed to a stop, boxed in by traffic. From inside our vehicle, we watched a transformation take place. Dark patches of soil turned white. Snow softened the sharp outlines of buildings; it coated the cars around us, and accumulated on every tree in sight.

That snowfall reminded me of a spiritual truth: Just as that snow covered everything in sight, God's grace covers our sin. But grace doesn't just cover sin, grace erases sin. Through the prophet Isaiah, God appealed to the Israelites, saying, "Come now, and let us reason together ... though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18). When God made this promise, His children had a painful problem with sin. God compared them to a physical body plagued with "wounds and welts and open sores, not cleansed or bandaged or soothed with oil" (Isaiah 1:6 niv).

As bad as their sin was, God was willing to extend His grace to them. As His children today, we have the same assurance. Sin may stain our lives, but when we repent and confess it, we have "the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of [God's] grace" (Eph. 1:7).

Lord, give me courage to confess,

To bare my sinful heart to Thee;

Forgiving love You long to show

And from my sin to set me free. —D. DeHaan

The weight of sin is balanced only by the blood of Christ.

Isaiah 1:18-20; Psalm 51:7 Diamond Dust

Wash me and I will be whiter than snow. Psalm 51:7

During a bitterly frigid winter in our part of Michigan, there were many mixed emotions about the weather. As the snowy winter season pressed on into March, most people had long before fallen out of love with snow and were bemoaning long-range forecasts of low temperatures.

Yet the majestic beauty of the snow continued to amaze me. Even as I threw endless shovelfuls of it from my driveway onto the over-my-head snowbanks, I was enthralled with the white stuff. One particular day, ice crystals filtered down from the sky to fall atop old snow. As my wife and I took a walk through this sparkling scene, it looked as if diamond dust had been sprinkled across the landscape.

In Scripture, snow seems to have varied purposes. God sends it as an indicator of His creative greatness (Job 37:6; 38:22-23). Snow-capped mountains irrigate the arid valleys below. But more significantly, God gives snow as a picture of our forgiveness. The gospel of Jesus provides a way for us to be cleansed of our sins and for our hearts to be made much "whiter than snow" (Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18).

The next time you see snow—in life or in photos—thank God for the forgiveness and the freedom from sin's penalties that this beautiful, natural gift pictures for all who have put their trust in our Savior.

Thank You for forgiving us and for turning our filthiness into the beauty of forgiveness. Help us to display the beauty of our forgiveness to all we encounter.

When Christ forgives us, our hearts are as clean as new-fallen snow.

INSIGHT: The prophet Isaiah, whose name means “the Lord saves,” warned an unrepentant Judah of God’s impending judgment (Isa. 1–12) through the Babylonian exile (Isa 39:6-7). He spoke of God’s grace (Isa 40–55) and a future glorious restoration for all who would repent (Isa 11; 56–66). Here in Isaiah 1, God calls His people to consider carefully their sinfulness (Isa 1:2-15). He assures them that no matter how tainted and sinful they are (Isa 1:18), God will cleanse, forgive, and bless them if they “are willing and obedient” (Isa 1:19). But He also warns of severe punishment if they fail to repent (Isa 1:20). God is merciful, and He forgives those who submit to Him

Isaiah 1:19, Isaiah 58:1-14 Willing To Change

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. —Isaiah 1:19

A recent news feature chronicled the growing search for stress relief through spas, massage, pills, and exercise tapes. The craving to ease tension has spawned an entire industry, including walk-in backrub stores in shopping malls across the country. The report ended by saying, “Although people will pay to fix their stress, they are not about to change the lifestyle that is causing it.”

No matter what the problem, our initial response is to treat the symptoms rather than the cause.

During the days of Isaiah, God’s people were not experiencing the Lord’s blessing. They went through the motions of worship and couldn’t understand why God wasn’t noticing their religious efforts (Isa. 58:3). But while they were fasting, they were also exploiting their workers and fighting among themselves (vv.3-4). Isaiah condemned their hypocrisy and told them they needed to change. If they would free the oppressed, share with the hungry, house the homeless, and clothe the naked, God would bless them with healing, answered prayer, guidance, strength, and joy.

Religious activity is no substitute for an obedient heart. With God’s help—and a willingness to change—we can eliminate the root problems, not just the symptoms.

The Christian life is not confined

To church one day a week;

God wants us to obey His Word,

Each day His will to seek. —Sper

Religious activity is no substitute for an obedient heart.

Isaiah 2

Isaiah 2:1-4 Plowshare Christmas

They shall beat their swords into plowshares ... ; neither shall they learn war anymore. —Isaiah 2:4

In his book Christmas 1945, Matthew Litt tells about the first peacetime Christmas celebration in the US after World War II. The New York Daily News alerted readers to expect a fleet of warships in New York Harbor: “Christmas Day will find a mighty armada, consisting of 4 battleships, 6 carriers, 7 cruisers, and 24 destroyers.” But instead of waging war, the military ships hosted 1,000 needy children.

The children’s measurements had been taken previously so that perfectly fitted navy-blue coats and woolen caps would be gift-wrapped and awaiting them aboard the ships. These vessels of war had been transformed into carriers of compassion.

The prophet Isaiah predicted a future day of Christ’s reign of peace on this earth: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isaiah 2:4). Christmastime serves as a reminder that the Prince of Peace will ultimately bring a time of global calm and compassion.

As we celebrate the first coming of the Prince of Peace and wait for His second coming, we are reminded of our privilege to serve as His “carriers of compassion.”

Lord, You have come and brought peace, and I long to

share Your compassion everywhere I go.

Thank You that this world will know ultimate peace

when You return. Amen.

True peace comes from the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 2:1-5 Hope For The World

Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. —Titus 2:13

PEACE TALKS FALL APART AGAIN. UNEMPLOYMENT RATE RISES. TORNADO RIPS THROUGH TOWN.

These newspaper headlines selected at random tend to lead us to despair. There just doesn't seem to be any hope for this world. And yet, according to the Scriptures, the dream of abolishing war is not merely wishful thinking. The idea of prosperity for all is more than a political gimmick. The Bible tells us that the eventual taming of nature is a certainty.

The hope for this world, however, is not to be found in human efforts but in the return of Jesus Christ. He alone can solve the problems that are baffling mankind.

The prophet Isaiah said that someday "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:4). This glorious prospect will become a reality when the Lord Jesus Himself returns as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Timothy 6:15) to set up His kingdom of peace and righteousness. We are to be "looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13). Because we have this hope, we can be optimistic even in the deepening gloom of this age.

Keep looking up!

The only hope for world peace is the coming of the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 2:1-9 A World At Peace

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. —Isaiah 2:4

President Woodrow Wilson was a staunch idealist whose hope for world peace was deeply embedded in his thinking. Therefore, when he declared war on Germany in 1917, his decision cut to his very heart. It is said that when he returned to the White House, he put his head down on a table and sobbed.

World War I was seen by many as "the war to end all wars." Wilson himself became the leading advocate for the League of Nations, which he hoped would ensure peace. But World War II and many subsequent wars have dashed such hopes.

So the question remains: Can this world ever know true peace? The Bible answers, "Yes!" Two Old Testament prophets describe a future disarmament unlike any in man's history (Isaiah 2:1-4; Micah 4:1-5). And Revelation 20 declares that Satan will be bound and unable to deceive the nations when Jesus Christ comes to reign in righteousness.

What about right now? When individuals trust Jesus as their Savior, they are reconciled to God and are motivated to be peacemakers in their own world of relationships—even with their enemies. God's peace in believers' hearts is a present reality, and the Lord's return to earth is the world's only hope for lasting peace. And it will come!

God gives me peace and I long to share it—

With Christ's gospel message I'll go;

I'll speak of His grace and joy that He gives me

Till He comes, then world peace we'll know. —Cetas

Only the Prince of Peace can bring lasting peace.

Isaiah 2:4 The Eleventh Hour

Read: Matthew 24:3-14

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. —Isaiah 2:4

World War I has been ranked by many as one of the deadliest conflicts in human history. Millions lost their lives in the first global modern war. On November 11, 1918, a ceasefire was observed on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month. During that historic moment, millions around the world observed moments of silence while they reflected upon the war's terrible cost—the loss of life and suffering. It was hoped that “the Great War,” as it was called, would truly be “the war that would end all wars.”

Despite the many deadly military conflicts that have followed, the hope for lasting peace has not faded. And the Bible offers a hopeful and realistic promise that someday wars will finally end. When Christ returns, Isaiah's prophecy will come true: “Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Isa. 2:4). Then the eleventh hour will pass and the first hour of lasting peace in a new heaven and new earth will begin.

Until that day comes, those who follow Christ are to be people who represent the Prince of Peace in the way we conduct our lives and in the way we make a difference in our world.

Only in Christ can true peace be realized.

INSIGHT: In today's reading, Jesus predicts events that will accompany His imminent return. The Lord Jesus Christ ministers in the offices of Prophet (Mark 6:4), Priest (Heb. 4:14), and King (Luke 1:32). What a comfort it is to know that Jesus speaks God's Word, represents us to the Father, and is sovereign over heaven and earth.

Isaiah 2:6-18 Not A Simple God

Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the Lord and the glory of His majesty. —Isaiah 2:10

People love to put God in a box. To satisfy their own thinking or to support their side of an argument, they build a box, label it, put God in it, and shrinkwrap it.

One popular box is the “love” box. It's the one people use when they want to think of God as a benevolent grandpa-type character who loves everybody so much He couldn't possibly punish them. No matter what the sin they get involved in, these individuals suggest that God just smiles a big sunshiny smile and looks the other way. “My God loves people too much to punish them,” folks say as they close the box.

There is no box big enough to put God in. His characteristics are so wide-ranging that we cannot begin to fathom the totality of His being. Sure, He is a God of love, but as Isaiah 2 points out, He is also a God of terror: “The day of the Lord of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, ... and it shall be brought low” (Isaiah 2:12). That's not the action of a tolerant, anything-goes God.

Our job as God-followers is to know Him as completely as we can. We need to investigate His seemingly opposite characteristics and bow before Him—our glorious, almighty, and complex Lord.

For Further Study

God is holy (Ex. 3:3-6), yet merciful (Ps. 108:4);

just (Acts 17:30-31), yet loving (Jn. 3:16-17);

unsearchable (Ps. 145:3), yet knowable (Jn. 14:6-9).

To strengthen your faith in God, seek the face of God.

Isaiah 5

Isaiah 5:1-7 The Rights Of God

[God] expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes. —Isaiah 5:2

Isaiah's song picturing Israel as the Lord's vineyard teaches us that God has a right to expect love, worship, and obedience from those He blesses. Unfortunately, like people in Isaiah's day, many of us show little gratitude. And we deliberately break His moral laws. When we behave this way, God has a right to act in judgment.

History reveals that whenever a nation ignores God and rejects His Word, it reaps a bitter harvest.

On this Independence Day, we in the United States are reminded again of the liberties we enjoy. For these we should be deeply

grateful. But sometimes we take them for granted, displaying little concern for those who are not so abundantly blessed. We are becoming a nation of individuals who selfishly insist on our own rights, making unfair demands on others and not thinking of their welfare.

Worst of all, in this clamor for personal freedom, we hear very little about the rights of God. We should recognize that He is the “Lord of the vineyard.” He expects us to produce the fruits of love and obedience instead of the wild grapes of ingratitude and wickedness (Isaiah 5:2).

As we thank God for our rights, let’s not forget the rights of God.

So long as faith is kept alive,

Nation and people will survive;

God keep them, always, everywhere:

The hearth, the Book, the place of prayer. —Anon.

True freedom is not in having our own way, but in yielding to God’s way.

Isaiah 5:1-10 The Greed Problem

He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase. —Ecclesiastes 5:10

When I was 15 years old, I spent as much time as I could in the library reading articles and books about social justice. I was troubled by the fact that thousands of men who were willing to work hard could not find a job. I was trying to find out what form of government could best provide economic justice.

Through a better understanding of the Bible and after some experience in the workplace, I gradually began to see that human greed, not an economic system, is the culprit. A poor person may envy the rich and strive to gain great wealth, but if he succeeds he discovers that he still wants more. One translation of Ecclesiastes 5:10 states it this way: “Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income” (NIV).

Through the prophet Isaiah, God expressed His grief over what greed did to His people (Isa. 5:1-10). He loves justice, but He saw the rich oppress the poor. He loves righteousness, but He heard cries of distress from the lips of the wronged. And He pronounced judgment on the greedy who kept buying more and more with no concern for others.

Lord, give us thankful hearts that are content and willing to share what we have with those less fortunate.

I do not ask for treasures here,

To hoard, decay, and rust,

But for the better things of life—

Humility and trust. —Meadows

Money is a good servant but a poor master.

Isaiah 5:18-23 Calling Evil Good

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil! —Isaiah 5:20

The Wizard of Oz has remained popular for years. People of all ages have learned moral lessons from Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion as they traveled down the yellow brick road. Of course, in the plot line the great enemy to be overcome is the Wicked Witch of the West. Evil is clearly depicted and overcome by good.

A new Broadway musical, however, turns the moral sense of the original story on its head. In this rewriting of the story, the wicked witch is presented as a sympathetic character. Born with green skin, she feels like an outsider. Major characters, plot lines, roles, and other details are altered so that the wicked witch is really just a misunderstood person. The audience might come away with the idea that evil is good and good is evil.

During the ministry of the prophet Isaiah, a reversal of moral values took place in Israel. Some actually lifted up the evils of murder, idolatry, and adultery as good. In response, Isaiah gave a stern warning: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil!” (Isa. 5:20). In our relativistic world, popular culture constantly challenges biblical values. But studying, memorizing, and meditating on God’s Word can ensure our discernment between good and evil.

In our day-to-day existence,

Evil sometimes wears a mask;

Trust the Lord for true discernment—

He gives wisdom when we ask. —Hess

If we know the truth, we can discern what's false.

Isaiah 5:18-25 Misnomers

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil. —Isaiah 5:20

A newspaper columnist expressed astonishment at the way truth is often stretched in advertising. She recalled ordering “fresh fruit salad” from the menu in a Boston restaurant. But when the item was served, it was anything but “fresh.” The peaches, pineapples, grapes, and maraschino cherries had spent months wallowing in their own juice in a tin can. When the waitress was asked what happened to the “fresh” fruit salad, she responded cheerily, “Oh, honey, that’s just what they call it.”

Such deception occurs not only in advertising; it happens whenever people move away from God’s principles of truth and goodness. Deception, misnomers (the use of a wrong name), and outright lies are the tools of an immoral person’s trade. Selfish and evil people call themselves generous and good. The slaves of sin call themselves liberated. The foolish call themselves enlightened. And the lustful describe their acts as love affairs.

God is not fooled by these misnomers. In Isaiah 5:20, He warned against those who “call evil good, and good evil.” No matter what the world calls good or evil, let’s take our definition from the God of all truth. With Him there are no misnomers.

Deceptions, twists, and outright lies

Define the words of fools;

But those who know God's Word will have

A life where wisdom rules. —Sper

We would not delight in sin if we were not deceived by sin.

Isaiah 5:1-25 Rearranging the Price Tags

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness. —Isaiah 5:20

The Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard tells a parable of a man who broke into a department store one night. Rather than stealing merchandise, he rearranged the price tags on many items. The next morning the clerks and customers found one surprise after another: diamond necklaces for a dollar and cheap costume jewelry costing thousands.

In Isaiah’s day, Israel had rejected and despised God’s instructions (Is. 5:24). The people grossly underestimated faith in Him and the value of His laws. They cheapened the worth of patiently waiting on the Lord to work out His purposes (Isaiah 5:18-19). They devalued virtue and inflated evil (Isaiah 5:20). They overpriced their own wisdom and cleverness (Isaiah 5:21) and made heroes of heavy drinkers (Isaiah 5:22). Bribery routinely subverted justice (Isaiah 5:23). God had created a climate where goodness could flourish (Isaiah 5:1-2), but His people had cultivated weeds and produced moral confusion.

Does this sound up-to-date? Our society is doing just what Israel did centuries ago. What a challenge to the church! May we who know Christ as our Savior show our world by how we live the true value of goodness, righteousness, justice, sobriety, wisdom, and purity.

This strife-torn world, so wracked by sin,

So deep in desperate need,

Must see firsthand the love of Christ

From Christians who will lead. —DJD

The best way to fight evil is to live for Christ.

Isaiah 5:20-25 When Evil Is Good

Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness! —Isaiah 5:20

In the early 1970s, political cartoonist Wayne Stayskal illustrated an age-old problem. In the first of three pictures, a father and his son are watching a violent television show together. From the tube blares the words: “Bang! Bang! Kill! Stab! Boom! Zap! Rat-a-tat-tat! Murder!”

In the second picture a news bulletin interrupts the program: “And now news from Vietnam.” The TV shows scenes of mutilated bodies of Vietnamese children, some in their mothers’ arms. The father is aghast as he shields the boy’s eyes with his hands. “What are they showing that stuff on TV for!” he yells.

Stayskal raises a vital issue. How can we entertain ourselves with fictional scenes that glorify violence but be horrified when watching the real thing? Hollywood began asking the same question after the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001. They postponed the release of some films with terrorist themes. But how long will such restraint last?

Sin is so dangerous because it is blind to itself. The prophet Isaiah said that God’s people were redefining good and evil. Incredible! But people are still doing it in the 21st century. Only God’s Word can safeguard any of us from calling “evil good, and good evil” (Isaiah 5:20). —DJD

O Lord, correct my vision,

So dim and warped by sin,

That through Your Spirit’s blessing

Your truth may shine within. —Bosch

If sin were not deceitful, it would not seem delightful.

Isaiah 6

Isaiah 6:1-6 | Seeing God In Familiar Places

The whole earth is full of His glory! —Isaiah 6:3

Because of where I live, I’m treated to spectacular displays of the magnificent, creative glory of God. Recently, on a drive through the woods, I was struck with a breath-taking display of deep rich reds and a variety of yellows that decorated the trees of autumn—all artfully arranged against the backdrop of a brilliant blue sky.

And soon, as the temperatures plummet and winter blows in, I’ll be reminded that no two snowflakes are ever the same as they pile on top of one another to create a rolling landscape of pristine white drifts. After that will come the miracle of spring, when that which seemed hopelessly dead bursts into life with buds and blossoms that will grace the meadows with a multiplicity of colors.

Wherever we look in the world around us, we see evidence that “the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa. 6:3). What is amazing is that the creation that surrounds us is damaged by sin (see Rom. 8:18-22), yet God has seen fit to grace our fallen landscape with these loving brushstrokes of His creative hand. It serves as a daily reminder that the beauty of His grace covers our sin and that His love for that which is fallen is always available to us.

Lord, may we be ever mindful of Your grace and love

in all that surrounds us. Thank You for making Yourself

visible through the beauty of Your creation. Teach us

to look beyond the beauty to see Your hand at work.

Never pass up an opportunity to enjoy nature’s beauty—it’s the handwriting of God.

Isaiah 6 Confrontation

1. Isaiah was confronted by God’s preeminence (Uzziah died and he saw God alone).
2. Isaiah was confronted by God’s purity (Holy, Holy, Holy).
3. Isaiah was confronted by God’s power (the foundations trembled).

Isaiah 6:1-8 The Great Miracle

He touched my mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." — Isaiah 6:7

Leonard Ravenhill (1907–1994), a British evangelist, once said, "The greatest miracle God can do today is take an unholy man out of an unholy world, make that man holy, then put him back into that unholy world and keep him holy in it." This seems to be what God did to Isaiah when He called him to speak to His people.

Around the time of the death of Uzziah, one of Judah's more successful kings, Isaiah had a vision of God. The prophet saw Him as the true King of the universe, sitting on a lofty throne. In the vision, Isaiah saw seraphim worshiping God with a hymn that praised His holiness, majesty, and glory.

Isaiah's vision of God led to a true vision of himself as unholy and broken before God. "Woe is me, for I am undone!" Isaiah said (Isaiah 6:5). This recognition of sin led him to a need for and the reception of God's cleansing grace (Isaiah 6:7). Newly cleansed, Isaiah was commissioned to spread God's message (Isaiah 6:9). The Lord sent Isaiah into an unholy world, not only to live a holy life but also to tell an unholy people about a holy God.

The Lord wants to show Himself to us, thus giving us a truer vision of ourselves, a deeper need for His grace, and a greater commitment to live and speak for Him. What a miracle!

Upon my life shed forth Thy grace,

Till others seek Thy loving face;

Oh, may no thing be seen in me

To cause a soul to stray from Thee! —Roberts

Amid the darkness of sin, the light of God's grace shines brightest.

Isaiah 6:1-8 Holy Love

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts... Woe is me, for I am undone! —Isaiah 6:3,5

Many followers of Jesus Christ today are preoccupied with the love and goodness of God, but not many think about His holiness. And even fewer quake in fear of it! Why?

The reason is this: When we catch a glimpse of our Lord's greatness and glory, we see more clearly our own sinfulness. And that's humbling!

We see an illustration of this truth in the Gospel of Luke. After witnessing a miracle, Peter fell down before Jesus and cried out, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Isaiah 5:8).

If we were to see God in all His splendor and holiness, we would respond as Isaiah did and admit to our sinfulness (Isaiah 6:5). That's a healthy response, but it's only half the picture. God is not out to destroy us by His holiness. His purpose is to take away our sin (Isaiah 6:7). He longs for us to experience His forgiveness and enjoy a close relationship with Him.

This truth is very close to my own heart. In one shattering moment a few years ago I saw more clearly than ever the awfulness of my sin. I was crushed, broken, terrified—until I also saw the unfathomable love of God, and His power to forgive and purify me (1 John 1:9).

God reveals His holiness not to destroy us but to expose and remove our sin. Ask Him to cleanse you today.

Dear Lord, reveal to me my sin,

Show me the filth that dwells within;

Cleanse me and take my guilt away,

That I may do Your work this day. —Fitzhugh

God has both an all-seeing eye and an all-forgiving heart.

Isaiah 6:1-10 Supersize It

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. — Isaiah 6:1

After you placed your food order at a popular fast food restaurant, the cashiers used to ask that famous question: “Would you like to supersize that?” In essence, they were asking the customers if they wanted more of what they were already getting.

In a similar way, when we come into God’s presence, I believe He asks us: “Would you like to enlarge your understanding of Me today?”

Isaiah had one such experience with God. Through a painful event in his life, Isaiah saw the Lord “high and lifted up” (Isa. 6:1). Through this encounter, God supersized Isaiah’s understanding of His holiness. He saw God’s complete moral excellence that unifies His attributes.

God also enlarged Isaiah’s realization of his own sin (Isaiah 6:5). This led to an expansion of his understanding of God’s complete forgiveness and cleansing (Isaiah 6:6-7). Only when Isaiah understood the depth of his sin could he appreciate and accept forgiveness and cleansing from God. Finally, his encounter with God led to Isaiah’s declaration of availability and commitment to reach out to others and to help them increase their understanding of God (Isaiah 6:8-9).

Let’s ask God to supersize our understanding of His greatness today.

Oh, I want to know You, blessed Lord,

Better than I’ve ever known before!

In Your Word I read of Your great purpose—

Help me understand it more and more. —Hess

Knowing about God is fascinating. Knowing God personally is life-changing.

Isaiah 6:1-5 The Wrong Standard

Woe is me, for I am undone! ... My eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. —Isaiah 6:5

A little boy announced, “I’m like Goliath. I’m 9 feet tall.” “What makes you say that?” asked his mother. The child replied, “Well, I made a ruler and measured myself with it, and I am 9 feet tall!”

Many people fail to see their need of salvation because they measure themselves by a faulty standard. By looking at their peers and comparing their behavior with others who have done worse than they have, they come to the conclusion that they are not so bad after all. But such feelings of pride are demolished when people compare themselves with a perfect standard of righteousness.

How do we measure up in God’s sight? When the prophet Isaiah saw the Lord in all His glory, he exclaimed, “Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, ... for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 6:5). According to Romans 3:23, we all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory. That’s why everyone needs to be forgiven.

If you’re measuring your morality against that of others, you are using the wrong standard of measurement. But if you recognize how far you fall short in the sight of God, reach out in faith to Jesus today and receive His gift of forgiveness.

By God’s Word at last my sin I learned—

Then I trembled at the law I’d spurned,

Till my guilty soul imploring turned

To Calvary. —Newell

If we could earn our salvation, Christ would not have died to provide it.

Isaiah 6:1-7 Ordinary People

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory. —Psalm 115:1

Have you ever been in the presence of greatness? Perhaps you shook the hand of a world leader. Maybe you got close to a famous athlete. Or you may have had a book signed by a bestselling author.

To be near such icons of popularity and prestige can almost take your breath away. You've seen them on television or read about them in the newspaper, but now you're in their presence! It can make your skin tingle.

In reality, though, it shouldn't. No offense to the most powerful politicians. No slight to the world's top athletes or most prestigious authors, but they are all ordinary people. They may have done something great, but at the heart of it all they are just like you and me. In God's eyes they are sinners who need the grace of the only One who can truly be called great: Our Almighty God.

Isaiah put it best when he said, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5). He had seen a vision of God, and he was devastated by the contrast between himself and the Lord. Until God rescued Isaiah, the prophet was powerless.

We're all equally ordinary. But we can be lifted to incredible heights through the salvation God provides. Only an extraordinary God could do that for ordinary people!

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,

In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail.

Thy mercies how tender! How firm to the end!

Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend. —Grant

God uses ordinary people to carry out His extraordinary plan.

Isaiah 6:1-8 Macauley

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." —Isaiah 6:8

Macauley Rivera, one of my dearest friends in Bible college, had a passion for the Savior. His heart's desire was to graduate, marry his fiancée Sharon, return to the inner city of Washington, DC, and plant a church to reach his friends and family for Christ.

That dream ended, however, when Mac and Sharon were tragically killed in an accident, leaving the student body stunned at the loss. At Mac's memorial service, the challenge was issued: "Mac is gone. Who will serve in his place?" As evidence of the impact of Mac's example, more than 200 students stood to take up the mantle of Christ's fallen servant.

The response of those students echoes the commitment of Isaiah. In a time of fear and insecurity, the prophet was summoned into the throne room of God, where he heard Him say, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I! Send me" (Isa. 6:8).

God still calls men and women to be His ambassadors today. He challenges us to serve Him—sometimes close to home, sometimes in distant lands. The question for us is, How will we respond to His call? May God give us the courage to say, "Here am I! Send me."

Take the task He gives you gladly;

Let His work your pleasure be;

Answer quickly when He calleth,

"Here am I, send me, send me." —March

Whom God calls, He qualifies; whom He qualifies, He sends.

Isaiah 6:1-8 Whom Shall I Send?

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." —Isaiah 6:8

As a young pastor, I served a fledgling new congregation that included my parents. My father was very active in the church's "people ministries"—evangelism, hospital and nursing-home visitation, bus ministry, relief for the poor, and more. Although he had never been formally trained in ministry, Dad had a natural ability to connect with people who were in the midst of hard times. That was his passion—the downtrodden people who are often overlooked. In fact, on the day he died, my last conversation with him was about someone he had promised to call on. He was concerned that his promise be kept.

I believe that my father's service was one that followed the heart of Christ. Jesus looked out over the masses of the forgotten people

of the world and felt compassion for them (Matthew 9:36-38). He commanded His followers to pray that the heavenly Father would send workers (like my dad) to reach those weighed down with the cares of life.

My father became the answer to those prayers in many hurting people's lives, and we can as well. When the prayer goes out for someone to represent Christ's love, may our heart respond: "Lord, here am I! Send me."

Take the task He gives you gladly,

Let His work your pleasure be;

Answer quickly when He calleth,

"Here am I, send me, send me." —Darch

True service is love in working clothes.

Isaiah 6:1-8 Talent Search

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" —Isaiah 6:8

Television shows like American Idol have become a global phenomenon. Millions wait anxiously to find out who will be the next singer eliminated in the musical talent hunt.

Some call it "a new concept in entertainment," but it's hardly a new idea. As a boy, I remember watching Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour. That show was followed by the bizarre talent hunt The Gong Show in the 70s, and then by Star Search in the 80s. It is an ongoing theme of television to search for someone unknown and make him or her famous.

Dreams of fame and fortune, however, are not at the heart of the search that is truly timeless. That search is God's own pursuit of hearts that are available for His work in the world.

In Isaiah, the Lord asks: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" And then we read Isaiah's ready response: "Here am I! Send me" (Isaiah 6:8).

God is not seeking the most qualified or talented; rather, He is seeking hearts that are surrendered to Him. He is seeking those who are available, dependable, and willing to be used. In those lives, God will show Himself strong, and He will be glorified.

Are you available?

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay;

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still. —Pollard

Your life is God's gift to you—make it your gift to God.

Isaiah 6:1-10 Face-To-Face

I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up. —Isaiah 6:1

Being face-to-face with famous people can take your breath away. As a sportswriter, I've interviewed basketball stars David Robinson and Avery Johnson. And I've stood in a garage with Joe Gibbs, racecar owner and pro football coach.

A person can easily feel inadequate when talking with bigger-than-life people. We can even develop an awe and respect for athletes and other stars who make us feel insignificant.

But that's nothing when compared to what Isaiah saw "in the year that King Uzziah died" (Isa. 6:1). Isaiah experienced something so magnificent and terrifying that nothing could compare to it—he stood face-to-face with God!

In a vision, God showed Isaiah who He really was. What the prophet saw greatly affected him. He saw God's majesty. He gained a fresh understanding of God's holiness. He saw the contrast between his sinful self and God's perfection. He heard God's call to service, and he answered it.

Today, we can see God in His Word and in the Spirit's work in and through us. And we can commune with Him through prayer. But one day in heaven we will see our Lord face-to-face (1 John 3:2). Now that will take our breath away!

Face to face! O blissful moment!

Face to face—to see and know;

Face to face with my Redeemer—

Jesus Christ who loves me so. —Breck

God's awesome presence is both convicting and comforting.

Isaiah 6:3 Holy Is The Lord!

Read: Psalm 48:1-14

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. —Isaiah 6:3

There are some things that God cannot do. For example, God cannot tell a lie. He can't do anything that conflicts with His holy character. What God is determines what God does. Since He is holy, all His attributes share in that perfection.

Let me explain what this means to us on a practical level. As a holy God, He is perfect in His righteousness, justice, truthfulness, and faithfulness. His perfect righteousness assures us that we can fully yield to His will because He'll always do what is right. In Genesis 18:25 we read, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

His perfect justice means that God will be unquestionably fair. Christians will be rewarded for what they have done (2 Corinthians 5:10), and the wicked will be punished according to their works (Revelation 20:13).

His perfect truthfulness assures us that we can take Him at His word. Numbers 23:19 says, "God is not a man, that He should lie." And finally, His perfect faithfulness tells us that He will never let us down. We read, "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

We can have absolute confidence in our righteous, just, truthful, and faithful God—because He is holy! —RWD

Holy, holy, holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,

Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy—there is none beside Thee,

Perfect in power, in love, and purity. —Heber

The holiness of God convicts the sinner and comforts the saint.

Isaiah 6:3 Theory Of Everything

For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible. —Colossians 1:16

Scientists have been looking for the "Theory of Everything." One person who thinks he found it is physicist Brian Greene, who wrote *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory*. Greene's "string theory" is a complicated concept suggesting that at its tiniest level everything consists of combinations of vibrating strands, or strings. He has described his theory as "a framework with the capacity to explain every fundamental feature upon which the world is constructed."

Over the years, thinkers from Newton to Einstein to Hawking to Greene have spent the greater portion of their lives trying to figure out how the universe works—and they have proposed fascinating theories.

In reality, for any theory to explain everything in the universe adequately it must begin and end with God. "All things ... visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16) have their origin in Him and exist for His glory (Ps. 72:19). The first few verses of John's gospel tell us that our Lord created the universe—and that without His hand of creation nothing would exist.

That's why when we consider the world and everything in it, we can exclaim with Isaiah: "The whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:3). Praise His holy name!

Our God has fashioned earth and sky,

Sun, moon, and stars beyond compare;

His workmanship we can't deny—

His fingerprints are everywhere. —Seals

All creation is an outstretched finger pointing toward God.

Isaiah 6:5 Awesome!

Woe is me, for I am undone! ... for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts. —Isaiah 6:5

Just a few miles from New Mexico's Carlsbad Caverns is Lechuguilla Cave. Explorers who have descended into its interior describe a wonderland whose beauty is beyond almost anything they have ever seen.

One geologist noted, "Everything is alien... I've been in caves that are so beautiful that you just have to leave. You just can't take it." That's an interesting dilemma for explorers, isn't it? To be surrounded by beauty that is overwhelming to the eyes.

Their experience gives us a clue to the problem we have with understanding a holy God. He is so arrayed in splendor, so pure in His goodness, and so beautiful in His character that our sin-darkened eyes cannot bear to look on Him. We cannot endure His glory.

This was the experience of two people in the Old Testament. When Moses asked to see God's glory, the Almighty had to shield him from seeing His face (Exodus 33:18-23). And when Isaiah caught a glimpse of God's majesty, he cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone!" (Isaiah 6:5).

Lord, Your awesome splendor, goodness, and beauty reveal the defects in us. Thank You for being so loving and merciful. And thank You for making us holy and acceptable to You through Christ.

Holy, Holy, Holy! Though the darkness hide Thee,

Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see;

Only Thou art holy—there is none beside Thee,

Perfect in power, in love, and purity. —Heber

God's awesome presence is both convicting and comforting.

Isaiah 6:8-13 Is Faithfulness Enough?

I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" —Isaiah 6:8

A young missionary in Central America was tempted to give up. He wrote to friends and family, "I go about on fishing boats through the day. At night I sleep on piles of hides on the deck. The people do not seem to be interested in the gospel message I bring. Sometimes the adversary tempts me to discouragement in the face of seeming lack of success." But then he added, "I take courage and press on anew as I remember that God does not hold me responsible for success but for faithfulness."

The prophet Isaiah also may have been tempted to give up his difficult assignment. The Lord told him that the result of his efforts would be that the people would hear but not understand, and see but not perceive (Isaiah 6:9). Their hearts would be dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes shut (Isaiah 6:10).

Put yourself in the shoes of Isaiah or that missionary. Would you have pressed on or given up? Is faithfulness enough, or do you think your work must be recognized as successful before you feel satisfied in serving the Lord?

The prophet and the missionary did what God asked them to do. They preached God's Word and trusted in His purposes. You too can be a faithful servant. Do your best and leave the results in the hands of the Lord.

Oh, let us be faithful to Jesus,

The faith we confessed let's renew,

And ask Him this question each morning:

"Lord, what will You have me to do?" —Pangborn

The world crowns success; God crowns faithfulness.

Isaiah 7

Isaiah 7:10-14 Where's The Baby?

The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14

Two women who were dressed in their finest were having lunch together in a very exclusive restaurant. A friend saw them and came over to their table to greet them. "What's the special occasion?" she asked. One of the women said, "We're having a birthday party for the baby in our family. He's 2 years old today." "But, where's the baby?" the friend asked. The child's mother answered, "Oh, I dropped him off at my mother's house. She's taking care of him until the party's over. It wouldn't have been any fun with him along."

How ridiculous! A birthday celebration for a child who wasn't welcome at his own party? Yet, when you stop to think about it, that's no more foolish than going through the Christmas season, with all of its festivities, without remembering the One whose birth we are supposed to be honoring.

And that's the way many people celebrate Christmas. In all the busyness—the party-going, gift-shopping, and family gatherings—the One whose birthday they are commemorating is almost completely forgotten.

As you move into this holiday season, in all of your good times with family and friends, make sure you don't leave out the Lord Jesus. Give Him the honor He deserves.

Among the tinsel, trees, and toys

Are many signs of Christmas joys,

But where's the Christ, whom God sent down,

Who laid aside His throne and crown? —Hess

There is always the danger of keeping Christmas and losing Christ. —Ironside

Isaiah 7:14 in Poetry

Mary Had The Little Lamb

Mary had the little Lamb, who lived before His birth;
Self-existent Son of God, from Heaven He came to Earth.
Micah 5:2

Mary had the little Lamb; see Him in yonder stall --
Virgin-born Son of God, to save man from the Fall.
Isaiah 7:14

Mary had the little Lamb, obedient Son of God;
Everywhere the Father led, His feet were sure to trod.
John 6:38

Mary had the little Lamb, crucified on the tree
The rejected Son of God, He died to set men free.
1 Peter 1:18

Mary had the little Lamb -- men placed Him in the grave,
Thinking they were done with Him; to death He was no slave!
Matthew 28:6

Mary had the little Lamb, ascended now is He;
All work on Earth is ended, our Advocate to be.
Hebrews 4:14-16

Mary had the little Lamb -- mystery to behold!

From the Lamb of Calvary, a Lion will unfold.

Revelation 5: 5,6

When the Day Star comes again, of this be very sure:

It won't be Lamb-like silence, but with the Lion's roar.

Psalms 2:12

Revelation 19:11-16

Marv & Marbeth Rosenthal - Copies of this poem may be used without written permission from the authors.

Isaiah 7:14 The Spirit Of Giving

Read: Matthew 1:18-25

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14

Yes, there are people who believe in Santa Claus. According to a poll taken by KRC Research in 1996 and cited in U.S. News & World Report, nine percent of American adults say they really do believe in the jolly old North Pole resident.

Perhaps that's not surprising when we realize that at no other time of the year do we focus so much attention on a single theme as during the Christmas season. The fictional character of Santa Claus has become an integral part of the celebration in our culture because he symbolizes gift-giving, the centerpiece of most holiday gatherings. What many people believe in at Christmas is the spirit of giving.

As admirable as that spirit may be, there is something more grand and life-changing to believe in. At Christmas we need to focus on truths like these:

The prophecies of Jesus' birth (Isa. 7:14; 9:1-7).

The miracle of Jesus' conception (Mt. 1:18).

The perfection of the holy Christ-child (Lk. 1:35).

The mission of that baby boy (Mt. 1:21).

The Creator of the world miraculously became man on that first Christmas morning so He could provide us with the gift of eternal life. Now, that's something to believe in at Christmas!

The greatest gift in history:

Almighty God becoming man;

He left His throne and slept on straw,

In keeping with salvation's plan. —Sper

The best gift in the world was wrapped in a manger.

Isaiah 7:10-15 A Special Birth

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14

In the pages of Scripture, several baby-boy births stand out. Cain, the firstborn after creation. Isaac, the hope of Israel's future. Samuel, the answer to a mother's fervent prayer. All extremely important. All joyously expected. And all described exactly the same by the chroniclers of Scripture: In each case, we are told that the mother conceived and bore a son (Gen. 4:1; 21:2-3; 1 Sam. 1:20).

Now consider one more baby boy's birth. The description of this arrival was much more greatly detailed: a few words were clearly not enough to tell of Jesus' birth. In Micah, we were told where He would be born—Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). In Isaiah, that His mother would be a virgin (Isa 7:14), and that He was coming to save people from their sin (Isa 53).

In the New Testament, we were given such key information as what His name would be and why (Matt. 1:21), where He was born in fulfillment of prophecy (Mt 2:6), and how both His birth mother and His adoptive father were part of God's plan (Mt 1:16).

Jesus' birth stands above all births. His coming changed the world and can change our lives. Let's celebrate Him!

Mild He lays His glory by,

Born that man no more may die.

Born to raise the sons of earth,

Born to give them second birth. —Wesley

Christ is the greatest gift known to man.

INSIGHT: Scripture tells the story of God's rescue of humanity from the curse and consequences of sin, which was accomplished by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Isaiah's prophecy is just one of many that predict His coming and the events of His life. The first prophecy of redemption comes as soon as the need for rescue is pronounced. In Genesis 3, God delivers the devastating news of the consequences of Adam and Eve's actions. However, He does not leave them hopeless; the promise of a redeemer is included (Ge 3:15). What the Old Testament prophets predicted about the Redeemer, the New Testament says is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (see Luke 24:44).

Isaiah 8

Isaiah 8:11-18 Don't They Believe In God?

The Lord of hosts, Him you shall hallow; let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. —Isaiah 8:13

During the chaos of a big city riot, a television news video showed a man pointing at looters who were racing in and out of the stores. The man cried in anguish, "This is stealing! Don't these people have any morals? Don't they believe in God?"

The prophet Isaiah made a similar point. The Israelites had done the unthinkable—they had fallen into the immoralities of their pagan neighbors. In addition, they had made a treaty with Assyria rather than relying on the Lord to protect them against their enemies (2 Ki. 16:1-9).

Isaiah said they were worried about the wrong things. Instead of fearing their enemies, they should have been thinking about the Lord (Isa. 8:12-13). The Lord promised that He would be a sanctuary for those who put their trust in Him. But to those who rejected His offer, He would be "a stone of stumbling" and a hunter's snare (Isaiah 8:14).

We who profess faith in Christ need to make sure God is the one we fear. Whenever we join others in their sins or behave as if we are afraid of offending them, those who observe us will ask, "Don't they believe in God?"

Our challenge is to fear the Lord above everyone else, and to show it by what we do and say.

Everywhere sin and disgrace are appalling:

Let us be faithful, make sure of our calling,

Let us serve Christ and follow His lead,

Let us be true in thought, word, and deed. —HGB

A friend of God will be a stranger to the world.

Isaiah 8:1-10 Immanuel

"The virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." —Matthew 1:23

Since that first Christmas day 2,000 years ago, the assurance that God is with His people has taken on new meaning. Before Jesus was born, the Israelites were assured that even in judgment they could have hope because God was with them (Isaiah 8:8,10). Yet they didn't know God as fully as we can today.

We have a great advantage because through reading the New Testament we can see the glory of God "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6). And we can sense His presence in all situations of life because He is made real to us by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:10-16).

When I need to be reassured that God is with me, I think about Jesus as He is revealed in the New Testament. I recall how He took little children in His arms and blessed them (Matthew 19:13-15). Then I think of His crucifixion, which reminds me of all He endured

to be my Savior (Mt 27:27-54). Finally, I reflect on His promise, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20).

The birth of Jesus gave new significance to the name Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Mt 1:23). Because He lived among us, died for us, and sent His Spirit to indwell us, we can rejoice!

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,

Hail the incarnate Deity!

Pleased as man with men to dwell,

Jesus, our Immanuel. —Wesley

God came to live with us so we could live with Him.

Isaiah 9

Isaiah 9:1-7 “Little Rajah, Little King”

The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. —Isaiah 2:11

In an editorial printed in *Reaper* magazine, David G. Stewart wrote, “In India we used to chuckle about baby puja, or baby worship. All the women would gather around the baby in arms, and cluck like broody hens with their approval, and note the supposed likeness to mom or dad, and hold the fingers, touch the cheek, kiss the feet. A favorite term to describe the young baby boy was ‘Little Rajah, Little King.’ Though they do not actually bow down and worship a new baby, those Indians give so much attention to a new infant that it’s no wonder they call it ‘baby worship.’”

When Jesus was an infant, He too received adoration and honor. He was adored by shepherds who left their flocks in the fields to worship a baby in a manger. Why? Because He was the King of kings.

I wonder, as this Christmas season progresses, are you able to focus your attention, even briefly, on the One whose birth we celebrate? Even more, are you willing to bow down in humility and give Him the adoration He rightly deserves? Isaiah prophesied long ago that His name would be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus was no ordinary baby. He truly was the King of all kings!

As you bring your gifts to His cradle

And worship Him now as King,

Do you bow your knees to His power?

Is your life the offering you bring? —Brill

When we recognize Jesus’ kingship, we will give Him our worship.

Isaiah 9:1-7 Isn’t He Beautiful!

Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. —Isaiah 9:6

A group of children from our city were in a worship service, and we started to sing. Ariel, age 7, leaned close to me and softly said, “I love this song; it makes me cry.”

The music and words about Jesus, her Savior, touched her heart: “Isn’t He beautiful? Beautiful, isn’t He? Prince of peace, Son of God, isn’t He?”

Yes, the Lord Jesus is beautiful. We don’t find a specific reference in the Bible describing Him that way, but His personal character is strong yet gentle, holy yet forgiving, majestic yet humble—all combined. Simply beautiful!

In his prophecy, Isaiah described Jesus and His coming in this way: “Unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor—giving us comfort and wisdom. The Mighty God—acting with power and authority. The

Everlasting Father—providing for all our needs and protecting us. And the Prince of Peace—offering reconciliation with God and others.

Isn't Jesus beautiful! Worship Him.

Beautiful Savior! Lord of the nations!

Son of God and Son of Man!

Glory and honor, praise, adoration

Now and forevermore be Thine! —Seiss

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. —Colossians 1:15

Isaiah 9:1-7 A Promised Gift

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. —Isaiah 9:6

I read several years ago about a woman who hurriedly purchased 50 Christmas cards without looking at the message inside. She quickly signed and addressed all but one, and then dropped them in a mailbox. Just imagine her dismay when later she glanced inside the one unmailed card and read these words:

This card is just to say

A little gift is on the way.

No doubt there were 49 people wondering what happened to their presents.

How different was God's promise to us! Many years before the Savior was born, the Lord spoke through the prophet Isaiah, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14). And in Isaiah 9:6 we read, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given." Did God keep His word? Indeed He did! Galatians 4:4 states, "When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son."

On this special day, as we commemorate the birth of Christ, let's thank God that He meant what He said. He not only promised, but He also gave. "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

On Christmas morning long ago

Into this world of sin and woe

The blessed Savior came;

God's wondrous gift of love was He,

God's gift to lost humanity—

O glory to His name! —Staples

No gift is more needed by a dying world than a living Savior.

Isaiah 9:1-7 Wonderful!

His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. —Isaiah 9:6

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, the crowds cried out, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" (Mt. 21:9). Later that same week, however, a mob called for His crucifixion (Mt 27:22). Few people recognized Him as the one Isaiah described as Wonderful (Isa. 9:6).

If there is anyone who deserves that name, it is Jesus. He is wonderful in His deity and in His selfless love that led Him from the shining glories of heaven into the darkness of this sin-cursed world. He is wonderful in His virgin birth, wonderful in His overcoming, sinless life of service, wonderful in His teachings, wonderful in His vicarious death, wonderful in His astounding resurrection, and wonderful in His ascended glory.

Someone has observed, "In Christ we have a love that can never be fathomed, a life that can never die, a peace that can never be understood, a rest that can never be disturbed, a joy that can never be diminished, a hope that can never be disappointed, a glory that can never be clouded, a light that can never be darkened, and a spiritual resource that can never be exhausted."

Do you love the Wonderful One? If you do, your life here will be full of wonder, and the life hereafter, bliss! —Henry G. Bosch (ODB Editor 1956-1981)

Ponder the wonder of Jesus.

Isaiah 9:1-7 No Other Name

There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. —Acts 4:12

The angel announced to Joseph, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21).

The name Jesus is the Greek form of the Hebrew word Joshua, which is a contraction of two words, Jehovah and Hoshea, which means “God the Savior” or “Savior God.”

This is His name. This is the name which is above every name, and the name of the only One who can save us. No one can take His place or approach God without Him.

We respect the names of the patriarchs of the Bible and the godly men and women of more recent history, but everyone will one day bow before Jesus (Phil. 2:9-11). Even His own mother acknowledged her need of a Savior (Lk. 1:47). Jesus alone is the mediator between God and man (1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Yes, we honor godly men and women of the Bible. And we give due respect to those who throughout history have faithfully lived for Christ and proclaimed the gospel. But we are not to worship them or pray to them. Jesus alone is the One whose name means “Savior.” He is the Son of God, of whom Isaiah proclaimed, “His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6).

My heart is stirred whene'er I think of Jesus,

That blessed Name which sets the captive free;

The only Name through which I find salvation;

No name on earth has meant so much to me. —Eliason

© 1950 Alfred B. Smith

For time and eternity, Jesus is all we need.

Isaiah 9:1-7 Light And Shadow

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. —Isaiah 9:2

Art historian Seymour Slive described the great Dutch artist Rembrandt (1606–1669) as the master of light and shadow, a compelling storyteller on canvas. Rembrandt's painting *The Adoration of the Shepherds* portrays the darkened stable in Bethlehem where two shepherds kneel beside the manger while other people stand farther away. One man holds a lantern, but the brightest light shines not from his lantern but from the Christ-child, illuminating those who have gathered close to Him.

Seven centuries before Jesus' birth, Isaiah used an image of light and shadow to foretell the coming of a Savior for Israel: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined... For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given” (Isa. 9:2,6).

Each person may see a different story in Rembrandt's painting, but perhaps each of us is represented somewhere in that stable. Are we kneeling in worship, standing back in hesitation, or hiding from the light that has penetrated our darkness?

Christmas invites us to step out of the shadows of darkness and to allow the light of Christ to shine into our hearts.

Observing God's love from afar

Is only a passing delight;

But when we experience Christ's presence,

Our darkness is turned into light. —Hess

Faith in Christ is not a leap into the dark; it's a step into the Light.

Isaiah 9:1-7 A Great Light

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. —Isaiah 9:2

I was driving through the mountains of western Maryland on a cold December night. As I topped a ridge near Rocky Gap State Park, a brilliant sea of lights caught my attention. What in the world is that? I wondered as the exit road flashed past. It so aroused my curiosity that 5 miles down the interstate I turned around and drove back to see what it was—a local community's celebration in lights during the Christmas season. At noon, I wouldn't have noticed anything. But at night, the dazzling display couldn't be ignored.

Strange, isn't it, that we complain about the moral and spiritual darkness of our world, yet it is the perfect setting for the radiance of the Lord Jesus Christ. At Christmas, we often read these prophetic words: "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined" (Isaiah 9:2).

Jesus said of Himself: "I am the light of the world" (John 8:12), and to His disciples, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14).

In a dark world, people don't see a great light without wondering why it's there and what it means. We get to tell them.

O Holy One of glorious birth

Who lives within our heart,

May we to all men everywhere

Your wondrous love impart. —Brandt

To lead others out of the darkness, let them see your light.

Isaiah 9:1-7 Pax Romana

To us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. Isaiah 9:6

No one can afford the price of war. One website reports 64 nations are currently involved in armed conflicts. When and how will they end? We want peace, but not at the expense of justice.

Jesus was born during a time of "peace," but it came at the cost of heavy-handed oppression. The Pax Romana ("Roman Peace") existed only because Rome squashed all dissent.

Seven centuries before that time of relative peace, hostile armies prepared to invade Jerusalem. From the shadow of war, God made a remarkable pronouncement. "On those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned," the prophet declared (Isa. 9:2). "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given ... Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end" (vv. 6-7). Matthew tells us that Isaiah's prophecy found fulfillment in the Christ-child (Matt. 1:22-23; see also Isa. 7:14).

We adore the tiny baby in the manger scene. Yet that helpless babe is also the Lord Almighty, "the Lord of Heaven's Armies" (Isa. 13:13 nlt). He will one day "reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness" (Isaiah 9:7). Such a regime will be no oppressive Pax Romana. It will be the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Father, we can never sufficiently thank You that Your Son came to bring us peace with You through His death and resurrection. Thank You that He will rule in both peace and righteousness.

The Lamb of God is also the Lion of Judah.

INSIGHT: The encouraging words of the prophet Isaiah about a time of peace are all contingent on one specific event. Isaiah 9:1-5 describes a time not simply of rest from war and conflict but a time when the apparel of battle—clothes stained with blood—will be burned (v. 5). The land will be blessed and at peace because of the birth of the Child described in Isaiah 9:6-7. Jesus brings real and lasting peace both to our world and to our hearts and minds.

Isaiah 9:1-7 The Big News

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. —Isaiah 9:6

In December 1903, after many attempts, the Wright brothers were successful in getting their "flying machine" off the ground. Thrilled, they telegraphed this message to their sister Katherine: "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas."

Katherine hurried to the editor of the local newspaper and showed him the message. He glanced at it and said, "How nice. The boys

will be home for Christmas.” He totally missed the big news-man had flown!

Many people today make a similar mistake when they hear the word Christmas. They don't think of Jesus and His miraculous birth. Instead, they think of family gatherings, festive meals, decorations, and gifts. To them, Christmas brings nostalgia and memories of childhood.

Now, all this celebration isn't wrong. But if that's all that Christmas means to us, we are missing its true significance. The real meaning of this special day is summed up in the words of the angel to the shepherds on that night long ago: “I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:10-11).

That's the big news of Christmas!

One day has left its mark in time

For all mankind to see;

It is the day when Christ was born-

That day made history. -D. De Haan

Don't celebrate Christmas without inviting the Guest of honor.

Isaiah 9:6 The Son Is Given

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given. —Isaiah 9:6

One of my favorite portions of Handel's Messiah is the joyous movement “For unto us a Child is born,” from the first part of the oratorio. I especially love how the chorus rises to the phrase, “Unto us a Son is given.” Those words, of course, are taken from Isaiah 9:6, “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.” Handel's majestic music soars with adoration for the Son who came to us in human flesh that first Christmas.

The New Testament clarifies even further who this Son is. In Luke 1, the angelic messenger appeared to Mary and identified the Christ-child in four ways. He would be the son of Mary, making Him fully human (Lk 1:31). He would be the Son of the Highest, which made Him fully divine (Lk 1:32). He would also be the Son of David, giving Him royal lineage (Lk 1:32). And He would bear the title of Son of God (Lk 1:35), giving Him equality with the Father in all things. All of the roles the Messiah was called to fill are made possible in these distinct expressions of His Sonship.

As we worship Him this Christmas, may our celebrations be filled with joy and wonder at the fullness of what it means. Our heavenly Father has given us His perfect, sufficient Son. O come, let us adore Him!

Yea, Lord, we greet Thee, born this happy morning,

Jesus, to Thee be all glory given;

Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing;

O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord. —Wade

God's love became incarnate at Bethlehem.

Isaiah 11

Isaiah 11:1-9 Snake In A Box

The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord. —Isaiah 11:9

At a nature center, I watched my friend's rosy-cheeked toddler pat the side of a large glass box. Inside the box, a bull snake named Billy slithered slowly, eyeing the little girl. Billy's body was as thick as my forearm and he sported brown and yellow markings. Although I knew Billy could not escape from his container, seeing a menacing-looking creature so close to a small child made me shudder.

The Bible speaks of a time in the future when fierce animals will fail to threaten each other or human beings. “The wolf ... shall dwell

with the lamb” and “the nursing child shall play by the cobra’s hole” (Isa. 11:6,8). All the inhabitants of the world will experience total harmony and peace.

The Lord will establish this safe environment when He restores the world with His wisdom, might, and knowledge. At that time, He will judge the world with righteousness and justice (Isaiah 11:4). And everyone will acknowledge His greatness: “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord” (11:9).

We live in a broken world. Unfairness and discord, fear and pain are a very real part of our daily lives. But one day God will change everything, and “the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings” (Mal. 4:2). Then Jesus will rule the world in righteousness.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hast’ning on

When we shall be forever with the Lord.

When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,

Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored. —von Schlegel

Leave final justice in the hands of a just God.

INSIGHT: The future and everlasting kingdom of God will be one of peace and harmony. Many of the prophets looked forward to this day with great anticipation. In today’s passage, Isaiah describes this kingdom by picturing animals that would normally prey on each other at peace together. This will be a time of peace because the Messiah will rule (v.9).

Isaiah 12

Isaiah 12:1-6 Bibles And Buckets

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. —Isaiah 12:3

At a women’s retreat, one person was carrying a Bible and a bucket. It’s easy to understand why she was carrying the Bible, but why the bucket? With a twinkle in her eye, she explained, “The bucket reminds me to draw all the living water I possibly can.” Pointing to a crack in the bucket, she said, “Like me, my bucket leaks, reminding me to keep coming back to the Lord for more!”

Isaiah 12 is a hymn of praise to God, our source of living water—the water that forever quenches spiritual thirst (Jn. 4:14). The prophet said we could freely draw this water from God’s “wells of salvation” (Isa. 12:3).

Believers of all generations can testify: “The Lord is my strength ... [my] song ... my salvation” (Isaiah 12:2). F. B. Meyer wrote, “The little possessive pronoun my is the bucket with which we draw water from the depths of God. Our pilgrimage way is lined by these wells of saving help.”

Yet how often we seem oblivious to God’s desire to provide for us! Nancy Spiegelberg has expressed her own unawareness of that lavish provision:

Lord, I crawled across the barrenness to You

with my empty cup, uncertain in asking

any small drop of refreshment.

If only I had known You better,

I’d have come running with a bucket.

© 1974 Nancy Spiegelberg

Today, assured of God’s overflowing goodness, let’s resolve to be “Bible and bucket” believers.

God can meet all your needs—let Him.

Isaiah 12 Don’t Be Afraid

God is my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid. —Isaiah 12:2

I have an ancient leaf blower that I use to clean up our patio. It sputters, rattles, smokes, emits irritating fumes, and is considered by my wife (and probably by my neighbors) to be excessively noisy.

But our old dog is utterly indifferent to the racket. When I start up the blower, she doesn't even raise her head, and only reluctantly moves when I blow leaves or dirt in her direction. That's because she trusts me.

A young man who occasionally mows our yard uses a similar blower, but his is not tolerated by our dog. Years ago, when she was a puppy, he teased her with the machine and she has never forgotten. Now, when the man enters the backyard, we have to put her in the house, because she growls, barks, and snarls at him. Same set of circumstances, but the hands that use the blower make all the difference.

So it is with us. Frightening circumstances are less troublesome if we trust the hands that control them. If our world and our lives were governed by a thoughtless and indifferent force, we would have good reason to fear. But the hands that control the universe—God's hands—are wise and compassionate. We can trust them in spite of our circumstances and not be afraid.

When fear and worry test your faith

And anxious thoughts assail,

Remember, God is in control,

And He will never fail. —Sper

God is in control, so we have nothing to fear.

Isaiah 12:1-6 'Not Know!'

I will trust and not be afraid. —Isaiah 12:2

Two-year-old Max was securely buckled in his seat in Grandpa's pickup truck. He was waiting for Dad and Grandpa to stop talking so he could go for a ride. His mother poked her head in the truck and said, "Where are you going, Max?" "Not know," he replied, raising his little arms.

"What are you going to do?" she asked. "Not know," came the answer again.

"Well," she asked, "do you want to come back in the house with me?"

"No!" came the quick reply as he settled himself more firmly, waiting to begin his adventure.

"That little boy taught me a lesson I needed right then," his mother Sheryl told me later. She was soon to give birth to another baby, and she had reason to be unsure of what was ahead. "He didn't know where he was going or what he was going to do, but he trusted Grandpa completely. Max's confidence in Grandpa is the kind of trust I need in my heavenly Father."

If you are in one of those periods of life when you don't know what lies ahead, or you don't know what to do about some critical issue, it might help to think about it that way. God wants you to have the confidence in Him to say, like the prophet Isaiah, "I will trust and not be afraid" (Isaiah 12:2).

O Lord, whenever I'm afraid,

I'll put my trust in You

To lead, protect, and guide my way,

And help me make it through. —Sper

We don't know what the future holds, but we know who holds the future.

Isaiah 12:3 At The Well

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. —Isaiah 12:3

A guide in Israel was preparing to lead a tour into the desert. His instructions to the group were simple and clear: "If you do not have these two items, I will not allow you to accompany us. You must have a broad-brimmed hat and a full bottle of water. These will protect you from the sun, and from the thirst caused by wind and dryness."

Water. It's essential to survival. That's why a woman came to the well in Samaria (John 4:7). She came at noon, when few people

were there. She was startled when a young Jewish man asked her for something to drink. Jesus broke huge barriers with His request—she was a woman, had been married many times, and wasn't a Jew.

Jesus offered her water far better than that from the well. He had "living water," which only He could give (Jn 4:10,13-14). I believe she took that water and was spiritually cleansed, for she told everyone what she had experienced: "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (Jn 4:29).

Are you at the well? Is your soul thirsting for God? Do you need the cleansing and refreshment He offers? He is waiting there to satisfy you with the "living water" of salvation and the gift of everlasting life.

Gracious and Almighty Savior,

Source of all that shall endure,

Quench my thirst with living water,

Living water, clear and pure. —Vinal

Jesus is the only fountain who can satisfy the thirsty soul.

Isaiah 12:3 Wells of Salvation

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:3

When people drill holes deep into the earth, it is normally for pulling up core samples of rock, accessing oil, or finding water.

In Isaiah 12, we learn that God wanted His people, who were living in a spiritual desert as well as a geographical desert, to discover His "wells of salvation." The prophet Isaiah compared God's salvation to a well from which the most refreshing of all waters can be drawn. After many years of turning their back on God, the nation of Judah was destined for exile as God allowed foreign invaders to conquer the nation, scattering the people. Yet, said the prophet Isaiah, a remnant would eventually return to their homeland as a sign that God was with them (Isa. 11:11-12).

God is our source of joy, refreshment, and strength in times of need.

Isaiah 12 is a hymn, praising God for His faithfulness in keeping His promises, especially the promise of salvation. Isaiah encouraged the people that deep in God's "wells of salvation" they would experience the cool water of God's grace, strength, and joy (Isaiah 12:1-3). This would refresh and strengthen their hearts and cause praise and gratitude to God (Isaiah 12:4-6).

God wants each of us to discover through confession and repentance the deep, cool waters of joy found in the everlasting well of His salvation.

What will you do to draw deeply from God's well to find His joy, refreshment, and strength?

The wells of God's salvation never run dry.

INSIGHT: "The song of praise in this chapter is suitable for the return of the outcasts of Israel from their long captivity, but it is especially suitable to the case of a sinner, when he first finds peace and joy in believing; to that of a believer, when his peace is renewed after corrections for backslidings; and to that of the whole company of the redeemed, when they meet before the throne of God in heaven. The promise is sure, and the blessings contained in it are very rich ... By Jesus Christ, the Root of Jesse, the Divine anger against mankind was turned away, for he is our Peace." Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary

Isaiah 16

Isaiah 16:1-5 Fire And Rain

In mercy the throne will be established; and One will sit on it in truth ... judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness. — Isaiah 16:5

When a wildfire raged through the beautiful canyons near Colorado Springs, Colorado, it destroyed the habitat of all kinds of wildlife and hundreds of homes. People across the nation cried out to God, pleading with Him to send rain to douse the flames, put an end to the destruction, and give firefighters relief. Some people's prayers had an interesting condition attached to them. They asked God to show mercy and send rain without lightning, which they feared would start even more fires.

This reminds me of how we live in tension between things that save us and kill us. With fire, we cook our food and keep warm, but in it we can be consumed. With water, we keep our bodies hydrated and our planet cooled, but in it we also can drown. Too much or too little of either is life-threatening.

We see the same principle at work spiritually. To thrive, civilizations need the seemingly opposite qualities of mercy and justice (Zech. 7:9). Jesus scolded the Pharisees for being sticklers about the law but neglecting these “weightier matters” (Matt. 23:23).

We may lean toward justice or mercy, but Jesus keeps them in perfect balance (Isa. 16:5; 42:1-4). His death satisfies God’s need for justice and our need for mercy.

Father, for personal reasons I sometimes lean toward
showing mercy, and sometimes I just want justice now.

Teach me the balance as I look at Your character and
give me the wisdom I need in specific situations.

God’s justice and mercy met at the cross.

Isaiah 18

Isaiah 18:1-5 Watching And Waiting

The Lord said to me, “I will take My rest, and I will look from My dwelling place.” —Isaiah 18:4

In Isaiah 18, it appears that the whole world is set to battle God’s people. Yet what is the response of the Almighty One? “I will take My rest, and I will look from My dwelling place” (v.4). His stillness may appear to have been an acceptance of the conspiracy against them. But it wasn’t. God’s response was His reminder that He acts in His timing—at just the right time according to His will.

I think of Jesus waiting 4 days while Lazarus lay in the grave (John 11:39). Was He unaware? Did He not care? Of course He cared! He was waiting for the right time to act and to teach the lessons He wanted to teach.

The Bible records God’s “delays,” many of which seem at the time to be inexplicable from our point of view. Yet every delay flows from the depths of His wisdom and love. If nothing else, delay, if we accept it, can produce the quieter virtues—humility, patience, endurance, and persistence—qualities that are often the last to be learned.

Are you in distress? Does the Lord seem distant and detached? He is not indifferent to your plight, nor is He unmoved by your pleas. He is waiting while His purposes are achieved. Then, at the right moment, He will intercede. God is never in a hurry, but He is always on time.

Turn not aside, discouraged one;

Stir up your gift, pursue your goal;

In God’s own time you’ll see Him work;

He’ll give you hope and lift your soul. —D. DeHaan

God is worth waiting for; His time is always best.

Isaiah 24

Isaiah 24:15 By Dawn's Early Light

Read: Psalm 148:1-14

Glorify the Lord in the dawning light. —Isaiah 24:15

Dressed for warmth and walking the path by memory, I crept through the pre-dawn darkness to sit at a quiet place in Michigan’s

north woods. I settled at the base of a 60-foot white pine, got comfortable, and joined the silent forest. As day began to break, discernible shapes emerged from the darkness. Inch by inch the dawn appeared, and with it came the awakening of the forest.

Here and there birds began to sing. A flock of majestic geese flew low to the horizon, punctuating the sky with their busy conversation. A doe and her fawns moved soundlessly along the pine break. A red squirrel stared at me and flicked his tail.

How could I experience the majestic panorama of God's creation and not praise Him? Quietly I did so, but my mind was shouting glory to His name for all the angels to hear. Yet, compared with the giant beech trees, lacy cedars, whip-thin poplars, and leafy ferns, my praise seemed insignificant. What could my words add to the wonder of the perky chickadee and the fleet-footed rabbit?

The author of Psalm 148 understood that all nature reflects the Creator's power and greatness. On that cool fall day I was privileged to join creation in glorifying God by dawn's early light.

All of creation shouts in praise

To God who made it all;

I add my voice and say Amen!

Although I feel so small. —K. De Haan

The wonders of creation point to our wonderful Creator.

Isaiah 25

Isaiah 25:1-5 Our Refuge in the Storm

You have been ... a refuge from the storm. —Isaiah 25:4

The best correspondents for Life magazine were sent all over the world to ask the question, "What is the meaning of life?" They talked to philosophers and children, taxi drivers and Nile River boatmen. More than 100 premier photographers provided images.

One dramatic photograph of a lighthouse off the Brittany Coast caught my eye. A huge Atlantic storm had sent gigantic waves around the mammoth brick structure, nearly swallowing it up. But on the sheltered side, literally surrounded by frothing, boiling waves, stood the lighthouse keeper. He was looking casually toward shore, his hands stuck nonchalantly in his pockets, as enormous waves crashed around him.

This powerful illustration reminded me of the many fierce storms of trial we face in life. And I was grateful for the promise that in God we are as safe as that lighthouse keeper. The words of Isaiah 25:4 are true for every believer: God is our refuge during the storms of physical affliction, emotional turmoil, and spiritual attack. With His protection we can endure any trial with the calm assurance that He who shields us cannot be moved. And that gives us peace no matter how turbulent our circumstances.

The Lord may calm the storm around you, but more often He'll calm the storm within you.

Isaiah 25:1-9 Silent Helper

I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things. Isaiah 25:1

The discovery of penicillin revolutionized health care. Prior to the 1940s, bacterial infections were often fatal. Since then, penicillin has saved countless lives by killing harmful bacteria. The men who recognized its potential and developed it for widespread use won a Nobel Prize in 1945.

Long before the discovery of penicillin, other silent killers were at work saving lives by destroying bacteria. These silent killers are white blood cells. These hard workers are God's way of protecting us from disease. No one knows how many invasions they have stopped or how many lives they have saved. They receive little recognition for all the good they do.

The Lord gets similar treatment. He often gets blamed when something goes wrong, but He seldom gets credit for all the things that go right. Every day people get up, get dressed, drive to work or school or the grocery store, and return safely to their families. No one knows how many times God has protected us from harm. But when there is a tragedy, we ask, "Where was God?"

When I consider all the wonderful things that God does silently on my behalf each day (Isa. 25:1), I see that my list of praises is much longer than my list of petitions.

In what ways does God's goodness undergird your life? What are you thanking Him for today?

God keeps giving us reasons to praise Him.

INSIGHT: Isaiah 25 opens with a call to worship and praise God. Interestingly, the motivation behind this praise is God's work of judgment and destruction. Normally we praise Him for His rescue and salvation, but here praise is offered for acts of judgment. Bill Crowder

Isaiah 26

Isaiah 26:1-9 Perfect Peace Is Possible

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. —Isaiah 26:3

Few things (if anything at all) in this fallen world can be called perfect. But God promises to keep us in "perfect peace" if we keep our minds focused on Him and continue trusting Him (Isaiah 26:3).

So why do we find it so difficult to trust Him? Often, it's because we're afraid that things won't go as we want them to unless we control them ourselves. The less we are in control, the more anxious and worried we become.

Author Hannah Whitall Smith wrote, "It is not hard, you find, to trust the management of the universe, and of all the outward creation, to the Lord. Can your case then be so much more complex and difficult than these, that you need to be anxious or troubled about His management of you?"

Yet we often think our situation is too difficult for God. If we can't solve things ourselves, we doubt that He can. We have our Christian beliefs, yes—but that isn't the same as believing God. Believing God is a personal response that grows out of our Christian faith and is expressed by our increasing trust in Him and His promises.

As our mind remains on Him, He keeps us in perfect peace. This has been the experience of countless believers, and you can experience it too.

If God's creation helps us see
What wonders He can do,
Then we can trust His promises
For they are always true. —D. De Haan

God can be trusted in the dark as well as in the light.

Isaiah 26:1-4 Peace In The Storm

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. —Isaiah 26:3

Life can seem unbearable at times. Physical pain, difficult decisions, financial hardships, the death of a loved one, or shattered dreams threaten to engulf us. We become fearful and perplexed. Plagued by doubts, we may even find it difficult to pray.

Those of us who know the Lord through personal faith in Christ have in Him a calm retreat in the storms of life, even while the howling winds of trial are sweeping over us. We can experience peace of mind and calmness of spirit.

Richard Fuller, a 19th-century minister, told of an old seaman who said, "In fierce storms, we must put the ship in a certain position and keep her there." Said Fuller, "This, Christian, is what you must do... You must put your soul in one position and keep it there. You must stay upon the Lord; and, come what may—winds, waves, cross seas, thunder, lightning, frowning rocks, roaring breakers—no matter what, you must hold fast your confidence in God's faithfulness and His everlasting love in Christ Jesus."

Do you feel overwhelmed by your troubles? Learn a lesson from that old sailor. Fix your mind on the Lord. Ask for His help. Then trust Him to give you peace in your storm (Phil. 4:6-7).

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blest—
Finding, as He promised,

Perfect peace and rest. —Havergal

The secret of peace is to give every anxious care to God.

Isaiah 26:1-9 Dealing With Delay

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You. —Isaiah 26:3

In April 2010, clouds of ash spewed by a volcano in Iceland closed airports across the UK and Europe for 5 days. Nearly 100,000 flights were canceled and millions of passengers around the world found themselves in an enormous holding pattern on the ground. People missed important events, businesses lost money, and no one knew when it would end.

When our plans fall apart and there is no remedy, how do we deal with frustration and delay? Isaiah 26:3-4 is an anchor for our souls in every storm of life: “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. Trust in the Lord forever, for in [Jehovah], the Lord, is everlasting strength.” Whether we’re facing annoying inconvenience or heartbreaking loss, this rock-solid promise is worth memorizing and repeating every night when we close our eyes to sleep.

Today, when plans are shattered, do our minds dwell on the circumstances or on the Lord? During frustrating delay, can we still trust the loving heart of God? In the hymn “Like a River Glorious,” Frances Havergal so beautifully expressed what we long for.

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,

Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;

Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,

Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.

Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest,

Finding as He promised, perfect peace and rest. —Havergal

When we put our problems in God’s hands, He puts His peace in our hearts.

Isaiah 26:1-9 Prepare To Sleep

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. —Isaiah 26:3

We spend approximately 30 percent of our lives sleeping—or trying to sleep. Today there are more than 300 sleep disorder clinics in the United States. There are also 90 million Americans who snore, and they (or the people who share a room with them) spend about \$200 million a year on anti-snoring remedies.

Think of it! Nearly a third of our entire lives sleeping! Yet how much do we plan and prepare spiritually for those important hours of sleep?

For many years, a friend of mine has followed a simple guideline he refers to as HWLW, which stands for “His Word the Last Word.” Every night, just before turning out the light, he reads a passage from the Bible or meditates on a verse he has memorized. Before he goes to sleep, he wants the last word he thinks about to be from God—not the evening news or the weather, not the late-night talk-show host or the celebrity guest, but a final word from the Lord.

Is it possible that the words of Isaiah 26:3 could apply to our subconscious as well as our conscious minds? Wouldn’t “perfect peace” for the person “whose mind is stayed on” the Lord make for a good night’s sleep?

Why don’t we all try it? “His Word the Last Word”—spiritual preparation for a peaceful night’s sleep!

Putting It Into Practice

Before going to sleep, read a portion from the Bible

or recall a verse you read earlier in the day.

Meditate on God and your relationship with Him.

Before you turn out the light, turn to the light of God’s Word.

Isaiah 26:3 Uncertain Times

Read: Philippians 4:6-9

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. —Philippians 4:7

During a major economic downturn several years ago, many people lost their jobs. Sadly, my brother-in-law was one of them. Writing to me about their situation, my sister shared that although there were uncertainties, they had peace because they knew that God would care for them.

Believers in Jesus can have peace in the midst of uncertainties because we have the assurance that our heavenly Father loves His children and cares for our needs (Matt. 6:25-34). We can bring all our concerns to Him with an attitude of thankfulness, trusting Him to meet our needs and give us peace (Phil. 4:6-7).

“The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,” writes the apostle Paul, “will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Php 4:7). To say the peace of God surpasses all understanding reveals that we can’t explain it, but we can experience it as He guards our hearts and minds.

Our peace comes from the confidence that the Lord loves us and He is in control. He alone provides the comfort that settles our nerves, fills our minds with hope, and allows us to relax even in the midst of changes and challenges.

Heavenly Father, You are all-wise, all-powerful, and

all-loving. In the midst of uncertainties, help me to

rest in the certainty of who You are. I thank You

that Your peace will guard my heart. I place my trust in You.

You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You. —Isaiah 26:3

INSIGHT: Jesus taught us not to worry, because we can entrust our needs to our heavenly Father who loves us and cares for us deeply (Matt. 6:25-34; 7:9-11; 1 Peter 5:7). In Philippians 4, Paul follows Jesus’ example and encourages us to replace our anxieties with expectant trust and grateful prayer. The “peace of God” (v.7) is not a psychological state of mind but an inner calm or tranquility. This peace comes from a confident trust in God who answers prayers (v.6), from a disciplined spiritual perspective, and from a deliberate practice of Christian virtues (v.9). Those who entrust themselves to God will not only experience the peace of God (v.7), but “the God of peace” Himself will be with them (v.9).

ISAIAH 27

Isaiah 27:1 - Leviathan

“In that day the LORD with his sore and great and strong sword shall punish leviathan the piercing serpent, even leviathan that crooked serpent; and He shall slay the dragon that is in the sea” (Isaiah 27:1).

There is a remarkable animal called a “leviathan,” described in the direct words of God in the 41st chapter of Job. It is surprising that most modern expositors call this animal merely a crocodile. Our text plainly calls it a “piercing serpent...the dragon that is in the sea.” He is also said to “play” in the “great and wide sea” (Psalm 104:25, 26). God’s description, in Job 41, says “a flame goeth out of his mouth” (v. 21) and “he maketh the deep to boil like a pot” (v. 31). The entire description is awesome! Whatever a leviathan might have been, it was not a crocodile!

In fact, there is no animal living today which fits the description. Therefore, it is an extinct animal, almost certainly a great marine reptile, still surviving in the oceans of Job’s day, evidently one of the fearsome reptiles that gave rise to the worldwide tales of great sea dragons, before they became extinct.

But that is not all. In ending His discourse, God called leviathan “a king over all the children of pride” (Job 41:34), so the animal is also symbolic of Satan, whose challenge to God instigated Job’s strange trials. He is “the great dragon...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world” (Revelation 12:9). Perhaps, therefore, the mysterious and notorious extinction of the dinosaurs is a secular prophecy of the coming Day of Judgment when God “shall punish leviathan” (Isaiah 27:1) and the “devil that deceived them” will be “cast into the lake of fire...and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

HMM Our Daily Bread, Saturday,

ISAIAH 28

Isaiah 28:23-29 Pain Is Not Pointless

This also comes from the Lord of hosts, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance. —Isaiah 28:29

During times of hardship, I often feel like whining, “Who needs this pain? I certainly don’t!” But Isaiah 28 and my own experience tell me this is a shortsighted reaction. Not that we need hardship just for its own sake, but we do need to be changed and to mature. In God’s hand, hardship can be an effective tool to bring about our much-needed growth.

In Isaiah 28:23-28, we read the prophet’s “poetic parable,” written to help the people of Israel understand how God works and what He intended to accomplish in their lives through tough times. A farmer is portrayed skillfully plowing the ground, planting his crops, and threshing the harvest. If the soil could talk, it might have whined, “Who needs this painful plowing?” But the pain is not pointless. Isaiah said that the farmer is taught by God to work in measured and well-timed ways, handling delicate crops with care and others more vigorously, but always with a sure harvest in view.

Our reassurance during tough times is that the farmer’s God is our God, “who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in guidance” (Isaiah 28:29). His dealings with us are always thoughtful and purposeful, producing in us “the peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Hebrews 12:11).

God has a purpose in our heartaches—

The Savior always knows what’s best;

We learn so many precious lessons

In every sorrow, trial, and test. —Jarvis

When you trust in God, pain is an opportunity for progress.

Isaiah 29

Isaiah 29:13 Imitation Faith

Read: Isaiah 1:1-4,12-17

These people ... honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me. —Isaiah 29:13

Tourists throughout the centuries have visited the famous Acropolis, the ancient hilltop religious citadel in Athens. Thousands of sightseers from all over the world have picked up marble chunks as souvenirs.

Why hasn’t the supply of pieces been exhausted long ago? The answer is very simple. Every few months a truckload of marble fragments from a quarry miles away is scattered around the whole Acropolis area. So tourists go home happy with what they think are authentic pieces of ancient history.

We can be deceived by other kinds of imitations. Religious language and music, religious objects and services may fool us into imagining that we are experiencing a firsthand relationship with God when in reality we are simply going through empty routines.

During the time of the prophet Isaiah, many of the people of Israel were merely going through the motions. That is why God told them, “Bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to Me... Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates” (Isaiah 1:13-14).

The possibility of religious deception prompts personal soul-searching. Our pious practices may be only imitations of the true heartfelt faith that the Lord desires. —VCG

Hypocrisy is a common sin

That grieves the Lord above;

He longs for those who’ll worship Him

In faith and truth and love. —Bosch

A hypocrite has God on his tongue and the world in his heart.

Isaiah 30

Isaiah 30:1-18 More Than Knowledge

In returning and rest you shall be saved. —Isaiah 30:15

Seatbelts save lives. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, front seat occupants who use their seatbelts reduce their risk of death by 45 percent. Yet only 10 to 15 percent of people buckled up before laws were passed in the 1980s requiring them to do so. Seatbelt use in the US rose to 68 percent in 1996, but 32 percent continued to ignore the laws and defy the odds.

These facts call attention to the role of the human will in education. We must believe that what we have been told is so important that we act upon it without hesitation.

Isaiah 30 illustrates the danger of a stubborn will. God had repeatedly assured the people of Judah that if only they would rely on Him, He would be their safety in times of trouble. But they wouldn't listen. Even though God had given them many reasons to put their confidence in Him, the people refused to obey. Therefore, many of them died without receiving His help.

Have you considered this matter of your willingness to believe God? It's not a matter of learning more; you already know He is trustworthy. Put your confidence in God. You'll make the best use of the knowledge you have, and you'll experience the safety you need.

The blessings of the Lord are known

By all who will obey;

His wisdom, truth, and love are shown

To all who walk His way. —DJD

We show what We know when We act on the fact.

Isaiah 30:8-17 The Resisters

This is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of the Lord. —Isaiah 30:9

"I don't have to listen to you!" That's a sentence parents don't like to hear from their teenage children. It means they have decided not to obey their parents. Usually, it's spoken in anger and soon forgotten.

Sometimes, though, a teen might decide to make that attitude a way of life. When that happens, it's hard for everyone in the family. A child's refusal to obey authority creates ongoing turmoil in the home and saps the joy from life.

The teenager openly rebels, thinking he would be happier by resisting authority. But instead, he can actually become miserable in his heart.

The prophet Isaiah told about some resisters—rebellious, lying people who refused to listen to what God was saying (Isaiah 30:8-17). In effect, they said to Him, "We've heard enough. We don't have to listen to You!" Their heart of resistance turned them against God's truth.

Rebellion is not limited to teens or to the people of Isaiah's day. Sometimes we too wear the resister label. We read God's Word and decide it's too restrictive. Or we sense that God wants us to do something, and we run from it. That leads only to misery. Instead, if we obey God's Word, we will enjoy His peace in our hearts.

If you've rebelled and turned away

From what you know is true,

Turn back to God—He will forgive;

He waits to pardon you. —Sper

Obedience is the pathway to joy.

Isaiah 30:8-18 Hide Or Seek?

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy. —Proverbs 28:13

An Indianapolis patrolman ran into trouble while he was investigating a routine traffic mishap. He had interviewed witnesses, arrested one of the drivers, and written up the accident report. Then he noticed that the offending motorist was chewing on something that wasn't gum. He was eating the report! Despite the officer's efforts to retrieve the report, it was destroyed. But the delay was only temporary. The patrolman tracked down the witnesses again and recompiled the evidence.

The resistance and coverup that this Indiana officer encountered is similar to what Isaiah saw in the people of Israel centuries ago. The prophet was grieved as he watched his countrymen try to ignore and conceal the evidence of their sin. They, in effect, stuck their fingers in their ears while the Lord spoke (Isa. 30:9), and they encouraged their prophets to tell them only what they wanted to hear (Isaiah 30:10). They would rather hide than seek the mercy of God. Consequently, the Lord sent judgment on them (Isaiah 30:12-17).

We can learn from Israel's mistakes that an attempt at cover up won't do any good. It's only temporary. We must confess our sins to God and forsake them. Then we will know the joy of God's forgiveness.

The sins that would entangle us

Must never be ignored;

For if we try to cover them

They'll pierce us like a sword. —Sper

The sin we try to cover up will eventually bring us down.

Isaiah 30:15-22 Answer the Cry

[The Lord] will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry. —Isaiah 30:19

When my grandchildren were young, my son took them to see the stage production of *The Lion King*. As the young lion, Simba, stood over his father, King Mufasa, who had been killed by his evil uncle, little Simba, afraid and alone, cried out, "Help, Help, Help!" At that moment, my 3-year-old grandson stood on his chair in the hushed theater and shouted, "Why doesn't somebody help him?!"

The Old Testament contains many accounts of God's people crying out for help. Although their trouble was often self-imposed due to their waywardness, God was still eager to come to their aid.

The prophet Isaiah had to deliver a lot of bad news, but in the midst of it he assured the people that "the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion... How gracious he will be when you cry for help!" (Isa. 30:18-19 niv). Yet God often looked to His own people to be the answer to that cry for help (see Isa. 58:10).

Today, people all around us are in need of someone to take action to help them. It is a high privilege to become the hands of God as we respond on His behalf to cries for help.

Lord, remind me that You desire to show

compassion to those in need and that You often call

on us to be the instruments of that compassion. Give

me an opportunity today to show Your love to at least one person in need.

Show that God cares by lending a helping hand.

INSIGHT: Isaiah was a prophet who spoke comprehensively about the coming Messiah. In fact, he spoke about the Deliverer more than any other Old Testament figure did—which makes his name very appropriate. Isaiah means "the Lord is salvation."

Isaiah 30:12-19 Waiting Game

He will be very gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. —Isaiah 30:19

We are sometimes slow to go to God for forgiveness. We carry our guilt around for days, weeks, or even longer before dealing with

our sin. Why do we wait so long?

Some of us may feel that going to God immediately makes forgiveness cheap. Others may consider it arrogant to expect God to forgive.

In Isaiah 30:18-19, the Lord told stubborn, unrepentant Israel that He was waiting to be gracious to them. He promised that the moment He heard their cry He would be merciful and answer them.

God's eagerness to forgive sin became most clear through Christ's suffering on the cross. His death was sufficient to pay the penalty for sin so He could offer forgiveness to everyone in the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). Therefore, we can "come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). The word boldly means "confidently, not arrogantly; freely, not cheaply." The phrase in time of need means "without delay."

Are you in need of forgiveness? God is waiting for you to receive it. If you'll repent and come boldly to Him without delay, He won't keep you waiting. At the sound of your voice, He'll be very gracious to you.

If you've rebelled and turned away

From what you know is true,

Turn back to God—He will forgive;

His pardon waits for you. —Sper

Forgiveness is free, but we must accept it.

Isaiah 30:15 Strength in Stillness

Read: Exodus 14:10-14

In quietness and confidence shall be your strength. —Isaiah 30:15

Early in my Christian life the demands of commitment made me wonder if I could make it past a year without returning to my old sinful ways. But this Scripture verse helped me: "The Lord will fight for you; you need only to be still" (Ex 14:14 niv). These are the words Moses spoke to the Israelites when they had just escaped from slavery in Egypt and were being pursued by Pharaoh. They were discouraged and afraid.

As a young believer, with temptations engulfing my world, this call "to be still" encouraged me. Now, some 37 years later, remaining still and calm while trusting Him in the midst of stress-laden situations has been a constant desire for my Christian living.

"Be still, and know that I am God," the psalmist says (Ps. 46:10). When we remain still, we get to know God, "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1). We see our weakness apart from God and recognize our need to surrender to Him. "When I am weak, then I am strong," says the apostle Paul (2 Cor. 12:10).

Daily we grind through stress and other frustrating situations. But we can trust that He will be faithful to His promise to care for us. May we learn to be still.

Sometimes the hectic demands on your day can crowd out your time with God. Find out how you can develop a regular time of Bible reading and prayer. Read In His Presence at www.discoveryseries.org/q0718

The Lord may calm your storm, but more often He'll calm you.

INSIGHT: After Pharaoh set the Jews free from slavery (Ex. 12:28-33), he immediately had a change of heart and summoned his elite army to recapture them (14:5-9). Although God had overwhelmingly demonstrated His great power through the 10 plagues (Ex. 7-11), the Jews chose not to trust in Him. Terrified, they accused Moses of deceiving them and leading them into the wilderness to die (14:11-12). But Moses encouraged them not to be afraid and to be still and trust the Lord (vv. 13-14). God was faithful and saved them from Pharaoh's army (vv. 21-23), and He continued to provide for them during their 40 years in the wilderness.

Isaiah 30:15-18 Worth The Wait

Therefore the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you. —Isaiah 30:18

Oh, how we hate to be kept waiting, especially by God. Why does He sometimes make us wait?

Read Isaiah 30:18 and notice that it begins with the word therefore. I've heard people say that if you examine what precedes the word therefore you'll discover what it's there for! So let's try it. In Isaiah 30:15 the Lord reminded Israel that if she had turned and

rested in Him, she would have been saved from her enemies. If she had been quiet and confident, she would have found sufficient strength. "But you would not," the Lord lamented, "and you said, 'No'" (Isaiah 30:15-16). Instead of returning to the Lord, Israel would flee from her enemies (Isaiah 30:17). "Therefore," we read in verse 18, "the Lord will wait, that He may be gracious to you."

What was God waiting for? He was waiting for Israel to fail in her self-sufficient ways and to start depending on Him. Only then could He be gracious to her.

Let's not fear the humbling experience of reaching the end of our resources. A. B. Simpson wrote: "We find our humbling failures save us from the strength that harms." That's why God allows us to fail—that we might be saved from ourselves and experience the truth: "Blessed are all those who wait for Him" (Isaiah 30:18).

Failure becomes a friend when it turns us to God.

Isaiah 30:15-18 Calm Under Pressure

In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength. —Isaiah 30:15

At the farewell for a minister who had served his church for 20 years, several preachers eloquently extolled his many virtues. One layman, however, paid a tribute that the pastor considered to be the most gratifying. He said, "I have observed him nearly every day for the past 20 years, and I've never seen him in a hurry!"

The pastor said that for years he had asked God to teach him how to renew his strength through "quietness and confidence," as he had read in Isaiah 30:15. In this verse Isaiah was calling rebellious Israel to return to God and rely on Him to find new strength. The pastor, however, saw in that verse a principle applicable to his own life.

Some people are calm by nature; others are high-strung. But Christians, regardless of their temperament, can come to God in prayer and learn to renew their strength in quietness and confidence. Martin Luther said that he could get so busy that he first needed to spend at least 3 hours a day in prayer to get anything done. Often we reverse that order. We rush from task to task feeling flustered because we haven't taken time to be with the Lord.

Let's learn the principle set forth in Isaiah 30:15. In quietness and confidence before God we find the real source of strength to stay calm. —RWD

We oft grow weary in life's race,

We're driven by its hurried pace;

But when we wait upon the Lord,

His strength becomes our sure reward. —D. De Haan

Never take on more work than you have time to pray about.

Isaiah 30:18 Waiting ...

Read: Luke 2:22-38

Blessed are all those who wait for Him. —Isaiah 30:18

Autumn is hunting season here in Michigan. For a few weeks every year, licensed hunters are allowed to go out into the woods and hunt for various species of wildlife. Some hunters build elaborate tree stands high above the ground where they sit quietly for hours waiting for a deer to wander within rifle range.

When I think of hunters who are so patient when it comes to waiting for deer, I think of how impatient we can be when we have to wait for God. We often equate "wait" with "waste." If we're waiting for something (or someone), we think we are doing nothing, which, in an accomplishment-crazed culture, seems like a waste of time.

But waiting serves many purposes. In particular, it proves our faith. Those whose faith is weak are often the first to give up waiting, while those with the strongest faith are willing to wait indefinitely.

When we read the Christmas story in Luke 2, we learn of two people who proved their faith by their willingness to wait. Simeon and Anna waited long, but their time wasn't wasted; it put them in a place where they could witness the coming of Messiah (Lk 2:22-38).

Not receiving an immediate answer to prayer is no reason to give up faith.

Not ours to know the reason why

Unanswered is our prayer,

But ours to wait for God's own time

To lift the cross we bear. —Anon.

Waiting for God is never a waste of time.

Isaiah 31

Isaiah 31:1-5 Lion Of Judah

Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed. —Revelation 5:5

The lounging lions in Kenya's Masai Mara game reserve looked harmless. They rolled on their backs in low-lying bushes. They rubbed their faces on branches as if trying to comb their magnificent manes. They drank leisurely from a stream. They strode slowly across dry, scrubby terrain as if they had all the time in the world. The only time I saw their teeth was when one of them yawned.

Their serene appearance is deceiving, however. The reason they can be so relaxed is that they have nothing to fear—no shortage of food and no natural predators. The lions look lazy and listless, but they are the strongest and fiercest of all. One roar sends all other animals running for their lives.

Sometimes it seems as if God is lounging. When we don't see Him at work, we conclude that He's not doing anything. We hear people mock God and deny His existence, and we anxiously wonder why He doesn't defend Himself. But God "will not be afraid of their voice nor be disturbed by their noise" (Isa. 31:4). He has nothing to fear. One roar from Him, and His detractors will scatter like rodents.

If you wonder why God isn't anxious when you are, it's because He has everything under control. He knows that Jesus, the Lion of Judah, will triumph.

When fear and worry test your faith

And anxious thoughts assail,

Remember God is in control

And He will never fail. —Sper

Because God is in control, we have nothing to fear.

Isaiah 31 Our Refuge And Strength

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. —Psalm 20:7

In August 2004, Hurricane Charley brought fierce destruction to areas of Florida. During the storm, 25-year-old Danny Williams went outside to seek protection in one of his favorite places, a shed under the protective branches of a banyan tree. But the tree fell on the shed and killed Williams. Sometimes, the places we look to for security can be the most dangerous.

The prophet Isaiah warned Judah's King Hezekiah of this truth. Hezekiah was a good king, but he repeated the sin of his father Ahaz by seeking security in an alliance with an alien power (2 Kings 16:7; Isa. 36:6). Instead, he should have been encouraging his people to trust in the Lord.

By seeking help from Egypt, Hezekiah showed that he had failed to learn from history. Egypt had been anything but an ally to Israel. Hezekiah had also forgotten Scripture. Amassing horses for cavalry units was against the divine constitution for the king (Deut. 17:16).

Ultimately, Hezekiah did seek help from the Lord (Isa. 37:1-6,14-20). And God miraculously annihilated the invading Assyrians (vv.36-38).

Judah made the mistake of valuing the strength of Egypt over the living God. May our trust always be in the name of the Lord our God (Ps. 20:7).

Trust in God and you will know

He can vanquish any foe;

Simply trust Him day by day,

He will be your strength and stay. —D. De Haan

No life is more secure than a life surrendered to God.

Isaiah 32

Isaiah 32:1-8 Noble Plans

A generous man devises generous things, and by generosity he shall stand. —Isaiah 32:8

There's a difference between saying, "I would like to visit England sometime" and saying, "I'm planning to visit England next week." One statement expresses a desire; the other indicates definite preparation.

So often we enter a new year with hopes, desires, and resolutions that can be the seeds of positive change. But the key to what actually happens in our lives is in making definite plans. That involves thought, purpose, and effort.

Isaiah wrote about a future time when "a king will reign in righteousness" (Isaiah 32:1). This prophetic passage tells us about the coming rule of Christ, but it also gives us a principle that we who bow before Jesus as King can apply today. Isaiah contrasted the schemer who "devises wicked plans" with the generous or noble person who "devises generous things" (Isaiah 32:7-8). As Christ's followers, we are to be generous people.

What plans have we made for increased generosity during this new year? Are we only hoping to give more time and attention to others, or have we made some specific commitments? If we want to help a person or a cause financially, have we written the first check?

This is a great time to make noble plans that honor God with our vision and generosity.

In Jesus' name our prayer we raise,

Whose guiding hand has blessed our days;

And may we, Lord, in godly fear

Serve You throughout this coming year. —Anon.

God's plans include you. Do your plans include God?

Isaiah 33

Isaiah 33:14-24 Living In The Fire

Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? —Isaiah 33:14

Just before darkness settled, the Israelites who stood on the walls of Jerusalem saw with dismay the mighty Assyrian army surrounding the city. But at dawn the enemy camp was deserted, and thousands of dead soldiers lay scattered on the ground. What awe and gratitude must have filled the hearts of godly Israelites—but the wicked were terrified!

The prophet Isaiah portrays trembling sinners asking how they can live with "the devouring fire" and "everlasting burnings" (Isaiah 33:14). These phrases do not refer to hell, but to our holy God. Those hypocrites were really asking, "Who can live with Him?" Isaiah's answer was simple: "He who walks righteously and speaks uprightly" (Isaiah 33:15). It wasn't enough just to participate in religious ritual; Isaiah was reminding them that to live in the presence of the consuming fire they had to obey God.

Hebrews 12:29 reminds us that "our God is a consuming fire." How is it possible, then, to have a close relationship with Him? Jesus said, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

If we trust Jesus as our Savior and seek to please Him, we need not fear living in the fire of His holiness.

No sinner can endure God's fire,

His holiness consumes all sin;

But Jesus took our punishment—

Now we can have His peace within. —D. De Haan

God's holiness reveals what is good by consuming what is evil.

Isaiah 33:14-15 Negative and Positive Commands

According to a third century rabbi, Moses gave 365 prohibitions and 248 positive commands. David reduced them to eleven in Psalm 15. Isaiah made them six (Isaiah 33:14, 15). Micah 6:8 binds them into three commands. Habbakuk reduces them all to one great statement: The just shall live by faith. Source unknown

Isaiah 35

Isaiah 35:3-10 Well Done, David Schumm

Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come. —Isaiah 35:4

At David Schumm's memorial service, we celebrated the optimism, perseverance, and faith of a man with severe cerebral palsy. For all of David's 74 years, the simple tasks of daily life required great effort. Through it all, he kept smiling and helping others by giving more than 23,000 hours as a hospital volunteer, along with encouraging at-risk teens.

David selected Isaiah 35:3-10 to be read at his service: "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are fearful-hearted, 'Be strong, do not fear! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God; He will come and save you... Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb sing. For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert' (Isaiah 35:3-4,6). This promise, given to the people of Israel while in captivity, reminds us of our hope for the time when Christ will return for those who trust and follow Him.

During David's last weeks, he often pointed visitors to a large picture of Jesus near his bed, saying, "He's coming to get me soon." This is the hope Jesus Christ gives to all His children, which calls forth our thanks and praise to Him!

Marvelous message we bring,

Glorious carol we sing,

Wonderful word of the King:

Jesus is coming again! —Peterson

Live as if Christ died yesterday and is coming back today.

Isaiah 35 Obsolete

The ransomed of the Lord ... shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away. —Isaiah 35:10

Pastor and author Joseph Parker (1830-1902) commented about the closing words of Isaiah 35:10, "Sorrow and sighing shall flee away." He said, "Looking through the dictionary, you will occasionally come across a word marked 'obsolete.' The time is coming when the two words sorrow and sighing shall be obsolete. The things which mar life here and now will then belong to the past."

Human existence has been marked by tragedy, heartache, disappointment, and evil. It's comforting to know that the time is coming when sorrow and death will pass away, and God Himself will wipe all tears from our eyes. Then we will experience the truth that "the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Are you burdened today by some seemingly insurmountable problem? Are you lonely, heartbroken, and disappointed? If you are a child of God, dwell on this reassuring thought: "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18). A brighter day is coming when words such as sighing, death, and tears will all be obsolete.

So don't be downhearted, beloved child of God. Keep looking up!

God's tomorrow is a day of gladness,
And its joys shall never fade;
No more weeping, no more sense of sadness,
No more foes to make afraid. —Ackley
Heaven—no pain, no night, no death, no tears.

Isaiah 37

Isaiah 37:30-38 The Mighty Finns

Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God. Isaiah 37:20

It began as a distant, foreboding hum, then grew into an ominous, earth-rattling din. Soon hundreds of tanks and thousands of enemy infantrymen swarmed into view of the badly outnumbered soldiers in Finland. Assessing the murderous wave, an anonymous Finn lent some perspective. Courageously, he wondered aloud about the enemy: "Where will we find room to bury them all?"

Some 2,600 years before Finland showed such pluck in that World War II battle, an anxious Judean citizenry reacted quite differently to their own overwhelming situation. The Assyrian armies had trapped the people of Jerusalem inside its walls, where they faced the hopeless prospect of a starvation-inducing siege. Hezekiah nearly panicked. But then he prayed, "Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth" (Isa. 37:16).

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord answered with strong words for Assyria's King Sennacherib. "Against whom have you raised your voice and lifted your eyes in pride? Against the Holy One of Israel!" (Isaiah 37:23). Then God comforted Jerusalem. "I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!" (Isaiah 37:35). The Lord defeated Sennacherib and destroyed the Assyrian army (Isaiah 37:36-38).

No matter what dangers loom on your horizon today, the God of Hezekiah and Isaiah still reigns. He longs to hear from each of us and show Himself powerful.

In what ways has God shown Himself strong in the past?

God is greater than our greatest problem.

INSIGHT: Isaiah 36–37 and a parallel account in 2 Kings 18–19 tell of the threat and siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians during the reign of Hezekiah. Having exiled the northern kingdom of Israel 10 years earlier (2 Kings 18:9-12), Assyria now turned its attention to Judah (v. 13). Initially, Hezekiah tried to avert the invasion by agreeing to pay tribute (vv. 14-16), but Assyria was determined to attack Judah (v. 17; Isa. 36:1). Hezekiah turned to God for help (Isaiah 37:14-20), and Isaiah prophesied the defeat of the Assyrians and promised protection and deliverance for Judah (vv. 21-37). Sim Kay Tee

Isaiah 38

Isaiah 38:19 Education Starts At Home

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The father shall make known Your truth to the children. —Isaiah 38:19

It's time for the lazy days of summer to give way to the busy days of fall. Time again for school to start. Getting youngsters ready for school can leave parents gasping for breath.

But there's more to getting the children ready than filling their backpack and getting them to the bus on time. They must also be prepared spiritually. Before they hit the books, they need to know that the most important things they will ever learn come from the Book: the Bible.

There are many ways this can be done. One family takes time before school to have Bible reading. While Dad and the kids eat, Mom reads a chapter as they work through the whole Bible. Another family uses the time to read and discuss shorter passages—Dad taking one child, Mom the other. Some parents use the night before to share scriptural truths.

If you have school-age children, the pattern you develop for teaching them God's Word is important. No matter what their school situation is—whether home-school, Christian school, private school, or public school—the main responsibility of spiritual training belongs to the parents.

Before anyone else has a chance to educate our children, we need to teach them about God.

God gives us children for a time,

To train them in His way,

To love them and to teach them how

To follow and obey. —Sper

If children are to find their way to God, someone must point the way.

Isaiah 38:20 - The man huddled on the cabin floor was slowly freezing to death. It was high in the Rockies in southwestern Alberta, and outside a blizzard raged. John Elliott had logged miles that day through the deep snows of the mountain passes. As he checked for avalanches and as dusk and exhaustion overcame him he had decided to "hole-up." He made it wearily to his cabin but somewhat dazed with fatigue, he did not light a fire or remove his wet clothing. As the blizzard blasted through the cracks in the old cabin walls, the sleeping forest ranger sank into oblivion, paralyzed by the pleasure of the storm's icy caress. Suddenly, however, his dog sprang into action, and with unrelenting whines, finally managed to rouse his near-comatose friend. The dog was John's constant companion, a St. Bernard, one of a long line of dogs famous for their heroics in times of crisis. "If that dog hadn't been with me, I'd be dead today," John Elliott says. "When you're freezing to death you actually feel warm all over, and don't wake up because it feels too good."

This moving story illustrates the spiritual condition of many people today. They are cold spiritually, and sadly are oblivious of their true condition. Thank God for all the ways in which He arouses such sleepers. He sends His messengers to nudge them awake. Sometimes the methods used to awaken them are drastic, but always for their good. Let us not imagine that because He shakes us, He therefore hates us. He awakens us from lethargy because He loves us, and wants to save us from an eternal death. When we were "ready to perish" (Isaiah 27:13), He was "ready to save" (Isaiah 38:20). Trust your life in His hand. - The Prairie Overcomer.

Isaiah 38:17 They Never Meet

Read: Psalm 103:6-14

You have cast all my sins behind Your back. —Isaiah 38:17

Did you know that the farthest point east and the farthest point west in the United States are both in Alaska? It's a geographical trick, actually. Pohnoi Point in the Aleutians is as far west as you can go and still be in the US. But if you travel a few miles farther west, you'll end up at Alaska's Amatignak Island. Because that spot is west of the 180th meridian separating the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, it is technically east of the rest of the US.

But you'll never find a spot where east and west are actually next to each other. In going west, you never "find" east. East goes on forever. West goes on forever. They never meet. You can't get farther from something than that.

What difference does this make? Just this: When you read in Scripture that your forgiven sins are separated from you "as far as the east is from the west" (Ps. 103:12), you are assured that they are an immeasurable distance away—gone forever. If that's not enough, try this: God says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins" (Isa. 43:25).

Concerned about your sins? Through Jesus' death on the cross, God is able to say, "What sins?" But He will do that only if you put your faith in His Son.

We invite defeat when we remember what we should forget.

Isaiah 39

Isaiah 39:5–40:5 | Comfort In Captivity

Comfort, yes, comfort My people! —Isaiah 40:1

On February 10, 1675, 50 colonial families in Lancaster, Massachusetts, feared possible Native American raids. Joseph Rowlandson, the Puritan minister of the village, was in Boston pleading with the government for protection, while Mary, his wife, stayed behind with their children. At sunrise, the settlers were attacked. After some of the settlers were killed, Mary and other survivors were taken captive.

Mary experienced both kindness and cruelty from her captors. The Native Americans, aware of the religious nature of the settlers, gave her a Bible they had confiscated. Later she would write in her memoirs about God's "goodness in bringing to my hand so many comfortable and suitable Scriptures in my distress." God's Word was her great comfort until she was ransomed by the colonists on May 2.

As the nation of Judah waited to be taken into captivity by a foreign power (Isa. 39:5-7), the despair of its people must have been great. But even in that dreadful anticipation, God's words brought comfort: "The word of the Lord which you have spoken is good!" (Isaiah 39:8).

Have you been taken captive by circumstances beyond your control? If so, read and meditate on the Word. And experience God's comfort.

Upon Thy Word I rest, so strong, so sure;

So full of comfort blest, so sweet, so pure,

Thy Word that changest not, that faileth never!

My King, I rest upon Thy Word forever. —Havergal

God's Word is the true source of comfort.

Isaiah 40

Isaiah 40:1-11 Getting Ready For Christmas

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand! —Matthew 3:2

I glanced through some magazines and saw article after article warning about holiday stress and telling people how to prepare for Christmas. They gave the usual advice: Do your baking early; wrap your gifts as you purchase them; don't fill every minute with activity. These are good ideas, and I'm sure you've thought of some yourself. Personally, I like to shop through catalogs when I can.

The people who listened to John the Baptist had some preparing to do too. No, not for celebrating Christmas but for the start of Jesus' public ministry (Isaiah 40:3-5; Malachi 3:1). John's mission was to prepare the way for the Messiah by preaching a message of repentance (Luke 3:3). In preparation for the Messiah's coming, the people were to cleanse their hearts by seeking God's forgiveness for their sins.

As we get ready to celebrate the coming of Jesus to earth, we too should heed John's message of repentance (Matthew 3:2). What's most important is to enter this season of the year with a pure heart. To do that, we need to confess our sin, turn from it, and renew our fellowship with the Lord. Then we'll be able to celebrate the Christmas season with great joy and peace.

That's how to get ready for Christmas.

Take time this Christmastide to go

A little way apart,

And with the help of God prepare

The house that is your heart. —Anon.

To give meaning to Christmas, give Christ first place in your heart.

Isaiah 40:1-5 Pigeon Hill

Every mountain and hill [shall be] brought low. —Isaiah 40:4

I have vivid childhood memories of climbing the highest sand dune on the Lake Michigan shoreline. Pigeon Hill rose more than 300 feet above the entrance to Muskegon Lake and covered 30 acres. It was a tough challenge to climb this magnificent mound.

But now Pigeon Hill is only a memory. The big dune was purchased by Sand Products Corporation for commercial use. Giant clamshell cranes scooped its fine sand onto conveyer belts that poured into the cargo holds of Great Lakes steamers. Boatload after boatload of sand was shipped to Detroit, Toledo, and other industrial centers to be used as the cores for engine castings and other iron and alloy products.

Bit by bit, Pigeon Hill disappeared. What once was a lung-bursting climb is now “a walk in the park.”

The disappearance of Pigeon Hill reminds me of Isaiah’s glorious description of the preparation for the return of Christ (Is. 40:1-5). Mountains will be leveled, valleys filled, and crooked roads made straight at the time of Jesus’ second coming. He will return in glory, and the days of sin and suffering will become a dim, distant memory.

In anticipation of that wonderful day, we exclaim, “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

Then will our trials be over,
Then will our pains cease to be,
Then will our joy be unbounded,
When Jesus’ coming we see. —Metcalf

Life’s burdens will seem small when we see Jesus.

Isaiah 40:1-8 Spring Beauty

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever. —Isaiah 40:8

As we strolled through the woods together, my 9-year-old granddaughter taught me something about plants. I had scarcely noticed, until Kelsey pointed it out, that the forest floor was painted light pink with thousands of tiny flowers. “Those are spring beauties,” she informed me. She went on to show me dogtooth violets, Dutchman’s-breeches, and trillium.

After Kelsey called my attention to the wildflowers, I saw them everywhere. What a delicate beauty they brought to the landscape! And what interest and delight a young girl and her grandfather could share!

“If we come back in a week or so,” I commented, “these flowers will be all gone. They’re beautiful, but they last only a short time. We’ll have to wait till next year to see them again.” Kelsey already knew that. She had studied the seasons in school.

What Kelsey didn’t know is what wildflowers teach us about the Bible. The flowers last a few days and are gone, Isaiah told us, but the Word of God lasts forever (Isaiah 40:8).

God’s Word never fades, dries up, or blows away. Its treasures are there for us to appreciate each day.

Have you taken a walk through God’s Word lately? Did you catch the beauty and majesty there?

The books men write are but a fragrance blown
From transient blossoms crushed by human hands;
But high above them all, splendid and alone,
Staunch as a tree, there is a Book that stands. —Frazee-Bower

The Bible—eternal truth and never-fading beauty.

Isaiah 40:1-8 A Lasting Letter

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever. —Isaiah 40:8

The family members who founded Hobby Lobby craft stores are born-again believers. The president, Steve Green, is passionate about the Scriptures and plans to establish a Bible museum that will display rare books and manuscripts from around the world. He

said, “We are interested in ... encouraging people to consider what [the Bible] has to say... The goal is to create a museum around the story of the Bible. No book has been persecuted as much or loved as much. Its incredible story needs to be told.”

The Bible has been preserved through time in remarkable ways, and the museum will tell that story. The oldest copies we have of the New Testament are more numerous and closer to the date of the eyewitness events recorded than any other ancient document from that time. Their reports on Christ are more reliable than anything we know about Socrates or Caesar. It should not surprise us that God is behind the scenes using people and circumstances to pass on His inspired text of redemption. Isaiah eloquently proclaimed: “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God stands forever” (Isa. 40:8).

As we read the Bible with an open heart, we long to share its message. It’s God’s lasting letter to all.

In all literature there is nothing that compares with the Bible.

Isaiah 40:3-5 Make Way

Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. —Isaiah 40:3

Dwight D. Eisenhower was known for his courageous leadership during World War II. His battle-tested skill equipped the troops to reclaim Europe. Soon after returning to the US as a hero, he was elected president.

While in Europe, Eisenhower had experienced the danger and difficulty of navigating the twisting roads. So, for the sake of US national security, he commissioned a network of roads that became the nation’s interstate highway system. Mountains were tunneled through and valleys were traversed by mammoth bridges.

In ancient times, conquering kings gained access to newly acquired territories through highways built for their troops. Isaiah had this in mind when he declared, “Make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa. 40:3). And John the Baptist called people to repentance to “prepare the way” into their hearts for the arrival of King Jesus.

What preparation needs to be done to allow Jesus unhindered access to your own heart? Are there rough places of bitterness that need the bulldozer of forgiveness? Are there valleys of complaining that need to be filled with contentment? We can’t afford to neglect this spiritual engineering. Let’s prepare the way for the King!

Repentance clears the way for our relationship with the King.

Isaiah 40:5 The Reveal

Read: Luke 2:25-35

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. —Isaiah 40:5

The room was a wreck. Mismatched furniture. Faded paint. Ugly light fixtures. Knick-knacks crammed into crowded spaces. The homeowners tried to make some improvements, but the room kept getting worse.

Thus begins a home-improvement TV program. After interviewing the owners, the designer draws a plan to maximize the room’s potential. Program producers create suspense by building up to a moment referred to as “the reveal.” Viewers watch the progress and ooh and aah with the homeowners when they see the new room.

Over time, the world has become like a neglected room. People bring in things that don’t belong. They arrange priorities in ways that hinder potential. Lives become dull, overcrowded, and ineffective. Self-improvement projects offer little help.

The Bible is God’s plan that shows the best way to live. God builds suspense throughout the Old Testament. Then, at the appointed time, comes the great reveal—Jesus! Upon seeing Him, Simeon exclaimed, “My eyes have seen Your salvation ... , a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:30-32).

We become part of God’s great “reveal” when we follow His design and Christ’s example.

O send Thy Spirit, Lord, now unto me
That He may touch my eyes and make me see;
Show me the truth concealed within Thy Word,
And in Thy Book revealed I see Thee, Lord. —Lathbury

All that I am I owe to Jesus Christ, revealed to me in His divine Book.

Isaiah 40:1-5 The Glory Of Humility

The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. —Isaiah 40:5

I remember sitting one Christmas season in London listening to Handel's Messiah, with a full chorus singing about the day when "the glory of the Lord shall be revealed." I had spent the morning viewing remnants of England's glory—the crown jewels, the Lord Mayor's gilded carriage—and it occurred to me that just such images of wealth and power must have filled the minds of Isaiah's contemporaries who first heard that promise.

The Messiah who showed up, however, wore a different kind of glory—the glory of humility. The God who roared, who if He so desired could order armies and empires about like pawns, this God emerged in Bethlehem as a baby who could not speak or eat solid food. This God who created all things became dependent on a teenager for shelter, food, and love.

Rulers stride through the world with bodyguards, fanfare, and flashing jewelry. In contrast, God's visit to earth took place in a shelter for animals, with no attendants present and nowhere to lay the newborn King but a feed trough. Indeed, the event that divided history into two parts may have had more animal than human witnesses. As Phillips Brooks put it:

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given!
So God imparts to human hearts
the blessings of His heaven.

In most religions, fear is the primary emotion when approaching God. In Jesus, God made a way of relating to us that did not involve fear.

In Christ, God veiled His deity to serve and to save humanity.

Isaiah 40:6-11 One Beautiful Moment

All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. —Isaiah 40:6

One snap of the shutter, and there it was ... one beautiful moment captured in time for eternity. The late summer sun reflected in the breaking wave made the water look like liquid gold splashing onto the shore. If my friend had not been there with his camera, the wave would have gone unnoticed, like so many others that have come and gone, seen only by God.

Who can imagine how many waves Lake Michigan has sent rolling onto the shoreline? Yet each one is unique. As seen in every wave, God makes extravagant beauty out of seemingly mundane things. Using water and air, He makes wondrous works of art. We enjoy His gallery in skies above and on earth and sea below. But most of earth's beauty remains invisible to us; it is seen only by God.

God uses another gallery to display His glory—humans. We too are made out of something ordinary—dust (Gen. 2:7). But to us He added an extraordinary ingredient—His very own breath (Isaiah 40:7). Like waves of the sea and flowers of the field (Isa. 40:6), our lives are brief and seen by few. Yet each one is a beautiful "moment" created by God to say to the world, "Behold, your God!" whose Word will last forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Only one life, so live it well,
And keep your candle trimmed and bright;
Eternity, not time, will tell
The radius of that candle's light. —Miller

We fulfill our purpose when we serve our Creator.

Isaiah 40:8 The Press And The Bible

Read: Psalm 119:89-91; 1 Peter 1:22-25

The Word of our God stands forever. —Isaiah 40:8

Secrecy, lawsuits, and the latest technological advances are part of a news item some have called "the greatest achievement of the past 1,000 years." This isn't a recent story of spy satellites or computer programs. It's the story behind Johannes Gutenberg's first-ever printing press—in 1455!

Gutenberg had tried to keep his invention top secret until it was completed, but a lawsuit by heirs of one of his investors revealed what he was working on. His press was a technological marvel that would make possible the mass printing of literature.

When Gutenberg finished his press, the first book he printed was the Bible. That single event would eventually make the Bible by far the most widely distributed book in the world! Prior to 1455, it had been preserved by making meticulous one-at-a-time copies, but since then the Bible has been mass-produced.

Why has this one book attracted so much attention? Why was it Gutenberg's first choice? And why are millions still printed every year? It's simple—the Bible is a supernatural book, the written revelation of God to man. God has inspired and preserved it, and He continues to lead people to develop new ways to spread its remarkable message of salvation.

Thank You, Lord, for the press and the Bible!

Our history is marked by the filling of books
With what we have thought, said, and done;
But one Book, the Bible, reveals the true way—
It tells of the Savior, God's Son. —JDB

Many books can inform, but only the Bible can transform.

Isaiah 40:11 Everlasting Arms

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. —Deuteronomy 33:27

After a pre-concert rehearsal in New York City's Carnegie Hall, Randall Atcheson sat on stage alone. He had successfully navigated the intricate piano compositions of Beethoven, Chopin, and Liszt for the evening program, and with only minutes remaining before the doors opened, he wanted to play one more piece for himself. What came from his heart and his hands was an old hymn by Elisha Hoffman:

What have I to dread,
what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace
with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.

Those words echo the truth in the final blessing of Moses: "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms" (Deuteronomy 33:26-27).

What a gift we have in our own arms and hands—they can swing a hammer, hold a child, or help a friend. But while our strength is limited, God's boundless power on our behalf is expressed in might and gentle care. "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save" (Isaiah 59:1). "He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom" (Isaiah 40:11).

Whatever challenge or opportunity we face, there is security and peace in His everlasting arms.

The heavenly Father's arms never tire of holding His children.

Isaiah 40:11 Safe In His Arms

Read: Psalm 95:1-11

He will gather the lambs with His arm. —Isaiah 40:11

Aleta Danforth has been a missionary in the Congo (formerly Zaire) since 1979. She was heartbroken when they had to leave the country in 1997. A tribal war that began in Rwanda was sweeping toward them across the country. Soldiers were finally seen in their area, so Aleta, her family, and their fellow missionaries had to say goodbye to their good friends.

They had been forced to evacuate a few years earlier, and now they were leaving once more. Aleta felt that she was on a roller coaster, and the ups and downs were overwhelming her.

While giving a report to her church after arriving in the US, she was tearfully describing the wild up-and-down emotions she had been experiencing. Then she remembered that on most roller coasters, no matter how high or how fast you go, you are kept snugly in place by a safety bar and a harness. "I'm even more secure," Aleta thought, "because God has wrapped His arms around me. He

is holding me as a shepherd holds a lamb. I am secure in His love.”

Have your emotions been on a wild roller-coaster ride? Let Aleta’s experience show you that you are secure in God’s loving, everlasting arms (Ps. 95:7; Isa. 40:11).

O the sweet unfailing refuge
Of the everlasting arms;
In their loving clasp enfolded
Nothing worries or alarms. —Henessay

No matter how low you feel, underneath are the everlasting arms.

Isaiah 40:15-31 Above Your Problems

Those who wait on the Lord ... shall mount up with wings like eagles. —Isaiah 40:31

One of the pitfalls of living in our troublesome world is that we can become problem-centered rather than God-centered. When this happens, we lose the proper perspective. Gradually, all our problems begin to look huge and the strength of almighty God seems small. Instead of moving mountains by faith, we become constant worriers, creating mountains of needless pressure for ourselves and others.

Isaiah 40 is an effective prescription for those of us whose God seems small. God reminds us that He is much bigger than the world He created. He points out that compared to Him, “the nations are as a drop in a bucket” (Isaiah 40:15) and the inhabitants of earth “are like grasshoppers” (Isaiah 40:22). His words aren’t meant to belittle us, but rather to encourage us to look to Him and gain His perspective of life.

Yet, God offers us more than a new perspective. He offers us something that will enable us to live by that view. If we will depend on Him instead of brooding over our problems, He will renew our strength, and wings of faith will lift our hearts above our difficulties. Some of them may be huge, but we can see them as smaller than our great God. And that makes all the difference.

Lord, give us wings to soar above
Our problems great and small,
With strengthened faith and confidence
To trust You with them all. —Sper

Worry ends where faith begins.

Isaiah 40:18-31 Test Your Tiredness

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Someone confided in me that she was feeling guilty. She said, “Even though I’m a Christian, I still get so tired!” As I reviewed the Scriptures, I found that God’s people sometimes suffered fatigue and even exhaustion. Today’s church seems unwilling to acknowledge this, however. In the name of victorious Christian living, some view all weariness as a failure to trust and obey God.

But according to Isaiah, our Creator anticipates weariness in His finite creatures. He promises to renew our strength if we wait on Him (Isaiah 40:30-31). He also understands that our need for strength, like our need for food, isn’t a once-for-all provision.

Our choice is not whether we will experience weariness but what we will be weary about. In my own life, I suffered exhaustion during a long period of time because of worry, fear, and bitterness. Thanks to the Lord, these negative feelings no longer dominate me. But I still get very tired because of my involvement in worthy causes and my desire to live faithfully as a servant of Christ.

Give yourself a “tiredness test.” If you are tired for the wrong reasons, humbly seek God’s loving correction. If you are tired for the right reasons, seek God’s renewing strength. You don’t need to feel guilty about feeling weary.

If you are weary in life's race
And driven by its hurried pace,
Then learn to wait upon the Lord;
His strength will be your sure reward. —DJD

God gives strength in proportion to the strain.

Isaiah 40:25-31 In His Hands

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He calls them all by name. —Psalm 147:3-4

How big is the cosmos? Galaxies upon galaxies stretch into space farther than we can comprehend.

Two Harvard astronomers have discovered a “great wall” of galaxies that they estimate to be 500 million light-years long, 200 million light-years wide, and 15 million light-years thick. (One light-year is 5.88 trillion miles.) Those numbers are mind-boggling.

Here’s something even more amazing. God created all of those galaxies and sustains everything that exists by His powerful hands. Yet that same mighty God, the one and only God, uses those hands to gently touch the lives of suffering men and women.

In Psalm 147:3-4 we read that the Lord not only knows all the stars by name, but He also “heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.” That truth is echoed in Isaiah 40:26-31, which states that the all-powerful Creator is the One who renews the strength of those who rely on Him. The God of the galaxies is the Great Physician who lovingly ministers to our needs. What a contrast—and what a comfort!

Regardless of how heavy your burdens, how tangled your problems, or how serious your diseases, the God of the galaxies has power enough to meet all your needs—and measureless power to spare. Put your problems in His hands.

The hand that holds the ocean's depths

Can hold my small affairs;

The hand that guides the universe

Can carry all my cares. —Anon.

Those who see God's hand in everything can leave everything in God's hand.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Power Up!

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

While it is still dark, a solitary car drives through the gate to the factory. A lone figure makes his way to a back door, unlocks it, and steps inside. A light goes on, then another. Large machines are fired up, temperature control equipment is engaged, banks of machinery soon begin to hum. By the time 7 a.m. rolls around, the millwright has the plant all powered up and ready for a new day’s production.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we can experience a similar “powering up.” It should happen every morning. We aren’t prepared for a day of spiritual and personal productivity until we’ve spent time “warming up.” A chapter of Scripture, some well-spent moments of devotional reading, meditation, and prayer set the proper spiritual climate for the rest of the day.

We need God’s power even more when we go through periods of emptiness, depression, or testing. Feeling shut down, we cry out to God. Isaiah declared that the Lord “gives power to the weak” and “increases strength” (Isaiah 40:29).

We need the strength of the Lord not only for severe trials but also for everyday living—and He has promised it. When we turn to God, we can “mount up with wings like eagles” (v.31). Go to Him daily to power up.

Though weak and helpless in life's fray,

God's mighty power shall be my stay;

Without, within, He gives to me

The strength to gain the victory. —DJD

To know God's presence is to know God's power.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Souls And Stars

Lord, what is man, that You take knowledge of him. —Psalm 144:3

How many stars are there in the vast expanse of the sky? With the help of telescopes, astronomers have discovered galaxies upon galaxies, and clusters of giant stars that make our planet seem like a speck of dust by comparison. At times, that knowledge can overwhelm us with a sense of utter insignificance.

Centuries before the telescope was invented, David realized that bulk and big size aren’t the measure of value. After all, a ton of dirt

is far bigger than a 10-carat diamond, but that doesn't make a dirt heap more precious than a handful of diamonds.

We humans, though small when compared to the size of the universe, are the objects of the Creator's sacrificial concern. As Paul gratefully exclaimed, "I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). Yes, the price tag of Calvary is tied to each one of us.

So picture a set of scales. Put all the stars on one side and your own soul on the other. In God's value system, your soul outweighs the stars!

Thank God that He chose to love you with the measureless love of Calvary. Have you entrusted your priceless soul to His eternal safe-keeping? —VCG

Yes, God was great in creation,
But greater, much greater in grace!
For when man had sinned and had grieved Him,
He sent Christ to die in his place! —Bennard

Christ's death is the measure of your worth to God.

Isaiah 40:25-31 A Difficult Hill

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

Researchers at the University of Virginia have found that most people perceive a hill to be steeper than it really is, especially if they're tired or carrying a heavy load. When asked to estimate the slope of a hill, test participants consistently misjudged it, thinking a 10-degree slant was about 30 degrees, and rating a 5-degree slope as nearly 20 degrees. Hardly any of them believed they could be that far off.

When we're burdened and exhausted, even a minor problem can seem too big for us to handle. As we encounter a trial in life, we're tempted to sit down at the base of that difficult hill and stay there, convinced that the grade is too steep for us.

That is why we need the encouragement of God's Word. It draws our attention to our untiring God, who knows our need. Isaiah wrote, "The Creator of the ends of the earth neither faints nor is weary. His understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isaiah 40:28-29).

Because we so easily misjudge life's difficulties, we need courage to keep going when we are tempted to quit. Take a step of faith today and join those who depend on the Lord, who run and are not weary, who walk and do not faint (v.31). In His strength, you can conquer any difficult hill.

As we live for Christ and follow Him,
The way may seem quite steep;
But if we trust His grace and strength,
Our steps He'll guide and keep. —Fitzhugh

God always gives enough strength for the next step.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Unlimited Power

[God] brings out their host by number; He calls them all by name. —Isaiah 40:26

Why don't the stars fall down?" A child may ask that question, but so does an astronomer. And they both get essentially the same answer: A mysterious power or energy upholds everything and prevents our cosmos from collapsing into chaos.

Hebrews 1:3 tells us that it is Jesus who upholds all things by the word of His power. He is the source of all the energy there is, whether the explosive potential packed inside an atom or the steaming kettle on the kitchen stove.

That energy is not simply a mindless force. No, God is the personal power who created everything out of nothing, including the stars (Genesis 1; Isaiah 40:26); who divided the Red Sea and delivered the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 14:21-22); who brought to pass the virgin birth of Jesus (Luke 1:34-35); and who raised Him from the dead and conquered death (2 Timothy 1:10). Our God, the one and only true God, has the power to answer prayer, meet our needs, and change our lives.

So when life's problems are baffling, when you face some Red Sea impossibility, call upon the wonder-working God who upholds all things. And remember that with our almighty God, nothing is impossible.

Thou art coming to a King—
Large petitions with thee bring;
For His grace and power are such
None can ever ask too much. —Newton

God is greater than our greatest problem.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Drained Of All Strength

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

When I was a teenager, my dad and I went on many hunting and fishing trips together. Most became happy memories, but one fishing expedition was nearly a disaster. We drove up into a high mountain range and set up camp in a remote area. Then Dad and I trudged a long way down the mountain to get to a stream to fish. After a long day fishing in the hot sun, it was time to return to camp. But as we began to head back, Dad's face grew pale. He was dizzy and nauseated, and he had almost no strength.

Trying not to panic, I had him sit down and drink liquids. Then I prayed aloud to God for help. Bolstered by prayer, rest, and nourishment, Dad improved, and we began to go slowly back up the mountain. He held on to my loosened belt as I crawled upward—leading the way back to camp.

Sometimes we find ourselves in what feels like a hopeless valley without the strength to go on. When this happens, it's important to recall God's promise: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isa. 40:29).

Do you feel drained? Exhausted? Ask God for help. Depend on Him for the power to go on and the strength to make it through the valley.

When circumstances overwhelm
And seem too much to bear,
Depend upon the Lord for strength
And trust His tender care. —Sper

When we have nothing left but God, we discover that God is enough.

Isaiah 40:25-31 I'm Invisible

[The Lord] gives power to the weak. —Isaiah 40:29

My friend Jane said something at a work meeting and no one responded. So she repeated it and again no one responded; her co-workers just ignored her. She realized that her opinion didn't matter much. She felt disregarded and invisible. You may know what that's like as well.

The people of God felt that way as a nation (Isa. 40). Only they believed it was God Himself who didn't see or understand their daily struggle to survive! In this prophecy of Isaiah, the southern kingdom has been carried away captive into Babylon, and the exiled nation complains: "My way is hidden from the Lord, and my just claim is passed over by my God" (Isaiah 40:27).

While Isaiah agreed that compared to God "the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the scales" (Isaiah 40:15), he also wanted the people to know that God gives power to the weak and strength to those who need it (Isaiah 40:29). If they waited on the Lord, Isaiah said, He would renew their strength. They would mount up with wings like eagles; they would run and not be weary (Isaiah 40:31).

When you're feeling invisible or disregarded, remember that God does see you and He cares. Wait on Him, and He'll give you renewed strength.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,
In Thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail.
Thy mercies how tender! How firm to the end!
Our Maker, Defender, Redeemer, and Friend. —Grant

Even when we don't sense God's presence, His loving care is all around us.

Isaiah 40:27-31 Running Well

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. —1 Corinthians 9:24

A computer study of 5,000 racehorses has revealed a way to predict whether or not a young horse will develop into a good runner. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology used computers and high-speed cameras to find out how a good horse runs. He discovered that the legs of a fast horse operate much like the spokes of a wheel. Each leg touches down only as the leg before it pushes off. The effect is peak efficiency of effort and speed.

In the Old Testament, Isaiah talked about running well in the course of life. He said that the person who runs the best is the one who learns to “wait on the Lord” (Isaiah 40:31). He doesn’t waste energy trying to do things on his own. He looks to the Lord for his strength and hope.

In the New Testament, the Christian life is likened to a race. The apostle Paul indicated that those who run well are characterized by self-control and self-discipline (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). The author of Hebrews said, “Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

Do you want to earn an imperishable crown? Then wait on the Lord. Practice self-control. Lay aside sinful burdens. These are the secrets of running well.

To run the race of life in Christ,

This must become your daily goal:

Confess your sins, trust God for strength,

Use discipline and self-control. —Sper

Those who wait on the Lord run without the weight of sin.

Isaiah 40:27-31 Plugged In

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

My wife was working at home on her computer recently when she suddenly noticed her laptop battery power was low and the computer was about to shut down. The computer was plugged in, though, so it shouldn’t have been using the battery. Following the laptop cord to the extension cord, she finally noticed that the extension cord was actually plugged back into itself instead of the wall outlet! She looked at me, amused, and said, “There’s a devotional in there somewhere.”

As she said it, I was reminded of a passage of Scripture on the power of God: Isaiah 40:27-31. Isaiah identifies the true and unending Source of strength from which we must draw ours—“the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 40:28). Then he speaks to those whose strength is ebbing, encouraging them to wait on the Lord to find their strength renewed (Isaiah 40:29-31).

Jesus spoke of us as branches abiding in Him as the Vine (John 15:4-5). It’s a parallel to Isaiah’s powerful closing, which promises that if we’re plugged into God we will “run and not be weary, ... walk and not faint” (Isa. 40:31).

When we find ourselves weary and distressed, we need to plug into the true Source of strength and life.

The Creator of the universe knows no power failure.

Isaiah 40:28-41:4 A Season Of Renewal

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

A survey showed that 84 percent of people in the United States want a less materialistic holiday season. I suspect the same is true of people in many other countries. But when all roads seem to lead to the shopping malls, what is the pathway toward a more spiritual and meaningful celebration of Christ’s birth?

Some church leaders are suggesting that we put more attention on the observance of Advent, the 4-week period before Christmas. Instead of filling those days with activity and ending up physically and spiritually depleted, we need to recall that “those who wait on 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” (Isaiah 40:31).

Even with a busy calendar of school and church programs, and family obligations, we can still carve out time to “wait on the Lord” and to concentrate on the true meaning of this season. We can determine to make the most of our times of daily Bible reading and prayer, and to give people priority over things.

As we take time to focus on Christ’s birth and to strengthen our relationship with Him, this time of year can become a season of renewal instead of exhaustion.

Take time this Christmastide to go

A little way apart,

And with the hands of prayer prepare

The house that is your heart. —Anon.

A Christless Christmas is like a counterfeit dollar.

Isaiah 40:29-31 Eagle Flight

He gives power to the weak. —Isaiah 40:29

I was watching an eagle in flight when for no apparent reason it began spiraling upward. With its powerful wings, the great bird soared ever higher, dissolved into a tiny dot, and then disappeared.

Its flight reminded me of Isaiah’s uplifting words: “Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles” (Isaiah 40:30-31).

Life’s heartbreaks and tragedies can put an end to our resilience, our endurance, our nerve, and bring us to our knees. But if we put our hope in the Lord and rely on Him, He renews our strength. The key to our endurance lies in the exchange of our limited resources for God’s limitless strength. And it is ours for the asking.

With God’s strength we can “run and not be weary,” even when days become hectic and demanding. With His strength we can “walk and not faint,” even though tedious, dull routine makes the way seem dreary and long. The psalmist exclaimed in the midst of his weary, tearful pilgrimage, “Blessed is the man whose strength is in You” (Psalm 84:5).

Oh, what an exchange—God’s infinite strength for our finite weakness!

If you are helpless in life’s fray,

God’s mighty power will be your stay;

Your failing strength He will renew,

For He’s a God who cares for you. —D. De Haan

God gives strength in proportion to the strain.

Isaiah 40:6-8 The Lost Library

The grass withers, ... but the word of our God stands forever. —Isaiah 40:8

My favorite sections of the local library are history and the periodicals. What about you? Imagine if one Saturday morning you showed up at the library, only to find your favorite books reduced to a pile of ashes.

Centuries ago, that is what happened when thousands of books at the Library of Alexandria caught fire. Alexandria was the place to do research in the ancient world. Then on a fateful day in 47 BC, Julius Caesar set fire to his ships in the Alexandrian harbor to prevent them from falling into enemy hands. The fire soon spread to the docks and the naval arsenal, ultimately destroying 400,000 of the library’s precious scrolls.

Such a tragedy shows just how perishable written materials can be. This makes the preservation of our Bible such a marvel. The Word of God has survived book-burnings, riots, revolutions, persecutions, and catastrophes. Yet scholars tell us that the manuscripts have been accurately preserved through millennia of copying.

God inspired the writing of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16) and has promised to preserve it through the centuries (Isaiah 40:8). Next time

you open your Bible, take a moment to reflect on how precious it is, and thank God for keeping it safe for you.

Thank You, Lord, for Your precious Word,

And for its message I have heard;

No other book do I revere,

No other counsel hold so dear. -Hess

Bestsellers come and go, but the Word of God abides forever.

Isaiah 40:6-11,28-31 Outrunning Cheetahs

The grass withers, the flower fades ... But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:7,31

The majestic African cheetah is known for reaching speeds of 112 kph (70 mph) in short bursts, but it doesn't do so well over distances. A BBC news item reports that four members of a northeast Kenyan village actually outran two cheetahs in a 4-mile footrace.

It seems that two large cheetahs had been feeding on village goats. So the four men came up with a plan to stop them. They waited until the hottest part of the day and then gave chase to the cats, tracking them down when the animals couldn't run any farther. The exhausted cheetahs were safely captured and turned over to the Kenyan wildlife service for relocation.

Can we see ourselves in the cheetah? Our strengths might seem impressive, but they are short-lived. As the prophet Isaiah reminds us, we are like wildflowers that soon wither under the heat of the sun (Isa 40:6-8).

Yet it is at the end of ourselves that our God offers us comfort. A surprise rises up to meet those who wait on the Lord. In His time and ways, He can renew our strength. By His Spirit He can enable us to rise up on "wings like eagles" or to "run and not be weary, [to] walk and not faint" (Isaiah 40:31).

Lord, forgive us for the many times that we rely on our short-lived strength. Help us see that all good gifts come from You, and that You are the never-failing source of our strength, hope, and joy.

When we draw near to God, our minds are refreshed and our strength is renewed.

INSIGHT: The prophets often carry a message of doom. Today's passage, however, is one of encouragement. Isaiah tells God's people to have hope because the God whose power created the ends of the earth is the God who lifts them up when they are weary.

Isaiah 40:10-11,28-31 Promised Strength

To those who have no might [God] increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

Jonah Sorrentino was deeply hurt at age 6 when his parents separated. As a result, he held a lot of anger and bitterness inside. At 15, Jonah learned of God's love for him and became a believer in Jesus Christ.

Jonah, also known as recording artist KJ-52, admits that he used to live like a victim of circumstances. In an interview with Christianity Today, he explained how he began to experience healing: "You definitely have to acknowledge that, no, you're not okay."

He added, "You also have to reach a point of saying, 'I'm not going to dwell on everything of the past ... on anger or bitterness or hurt. I'm going to move forward because God is going to give me the strength to do that.'" God helped him to forgive his parents. He wrote these lyrics to encourage others:

Understand you can always find strength in Christ;

God has a plan for every single part of your lives.

That might be hard to understand in your troubled times,

But anywhere you go, He's there with arms open wide.

If we've been hurt badly, we may wonder how we can live with a painful past. God could take away our pain instantly and forever if He chose to. Often, though, He heals us slowly and scars remain. He carries us and gently leads us as a shepherd cares for His flock (Isa. 40:11).

We may not be healed completely in this life, but we can count on God's promises. He gives "power to the weak" and increases their strength (Isaiah 40:29).

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.

Isaiah 40:12-13,25-31 Perspective

He ... sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers. —Isaiah 40:22

Question: When is a bird bigger than a mountain? Answer: When the bird is closer than the mountain.

In reality, the bird is not bigger than the mountain, but it sure looks that way when the feathery fellow is perched on my window ledge and the mountain is far away in the distance.

Sometimes we perceive God this way in relationship to our problems. The troubles facing us seem huge because they are so close—like a big black bird with beady eyes and a sharp beak waiting for a smaller animal's weariness to turn into helplessness so it can devour it. At such times, God seems as far away as a distant mountain, and we perceive Him as being small and unreachable.

The prophet Isaiah changes our perspective by asking these rhetorical questions: "Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, measured heaven with a span and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure? Weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?" (Isaiah 40:12). The Lord "gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isaiah 40:29).

Just as a bird is never bigger than a mountain, no problem is ever bigger than God. It's all a matter of changing our perspective.

The problems that we face each day

Can seem too much to bear

Until we turn our eyes to Christ

And trust His tender care. —Sper

We worship a God who is greater than our greatest problem.

Isaiah 40:18-31 Life Sentence

In his book *Life Sentence*, Charles Colson tells of strolling among the ruins where the Roman senate once met. Recalling his feelings, he wrote: "As I stood snapping photographs, my mind flashed back to the Roosevelt Room in the White House, a few steps across a narrow hallway from the President's oval office. At 8 o'clock each morning a dozen of us, the President's senior aides, had gathered around the antique mahogany table; its polished surface reflected the serious, intense expressions of men who believed the destiny of mankind was in their hands. The decisions we must make today,' Henry Kissinger would often say, 'will affect the whole future course of human history.' We believed it. Just as the nearly 2, 000 years ago. Yet here sat their once majestic forum in dusty piles of stone and rubble. Would even this much be left of the Roosevelt Room, I wondered, in two centuries, let alone two millennia from now?" - D. J. DeHaan. *Our Daily Bread*, June 13

Isaiah 40:21-31 - Universe-Three Proofs of God's Ownership

- First, it is His because he made it (Isa 40:22).
 - Second, because he rules over (and sometimes overrules) earthly rulers (Isa 40:23–24).
 - Third, because of His care for his own (Isa 40:25–31).
 - Today in the Word, July, 1990, p. 6
-

Isaiah 40:21-31 The Final Picture

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things. —Isaiah 40:26

What started as an empty 11-acre field in Belfast, Northern Ireland, ended up as the largest land portrait in the British Isles. Wish, by artist Jorge Rodriguez-Gerada, is made from 30,000 wooden pegs, 2,000 tons of soil, 2,000 tons of sand, and miscellaneous items such as grass, stones, and string.

At the beginning, only the artist knew what the final artwork was going to look like. He hired workers and recruited volunteers to haul

materials and move them into place. As they worked, they saw little indication that something amazing was about to emerge. But it did. From the ground, it doesn't look like much. But from above, viewers see a huge portrait—the smiling face of a little girl.

God is doing something on a grander scale in the world. He's the artist who sees the final picture. We're His "fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9) who are helping to make it a reality. Through the prophet Isaiah, God reminded His people that it is He who "sits above the circle of the earth" and "stretches out the heavens like a curtain" (Isa. 40:22). We can't see the final picture, but we continue on in faith, knowing that we're part of an amazing work of art—one that is being created on earth but will be best seen from heaven.

While sometimes I think I can see the big picture,

Lord, my heart knows it sees so little. I'm

thankful that You are working out Your beautiful

will in this world, and I can trust You.

God is using us to help create a masterpiece.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Not My Worry

Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you. Psalm 55:22

A man worried constantly about everything. Then one day his friends heard him whistling happily and looking noticeably relaxed. "What happened?" they asked him in astonishment.

He said, "I'm paying a man to do my worrying for me."

"How much do you pay him?" they asked.

"Two thousand dollars a week," he replied.

"Wow! How can you afford that?"

"I can't," he said, "but that's his worry."

While this humorous way to handle stress doesn't work in real life, as God's children we can turn our worries over to Someone who has everything perfectly under control even—especially—when we feel it is not.

The prophet Isaiah reminds us that God brings out the stars and calls them all by name (Isaiah 40:25-26). Because of "his great power and mighty strength" not one of them is missing (Isaiah 40:26). And just as God knows the stars by name, He knows us individually and personally. We are each under His watchful care (Isaiah 40:27).

If we are inclined to worry, we can turn that worry over to the Lord. He is never too weary or too tired to pay attention to us. He has all wisdom and all power, and He loves to use it on our behalf. The Holy One who directs the stars has His loving arms around us.

Lord, You know there are times when I get really scared. And I forget that You have promised that You will never leave me to face difficulty or loss alone. Help me to trust.

Worry ends where faith begins.

INSIGHT: The title "the Holy One" or "the Holy One of Israel" is the common designation for God in Isaiah, occurring about 26 times. This title is often accompanied by other names, such as "the Lord Almighty" (Isaiah 5:24; 47:4), "the Light of Israel" (Isaiah 10:17), "the Mighty God" (Isaiah 10:21), "Maker" (Isaiah 17:7; 45:11; 54:5), "the Sovereign Lord" (Isaiah 30:15), "Savior" (Isaiah 43:3), "Israel's Creator, your King" (Isaiah 43:15), and "the God of all the earth" (Isaiah 54:5). In calling God "the Holy One of Israel," Isaiah extols His complete holiness. Yet within the same breath Isaiah speaks of God as the "Redeemer," celebrating His tender mercy and compassion (Isaiah 41:14; 54:5; 59:20; 60:16). Sim Kay Tee

Isaiah 40:25-31 Burned-out Jugglers

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Today's wife, mother, and homemaker is a professional juggler. She balances home, church, and community responsibilities, and often runs a family taxi service.

My daughter Tina is a juggler who admits that she sometimes feels like resigning, but she's learned where to go with her struggle. Here's how it began.

One morning Tina woke up with the I-can't-juggle-it-all feeling and started to panic. Reaching for pen and paper, she began recording some spiritual "first aid," such as: "God is not stressed-out. God is not frustrated. God is not exhausted. God is not confused. God is not panicking."

After listing what God is not, she began listing what He is: "God is relaxed. God's timing is perfect. God has continuous energy. God is in control. God knows everything." Then she wrote, "This God is living in me. He is working through me." By the time she wrote those words, Tina's panic feelings had flown. Before she had a chance to say, "God, I want to resign," she realized that He wanted to renew her strength.

Are you a juggler needing God's first aid for your soul? Guided by today's Bible reading of Isaiah 40, ponder the Lord's limitless attributes. Then let Him renew you.

I look to Thee in every need

And never look in vain;

I feel Thy strong and tender love,

And all is well again. —Longfellow

Because God cares about us, we can leave our cares with him.

Isaiah 40:25-31 Think Young

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

In the book *Geeks and Geezers*, authors Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas present a fascinating look at "how era, values, and defining moments shape leaders" of two very different generations—the geeks (those 21-35) and the geezers (those over 70).

One of their findings is that among the older group of "geezers," every person who was able to continue to play a leadership role retained the qualities of curiosity, playfulness, eagerness, fearlessness, warmth, and energy. Instead of being defeated by time and age, they were "open, willing to take risks, hungry for knowledge and experience, courageous, eager to see what the new day brings."

That's a great attitude to have, but how can a Christian get it and keep it? The Bible says that our strength comes from a trusting relationship with God: "Those who wait on 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" (Isaiah 40:31).

Our minds more than our bodies cause us to lose heart and give up. The young are not immune, because "even the youths shall faint and be weary" (v.30). God gives power to young and old who place their hope in Him. He stirs our spirits to run, walk, and soar for Him.

We're often weary in life's race,

Driven by its hurried pace,

But when we wait upon the Lord,

His strength becomes our sure reward. —D. De Haan

No one is old who is young at heart.

Isaiah 40:25–41:1 Anti-Aging Power

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Americans spend more than \$20 billion annually on various anti-aging products that claim to cure baldness, remove wrinkles, build muscle, and renew the powers of youth. Can those products deliver what they promise? Dr. Thomas Perls of Boston University School of Medicine says there is "absolutely no scientific proof that any commercially available product will stop or reverse aging."

But there is a promise of spiritual vitality that defies the ravages of time. "Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young

men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on 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” (Isa. 40:30-31).

Isaiah used the eagle as a symbol of freedom and endurance, held aloft by a source of power outside itself. As we put our hope and trust in the Lord, we are carried along by His strength and not our own. The psalmist said it is the Lord who nourishes us so that our “youth is renewed like the eagle’s” (Ps. 103:5).

Are we taking advantage of God’s anti-aging power? It’s promised to all who put their trust in Him for strength of heart, vigor of spirit, and energy of soul.

The ravages of time cannot be stopped;

Yes, outwardly we perish every day;

But inner strength of heart can be renewed

By trusting in the Lord to light our way. —Sper

Growing old is a blessing when you’re growing closer to God.

Isaiah 40:25-27 The Star Shepherd

Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these things. —Isaiah 40:26

Some night when you’re away from city lights, “lift up your eyes on high” (Isa. 40:26). There in the heavens you’ll see a luminous band of stars stretching from horizon to horizon—our galaxy.

If you have good eyes, you can see about 5,000 stars, according to astronomer Simon Driver. There are, however, far more that you cannot see with the naked eye. In 1995, the Hubble Deep Field Study space probe concluded that there are billions of galaxies, each containing billions of stars. By one estimate, there are more than 10 stars in the universe for every grain of sand on the earth.

Yet each night, without fail, God “brings out their host by number; ... by the greatness of His might ... ; not one is missing” (Isaiah 40:26).

Why then do people say, “My way is hidden from the Lord”? (Isaiah 40:27). Yes, billions of individuals inhabit this globe, but no one has been forgotten by God. He knows “those who are His” (2Ti 2:19). If He can bring out the incalculable hosts of heaven each night one by one, He can bring you into His light. He does so by “the strength of His power” (Isaiah 40:26)—the power He showed when He raised Jesus from the dead.

Are the stars out tonight? Rejoice! God cares for you.

The God who made the firmament,

Who made the deepest sea,

The God who put the stars in place

Is the God who cares for me. —Berg

We see the power of God’s creation; we feel the power of His love.

Isaiah 40:25, 27, 28-Our Thoughts of God

The first question here rebukes wrong thought about God. “Your thoughts of God are too human,” Luther said to Erasmus. This is where most of us go astray. Our thoughts of God are not great enough; we fail to reckon with the reality of his limitless wisdom and power. Put this mistake right, says God; learn to acknowledge the full majesty of your incomparable God and Savior. The second question rebukes wrong thoughts about ourselves. God has not abandoned us anymore than he abandoned Jacob. He never abandons anyone on whom he has set his love. If you have been resigning yourself to the thought that God has left you high and dry, seek grace to be ashamed of yourself. Such unbelieving pessimism deeply dishonors our great God and Savior. The next two questions and the statements which follow rebuke our slowness of heart to believe in God’s majesty. God would shame us out of our unbelief. He asks: Have you been imagining that I, the Creator, have grown old and tired? The rebuke is well deserved by many of us. - Your Father Loves You by James Packer, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986, page for January 5

Isaiah 40:27 Star Shepherd

Read: Ezekiel 34:11-16 |

Why do you say, ... "My way is hidden from the Lord"? —Isaiah 40:27

In the spring, shepherds in Idaho move their flocks from the lowlands into the mountains. Thousands of sheep move up the passes into the high country to summer pasture.

My wife and I came across a flock on Shaw Mountain last week. It was bedded down in a meadow by a quiet stream—a picturesque scene that evoked memories of Psalm 23.

But where was the shepherd? The sheep appeared to be alone—until a few broke away from the flock and began to wander toward a distant gully. Then we heard a shrill whistle from above. Looking up, we saw the shepherd sitting high on a hill above the sheep, keeping watch over his flock. A mountain dog and two Border collies stood at his side. The dogs, responding to the shepherd's signal, bounded down the hill and herded the drifting sheep back to the flock where they belonged.

In the same way, the Good Shepherd is watching over you. Even though you cannot see Him, He can see you! He knows you by name and knows all about you. You are the sheep of His pasture (Ezek. 34:31). God promises that He will "seek out" His sheep, "feed them in good pasture," and "bind up the broken" (Ezek 34:12,14,16).

You can trust in God's watchful care.

The Lamb who died to save us is the Shepherd who lives to care for us.

Isaiah 40:27-31; 41:10 Without Power

He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. —Isaiah 40:29

In late October 2012, a hurricane-spawned superstorm struck the heavily populated northeastern US, leaving massive flooding and destruction in its wake. During the storm, more than 8 million customers lost electricity. Power outages alone caused shortages of food, fuel, and water, along with the chaos of gridlocked transportation. The howling winds and surging waters left many neighborhoods crushed, flooded, and choked with mountains of sand. Media coverage of the event reported: "Millions Without Power."

Like a storm of nature, a personal tragedy can often leave us feeling powerless and in the dark. During such times, God's Word assures us of His help: "He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength" (Isa. 40:29).

At our lowest point, drained of emotional resources, we can place our hope in the Lord and find our strength in Him. He promises us that, for each new day, "Those who wait on 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" (Isaiah 40:31).

God is our spiritual power source in every storm of life.

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home! —Watts

It takes the storm to prove the real shelter.

INSIGHT: To say the least, coping with life's many demands can be fatiguing at times. But the reading for today uses wonderful poetic imagery to describe the buoyancy that faith can provide. The believer who depends upon the Lord can "mount up with wings like eagles" (Isaiah 40:31). The text also mentions the supernatural staying power and stamina that only God can provide. In contrast to the strength that youth and health provide, the person of faith can persevere long after others have given up on the race of life. Finally, Isaiah 41:10 extends a wonderful promise of protection and care through life's threats and troubles.

Isaiah 40:28 A Possum's Pose

Read: 1 Samuel 28:5-6, 15-20 |

[The Lord] neither faints nor is weary. —Isaiah 40:28

Possoms are known for their ability to play dead. When this happens, the possum's body wilts, its tongue flops out, and its heart rate declines. After about 15 minutes, the animal revives. Interestingly, animal experts do not believe that possums purposefully play dead to evade predators. They faint involuntarily when they become overwhelmed and anxious!

King Saul had a similar response to danger at the end of his reign. Saul "fell full length on the ground, and was dreadfully afraid ... And there was no strength in him" (1 Sam. 28:20). He responded this way when the prophet Samuel told him that the Philistines would attack Israel on the next day, and that the Lord was not going to help him. Because Saul's life had been characterized by disobedience, rashness, and jealousy, God was no longer guiding him (v.16), and his efforts to defend himself and the Israelites would be futile (1Sa 28:19).

We may be in a place of weakness and despair because of our rebellion or because of the difficulties of life. Although anxiety can steal our strength, God can renew it as we lean on Him (Isa. 40:31). He "neither faints nor is weary" (Isaiah 40:28), and He is willing to reach down and revive us when we can't take another step.

Jesus, You mean the world to me. You

are my life and my all. I'm thankful for

the strength that You give from day to day.

I know that without You I am nothing.

The secret of peace is to give every anxious care to God.

Isaiah 40:27-31 On Eagles' Wings

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles. —Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah's words about patiently waiting for the Lord anticipate the future with confident hope. From our place of trial, we wait for salvation that is certain to come. Jesus assured His followers, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Matthew 5:4).

Knowing that our destiny is glorious, which is the sure hope of heaven, we're able to pick up our pace here on earth. Though weary, we can stretch the wings of our faith and fly! We can walk the path of obedience and not get tired. We can move through routine days and not grow weary. A better world is coming, when our spirits will call us to action and our bodies will run and leap and fly! This is our hope.

In the meantime, what will be true one day can begin to be true now. We can be steadfast, patient, and joyful in spite of deep weariness; kind and calm, less focused on our frailty and fatigue; more concerned about others than we are about ourselves; ready to speak a loving word to those who are struggling. We can get ready now for the day our souls will take flight.

I am a little weary of my life—

Not Thy life, blessed Father! Or the blood

Too slowly laves the coral shores of thought,

Or I am weary of weariness and strife.

Open my soul-gates to Thy living flood;

I ask not larger heart-throbs, vigor-fraught,

I pray Thy presence, with strong patience rife. —MacDonald

When you're weary in life's struggles, find your rest in the Lord.

Isaiah 40:31 Spiritual Decompression

Read: Mark 1:35-39

Casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. —1 Peter 5:7

On May 24, 1883, New Yorkers celebrated the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge, the first steel-wire suspension bridge. This engineering feat, however, was not accomplished without sacrifice. To lay the bridge's giant foundations in the water, huge watertight

chambers called “caissons” had to be used. Men would work in them for 8 hours while under tremendous air pressure.

Returning to normal atmospheric pressure resulted in terrible symptoms later known as caisson disease. It was discovered that a rapid decrease in air pressure releases tiny nitrogen bubbles in the blood. This cuts off the oxygen supply, resulting in nausea, achy joints, paralysis, and even death. Today, scientists know that the use of a decompression chamber allows a gradual reduction of pressure, which prevents the nitrogen bubbles from forming.

Similarly, we need a place to reduce the pressures of life. God has provided a way to “spiritually decompress.” A personal devotional time can be a place where burdens are lifted (Mark 1:35-39). There we can cast all our care upon Him (1 Peter 5:7). By focusing on God’s sufficiency we can experience His peace (Isa. 26:3). Do you have a place of spiritual decompression?

There is a quiet resting place,

Where peace and joy are found;

Where burdens may be laid aside

And faith and love abound. —Moore

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 40:31 Ruts And Routines

Read: Daniel 6:1-10

Cause me to hear Your lovingkindness in the morning, for in You do I trust. —Psalm 143:8

Summer is my favorite season. I love the leisurely days when I can set aside some of my routines without feeling guilty. Doing new things, seeing new places, and allowing myself the time to take “the scenic route” revive my spirit and renew my enthusiasm for life and work.

But summer can also be a dangerous time of breaking good habits. Certain routines are good. They increase our efficiency and ensure that important things get done. After all, we need to have fixed times and places for certain things or the world would be chaotic. Creation is designed to operate on schedule, and, as part of it, so are we. We need food and sleep at regular intervals.

We sometimes hear legitimate warnings about allowing routines to turn into ruts. But the Bible indicates that having set times for certain things is good. David indicated that morning was the right time for him to praise God and ask for His direction (Ps. 5:3; 143:8). And Daniel prayed three times a day, and not even the threat of death made him change his routine (Dan. 6:10).

While enjoying carefree days, we must not become careless about spending time with God. Savoring spiritual sustenance is a routine for all seasons.

You’ll go forth a little stronger

With a fresh supply of grace,

If each day you meet the Savior

In a secret, quiet place. —Adams

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 40:31 - Patience To Be Patient

Read: Psalm 130

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word I do hope. —Psalm 130:5

Children want things now: “But I want dessert now!” “Are we there yet?” “Now can we open our presents?” In contrast, as we get older we learn to wait. Medical students wait through training. Parents wait in hopes that the prodigal will return. We wait for what is worth waiting for, and in the process we learn patience.

God, who is timeless, requires of us a mature faith that may involve delays that seem like trials. Patience is one sign of that maturity, a quality that can develop only through the passing of time.

Many prayers in the Bible come out of the act of waiting. Jacob waited 7 years for a wife and then worked 7 more after being tricked by her father (Gen. 29:15-20). The Israelites waited 4 centuries for deliverance; Moses waited 4 decades for the call to lead them, then 4 more decades for a Promised Land he would not enter.

“My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning,” wrote the psalmist (Ps. 130:6 NIV). The picture comes to mind of a watchman counting the minutes for his shift to be over.

I pray for the patience to endure times of trial, to keep anticipating, keep hoping, keep believing. I pray for patience to be patient.

Those who wait on 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. —Isaiah 40:31

God seldom does great things in a hurry.

Isaiah 40:31 Use Your Weapons

Read: Ephesians 6:10-20

Above all, [take] the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. —Ephesians 6:16

While visiting a museum, I was intrigued by a small inscription describing a class of Roman gladiators—the Retiarii—who fought using only a net and a trident. Of all the fearsome and lethal weapons available to those warriors, who often battled to the death, these men were given two items—a piece of webbing and a three-pronged spear. When they entered the arena, their survival depended on how well they used their weapons.

In the spiritual battle we face as Christians, God has chosen our weapons: “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds” (2 Corinthians 10:3-4).

It’s worth pausing to look at ourselves in the mirror of Ephesians 6:10-18 to see if we are properly equipped with “the whole armor of God.” From the helmet of salvation to the shoes of the gospel of peace, we are to be protected and armed for a conflict that depends not on human strength but on the power of God.

When we realize the nature of that warfare and the forces against us, it’s foolish to enter the fray with anything except our God-given weapons.

Does all the world seem against you

And you’re in the battle alone?

It’s often when you are most helpless

That God’s mighty power is known. -Anon.

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. -Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 40:31 Wait On The Lord

Read: Psalm 27

Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the Lord! —Psalm 27:14

In Cantonese, a Chinese dialect, the word for wait sounds like the word for class. Making a pun on this word, some senior folks in Hong Kong identify themselves as “third-class citizens,” which also means “people of three waits.” They wait for their children to return home from work late at night. They wait for the morning sun to dispel their sleepless nights. And with a sigh of resignation, they wait for death.

In the Bible, the word wait is more an attitude than an activity. To “wait on the Lord” is to trust Him. Psalm 27 is David’s exuberant declaration of faith in God. He sees the Lord as his salvation (Ps 27:1). In times of danger, he knows for certain that God will hide him (Ps 27:5). He remembers that God has asked him to seek His face, so he asks God not to hide from him. For, like a child, he longs to see God’s approving face (Ps 27:8-10). In his darkest moments, David declares: “I would have lost heart, unless I had

believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps 27:13).

Though no one knows how life will unfold, we can decide to trust God and to focus our mind on Him. For to those who wait on the Lord, the promise is given: Our heart will be strengthened (Ps 27:14).

I know not what the future holds—

What in one hour may be;

But I can wait while it unfolds,

And trust implicitly. —Elliott

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 40:31 Get Up!

Read: Psalm 54

God is my helper. —Psalm 54:4

I hadn't been water-skiing in 15 years, but when friends offered to take my son-in-law Todd and me out on the lake last summer, how could I say no? It seemed like a good idea until I watched Todd have trouble getting upright on his skis. He had done a lot of skiing, but as he tried to get up on one ski, he kept falling. So when it came to my turn, I didn't have a lot of confidence.

Fortunately, my friend who is a competitive skier stayed with me in the water and coached me about what to do. She said, "Let the boat pull you up," and "Be strong!" These seemingly contradictory statements made all the difference. I did both—I trusted the boat to do its job, and I hung on with all my strength. The first time the boat took off, I got up and enjoyed a great ride around the lake.

When life has you down—whether through sorrow that seems too hard to bear or circumstances that make each day a morning-to-night grind—my friend's advice can help. First, let God pull you up by His power (Ps. 54:1-4). Then, hold on to His hand. Cling to Him and "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might" (Eph. 6:10).

Trust His power and hold on. He will give you the strength to keep from falling (Isa. 40:31).

Savior, let me walk beside Thee,

Let me feel my hand in Thine;

Let me know the joy of walking

In Thy strength and not in mine. —Sidebotham

Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. —Isaiah 40:31

Isaiah 40:31 A Deadly Weapon

Read: Nehemiah 4:1-10

Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; ... they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. —Isaiah 40:31

Boxing legend Muhammad Ali used several ring tactics to defeat his opponents; one tactic was taunting. In his fight with George Foreman in 1974, Ali taunted Foreman, "Hit harder! Show me something, George. That don't hurt. I thought you were supposed to be bad." Fuming, Foreman punched away furiously, wasting his energy and weakening his confidence.

It's an old tactic. By referring to Nehemiah's efforts at rebuilding the broken wall of Jerusalem as nothing more than a fox's playground (Neh. 4:3), Tobiah intended to weaken the workers with poisonous words of discouragement. Goliath tried it on David by despising the boy's simple weapons of a sling and stones (1 Sam. 17:41-44).

A discouraging remark can be a deadly weapon. Nehemiah refused to surrender to Tobiah's discouragements, just as David rejected Goliath's diabolical teasing. Focusing on God and His help rather than on their discouraging situations, David and Nehemiah both achieved victory.

Taunting can come from anybody, including those who are close to us. Responding to them negatively only saps our energy. But

God encourages us through His promises: He will never forsake us (Ps. 9:10; Heb. 13:5), and He invites us to rely on His help (Heb. 4:16).

Lord, it's easy to let discouragement sap my energy

and joy. Help me to reject all agents of

discouragement in my life and to trust in You for comfort and strength.

If you're in a tunnel of discouragement, keep walking toward the Light.

INSIGHT: Despite the taunting that the Israelites faced from multiple sources when rebuilding the walls and city of Jerusalem, they had courage and confidence in God. They had returned to Jerusalem just as God had promised through the prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 29:10).

Isaiah 40:31 Crumbs of Time

Read: Daniel 6:10-23

Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before. Daniel 6:10

A friend was coming to town. He is a very busy man and his schedule was tight, but after a difficult day in important meetings, he managed to see my family for half an hour for a quick and late dinner. We enjoyed his visit, but I remember looking at my plate and thinking, "We only got the crumbs of his time."

Then I remembered how many times God gets the crumbs of my time—sometimes just the last minutes before I fall asleep.

Daniel was a busy man. He held a high government position in the ancient kingdom of Babylon, and I'm sure he had a full schedule. However, he had developed the habit of spending time with God—praying three times a day, praising God, and thanking Him. This routine helped him develop a strong faith that did not waver when he faced persecution (Dan. 6).

God desires a relationship with us. In the morning we can invite Him into our day, and then we can praise Him and ask Him for His help throughout the day. At other times we can treasure some time alone with Him and reflect on His faithfulness. As we spend time with God in prayer and in His Word, we grow in our relationship with Him and learn to become more and more like Him. As time with God becomes a priority, we enjoy His company more and more.

Dear Father, I want to have an intimate relationship with You. I invite You to be part of my entire day—from the time I awake until I go to sleep.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. Isaiah 40:31

INSIGHT: The name Daniel means "God is my judge," and Daniel lived a life that expressed that truth. He lived in captivity to the Babylonians, but his heart was surrendered to God. Bill Crowder

Isaiah 41

Isaiah 41:8-14 Life-Changing Choices

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. —Isaiah 41:10

Champion athlete Eric Liddell's decision not to run on Sunday in the 1924 Olympic Games was not difficult because of his deep belief that the Lord's Day was for worship and rest.

A more agonizing dilemma had come a year earlier when Eric was asked to speak about his faith in Christ to a group of coal miners. Liddell said of his struggle: "My whole life had been one of keeping out of public duties but the leading of Christ seemed now to be in the opposite direction, and I shrank from going forward. At this time I finally decided to put it all on Christ—after all if He called me to do it, then He would have to supply the necessary power. In going forward the power was given me."

The day after agreeing to publicly share his faith, Eric received a letter from his sister, Jenny, in China. Written weeks before, it ended with this verse of Scripture: "Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed for I am your God; I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you; yes, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10).

Every call from God is an opportunity for us to say "Yes," trusting His strength and not our own.

Lord, I'm fearful sometimes when You ask me

to do something out of my comfort zone.

Help me to remember that as I step out in faith,

You will provide the power to obey.

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. —1 Thessalonians 5:24

Isaiah 41:8-20 Someone Is With You

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you. —Isaiah 41:10

Every night a boy had to walk past what he believed was a haunted house. A friend gave him a good-luck charm to give him courage. An adult said, "It's sinful to be afraid. Trust God! Be brave!" But he was still afraid. Then someone said with compassion, "I know what it is to be afraid. I will walk with you past the house." That's all the boy needed to quell his fears.

Several years ago I was asked to conduct a funeral. I had spoken at many similar occasions as a pastor, but this one was different. Physical and emotional exhaustion had depleted my inner reserves, causing me to lose all confidence in myself. But as the hour approached, I held to the promise of Isaiah 41:10 and did what I knew I had to do.

Looking back, I've concluded that it wasn't simply using a Bible verse or telling myself to trust God that helped me through. Instead, it was because Someone was at that funeral, not only comforting the grieving but also lifting my fears. That Someone was Jesus Christ, who Himself had endured intense sorrow and grief. He was there in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Are you facing fear today? Let the words of Isaiah 41:10 remind you that the Lord is with you.

Fear not, I am with thee—O be not dismayed,

For I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;

I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,

Upheld by My gracious, omnipotent hand. —Anon.

Fear will leave us when we remember that Jesus is with us.

Isaiah 41:10 Frightened By A Boxer

Read: Psalm 91:1-11

Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. —Isaiah 41:10

On a bright Sunday morning one of my boys, who was just a little fellow, was walking to church with me. Soon the sights and sounds of a new day invited him to skip on ahead. Suddenly his carefree progress came to an end. A few yards away was a boxer dog looking at him. Stopping abruptly, my son turned and rushed to my side. Only when his hand was securely in mine and he knew I was right beside him was he able to walk undisturbed past the boxer.

What a picture of our pilgrimage through this world! From time to time the fierce-looking obstacles of illness, money problems, or personal conflicts appear before us, striking fear into our hearts. At first we are bewildered and life seems to be at a dead end. But then by faith we make our way to the Savior, realizing we dare not go forward without the assurance of His presence. As we completely trust in Him, He helps us face the future by walking with us each step of the way.

If anxiety and dread are lurking on the threshold of your tomorrow, remember God's wonderful promise in Isaiah 41:10, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand."

If you can't find a way out, look up.

Isaiah 41:10-13 Chipmunk Chatter

Fear not; I will help you. —Isaiah 41:13

I had laid out some landscape netting in my yard, upon which I was going to spread decorative stones. As I was preparing to finish the job, I noticed a chipmunk tangled up in the netting.

I put on my gloves and gingerly began clipping away at the netting. The little guy was not happy with me. He kicked his hind feet and tried to bite me. I calmly told him, "I'm not going to hurt you, buddy. Just relax." But he didn't understand, so in fear he resisted. I finally snipped the last restricting loop and sent him scampering home.

Sometimes humans feel entangled and react in fear to the Lord. Through the centuries, He has offered rescue and hope to people—yet we resist Him, not understanding the help He provides. In Isaiah 41, the prophet quotes the Lord as saying, "For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, 'Fear not; I will help you'" (Isaiah 41:13).

As you think about your situation, how do you see God's role? Are you afraid to turn things over to Him—for fear that He might harm you? He is good and He is near, wanting to free you from life's entanglements. You can trust Him with your life.

In what area of your life do you need freedom? Ask the Lord to show you and to give you the faith to trust Him for His deliverance.

Faith is the best antidote for fear.

Isaiah 41:13 Holding Me Up

Read: Psalm 34:1-7

I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you. Isaiah 41:13

After I no longer went on family road trips with my parents, it became a rare occasion to visit my grandparents who lived hundreds of miles away from us. So one year, I decided to fly to visit them in the small town of Land O'Lakes, Wisconsin, for a long weekend. As we drove to the airport for my return flight, Grandma, who had never flown, began to express her fears to me: "That was such a small plane you flew on ... There's nothing really holding you up there, is there? ... I would be so afraid to go up that high."

By the time I boarded the small aircraft, I was as fearful as the first time I had flown. What exactly is holding up this plane, anyway?

Irrational fears, or even legitimate ones, don't need to terrify us. David lived as a fugitive, afraid of King Saul who relentlessly pursued him because he was jealous of David's popularity with the people. David found true solace and comfort only in his relationship with God. In Psalm 34 he wrote: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" (Ps 34:4).

Our Father in heaven is all-wise and all-loving. When fear starts to overwhelm us, we need to stop and remember that He is our God and He will always hold us up.

My fears sometimes overwhelm me, Father. Yet I know that You are here with me. May Your perfect love cast out my fear and still my troubled heart!

When we believe that God is good, we can learn to release our fears.

INSIGHT: The superscription to Psalm 34 gives the occasion for David writing this song of deliverance. While a fugitive from the jealous King Saul, David foolishly took refuge in the Philistine territory of Gath (1Sam. 21:10-15). This was a dangerous thing to do because Gath was the hometown of Goliath (1Sa 17:23). When the Philistines realized that David was the Jew who had slain their champion Goliath, they captured him (1Sa 21:11,13). Aware that his life was now in danger, David feigned insanity and the ploy succeeded for he was released and made his escape. In response to God's deliverance, David wrote, "I sought the Lord, and he answered me" (Ps. 34:4). Sim Kay Tee

Isaiah 41:17-20 "Embroidery Of Earth"

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar and the acacia tree, the myrtle and the oil tree. —Isaiah 41:19

Near one of the most majestic sites in God's nature is a botanical garden of awe-inspiring beauty. On the Canadian side of Niagara Falls is the Floral Showhouse. Inside the greenhouse is a vast array of beautiful flowers and exotic plants. In addition to the flora my wife and I observed, something else caught our attention—the wording of a plaque.

It reads: "Enter, friends, and view God's pleasant handiwork, the embroidery of earth." What a marvelous way to describe the way our Creator favored this globe with such jaw-dropping beauty!

The "embroidery of earth" includes such far-ranging God-touches as the verdant rainforests of Brazil, the frigid beauty of Arctic Circle glaciers, the flowing wheat fields of the North American plains, and the sweeping reaches of the fertile Serengeti in Africa. These areas, like those described in Isaiah 41, remind us to praise God for His creative handiwork.

Scripture also reminds us that the wonder of individual plants are part of God's work. From the rose (Isa. 35:1) to the lily (Matt. 6:28) to the myrtle, cypress, and pine (Isa. 41:19-20), God colors our world with a splendid display of beauty. Enjoy the wonder. And

spend some time praising God for the “embroidery of earth.”

If God’s creation helps you see

What wonders He can do

Then trust the many promises

That He has given you. —D. De Haan

Creation is filled with signs that point to the Creator.

ISAIAH 42

Isaiah 42:3 Hand of Mercy

Nowhere in the Old or New Testament do we find an excuse to kick a man when he is down. Rather, we are encouraged to extend the hand of mercy to anyone who is in trouble. British author John Hunter points out how the mention of a “smoking flax” in Isaiah 42:3 illustrates this truth. Though the verse applies to Christ, it has a lesson for all believers. According to Hunter, Middle Easterners used a simple oil lamp to light their homes. It was a small clay vessel with the front end pinched together to form an opening. A piece of flax, serving as the wick, was inserted through the small hole until part of it was submerged in the oil. When the flax was saturated, it could be lighted. It would then burn with a soft, warm glow. But when the oil in the lamp was consumed, the flax would dry out. If it was ignited again, it would give off an acrid, dirty smoke, making the vessel offensive and useless. Now, you might think that the only thing to do would be to crush and discard the wick. But that would accomplish nothing. If you simply refill the lamp, the wick could burn brightly again. Occasionally God’s people temporarily “run out of oil.” They become like the smoking flax because they are ill-tempered and offensive. But fellow believers should not abandon them or become angry and impatient with them. Rather, they should seek to restore them by being merciful and understanding. By supporting them with prayer and expressions of concern, they can help them burn again with the soft, warm glow of Christian love. - Dennis Egner - Our Daily Bread

ISAIAH 46

Isaiah 46:1-10 miracle Material

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? —Isaiah 40:25 niv

CNN calls a derivative of graphite a “miracle material” that could revolutionize our future. Only one atom thick, graphene is being hailed as a truly two-dimensional material in a 3-D world. One hundred times stronger than steel, it is harder than diamond, conducts electricity 1,000 times better than copper, and is more flexible than rubber.

In and of themselves, such technological advances are neither moral nor evil. But we are wise to remember the limitations of anything we make for ourselves.

Isaiah spoke to a generation who found themselves carrying into captivity gods they had made with their own hands. The prophet wanted the Israelites to see the irony of needing to care for the silver and gold idols they had crafted to inspire, help, comfort, and protect them.

What was true of Israel holds true for us as well. Nothing we have made or bought for ourselves can meet the needs of our heart. Only God, who has been carrying us “from the womb” (Isa. 46:3-4), can carry us into the future.

Father, thank You for the miracle of relationship with You. Help us not to rely on our own efforts, strength, or possessions but instead sense Your loving care for us.

An idol is anything that takes God’s rightful place.

INSIGHT: Isaiah assured the discouraged Jewish nation in exile in Babylon that God would come to their rescue and punish their enemies (Isa. 40–55). The Babylonian conquerors and their gods (represented by their chief deity, Bel, and his son Nebo) would be defeated and destroyed (Isaiah 46:1-2). Unlike these false gods, who were crafted by human hands and were incapable of protecting or saving anyone (Isaiah 46:6-7), God asserted that He alone was God and there was none like Him (Isaiah 46:9). He reminded His people that He had faithfully cared for them since birth (Isaiah 46:3-4) and He alone had the power to save them

(Isaiah 46:10).

Isaiah 42

Isaiah 42:1-9 God's Surprising Answer

Oh, that You would rend the heavens! That You would come down! —Isaiah 64:1

Rend the heavens!" and "come down!" pleaded the prophet Isaiah. Make Your name known by making the mountains shake and the nations tremble, he advised the Lord (Isa. 64:1-3).

Isaiah wanted God to behave as He had in the past. Recalling the Scripture about God's visit with Moses on Mt. Sinai, Isaiah longed for a repeat performance.

But God had already told Isaiah that He would be doing something new. "Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isa 42:9).

The "something new" was Jesus! God did indeed come down. But not in Isaiah's lifetime. And not in the dramatic fashion he longed for. "He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street" (Isa 42:2). He came in the unassuming form of an infant.

Many of us can remember a situation when God was amazingly timely in His response to our need. Like Isaiah, we want God to do the same thing again. But perhaps He has something else in mind. As you celebrate God's humble descent to earth, be aware that He came to change our hearts, not just our circumstances.

God's answer wasn't detected

When Jesus came to earth,

For no one had expected

A Child of lowly birth. —D. De Haan

God's answers to our prayers may exceed our expectations.

Isaiah 42:1-9 The Power Of Compassion

A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench. —Isaiah 42:3

Francis Schaeffer, author and Christian apologist, struggled to spell words correctly because of dyslexia. At the college he attended, spelling errors lowered the grade on all written assignments. During his first year, a professor told Schaeffer, "This is the best philosophy paper I've ever read, but it's the worst spelling. What am I going to do? I can't pass you."

Francis replied, "Sir, I could never spell. Could you please just read what I'm saying and not worry about the spelling?"

After a long pause, the professor replied, "You know, Mr. Schaeffer, I think we'll do that." His wise, compassionate response encouraged a gifted young man who would later help many of the searching generation during the 1960s and 70s to find their way to faith in Christ.

Isaiah said of the promised Messiah, "A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth" (Isa. 42:3). The image is of a gentle, yet powerful Person who sets prisoners free and encourages those who are fainthearted and tempted to despair.

Jesus came to free us from sin, not to condemn us for our condition. Today, He offers salvation and encouragement to all who turn to Him.

No condemnation now I dread,

I am my Lord's and He is mine;

Alive in Him, my living Head,

And clothed in righteousness divine. —Wesley

When we come to Christ in our brokenness, He makes us whole.

Isaiah 42:1-7 Eye Level To A Bulldog

I, the Lord, have called You ... to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. —Isaiah 42:6-7

My son and his wife have a 120- pound American bulldog with a powerful body and fearsome face. Yet until we became friends, “Buddy” wasn’t sure he could trust me. As long as I was on my feet, he’d keep his distance and wouldn’t look me in the eye. Then one day I learned that if I’d get down on the ground, the mood of Buddy’s big-jowled face would change. Sensing I was no longer a threat, he’d playfully come running like a freight train, pounce on me with his big feet, and want me to scratch his muscular neck.

Maybe what Buddy needed from me is a glimmer of what our God gave us by coming down to our level and living among us in the person of Christ. From the day that our first parents sinned and hid from the presence of the Lord, our tendency has been to be afraid of coming to a high and holy God on His terms (John 3:20).

So, as Isaiah predicted, God showed how low He was willing to go to bring us to Himself. By adopting the form of a lowly servant, our Creator lived and died to disarm our wrongs. Even now He is coaxing us from the cover of our spiritual darkness (Isa. 42:7) to call us friends (John 15:15). How can we still be afraid to trust Him?

Lord, thank You that You stepped out of heaven
and came down to this earth, that You clothed Yourself
in human flesh. We’re grateful that we can now draw
near to You, even though we’re sinful. Amen.

The high and holy One became the meek and lowly One.

Isaiah 42:1-4,23-25 Who Is Deaf?

The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save ... [But] your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear. —Isaiah 59:1-2

A man told his doctor that he thought his wife was going deaf. The doctor told him to conduct a simple test. When the man reached the front door of his home, he called out, “Darling, is dinner ready?” Hearing no response, he walked inside and repeated himself. Still no reply. On the third try, when he was just behind her, he finally heard her say, “For the third time, yes!”

Similarly, the ancient Israelites thought God was deaf when the problem was actually with them. Isaiah was a prophet sent to warn God’s people about impending judgment, but his message fell on deaf ears. Instead of being God’s covenant people, who were to bring light to those in darkness and release them from the dungeons of sin (Isaiah 42:7), they refused to hear Him. “They would not walk in His ways, nor were they obedient to His law” (Isaiah 42:24).

The prophet explained why their prayers seemed to fall on deaf ears: “The Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God” (Isa. 59:1-2). One reason for not receiving answers from God is that sin may be blocking our hearing. Let’s examine ourselves carefully.

Our God isn’t hard of hearing.

Nothing between my soul and the Savior,

Naught of this world’s delusive dream;

I have renounced all sinful pleasure,

Jesus is mine; there’s nothing between. —Tindley

God speaks through His Word to those who listen with their heart.

Isaiah 42:8 That Is Mine!

Read: Ezekiel 29:1-9

I am the Lord; that is My name. —Isaiah 42:8

The Nile of Africa, which spans 6,650 kilometers (more than 4,100 miles) and flows northward across several northeastern African countries, is the world's longest river. Over the centuries, the Nile has provided sustenance and livelihood for millions of citizens in the countries it passes through. Currently, Ethiopia is building what will become Africa's largest hydro-power dam on the Nile. It will be a great resource for the area.

Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, claimed to be the Nile's owner and originator. He and all Egypt boasted, "My River is my own; I have made it for myself" (Ezek. 29:3,9). They failed to acknowledge that God alone provides natural resources. As a result, God promised to punish the nation (Ezek 29:8-9).

We are to care for God's creation, and not forget that everything we have comes from the Lord. Ro 11:36 says, "For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever." He is the One who also endows humanity with the ability to manufacture and invent man-made resources. Whenever we talk about a good thing that has come to us or that we have accomplished, we need to remember what God says in Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord; that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another."

Praise the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does such wonderful things. Praise Your glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with Your glory.

To God be the glory—great things He has done!

INSIGHT: The psalmist says, "The earth is the Lord's and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1NIV). Ezekiel underscores this point to the Pharaoh of Egypt. Pharaoh claimed to have created the Nile (Ezek. 29:3), but Ezekiel shows that God is angry with Pharaoh's arrogant claim. God is the true Creator and He controls the beasts of the field and the fish of the sea (vv. 3-5).

Isaiah 43

Isaiah 43:1-13 In The Car Wash

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. —Isaiah 43:2

I'll never forget my first experience using an automatic car wash. Approaching it with the dread of going to the dentist, I pushed the money into the slot, nervously checked and rechecked my windows, eased the car up to the line, and waited. Powers beyond my control began moving my car forward as if on a conveyor belt. There I was, cocooned inside, when a thunderous rush of water, soap, and brushes hit my car from all directions. What if I get stuck in here or water crashes in? I thought irrationally. Suddenly the waters ceased. After a blow-dry, my car was propelled into the outside world again, clean and polished.

In the midst of all this, I remembered stormy times in my life when it seemed I was on a conveyor belt, a victim of forces beyond my control. "Car-wash experiences," I now call them. I remembered that whenever I passed through deep waters my Redeemer had been with me, sheltering me against the rising tide (Isa. 43:2). When I came out on the other side, which I always did, I was able to say with joy and confidence, "He is a faithful God!"

Are you in the middle of a car-wash experience? Trust God to bring you through to the other side. You'll then be a shining testimony of His keeping power.

How wonderful to know that He

Who watches from above

Will always keep us sheltered in

His ever-present love! —King

A tunnel of testing can produce a shining testimony.

Isaiah 43:1-13 Heat And Holiness

When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned. —Isaiah 43:2

Why is it taking my hair so long to get dry? I wondered. As usual, I was in a hurry, and I didn't want to go outside into the wintry weather with wet hair. Then I realized the problem. I had changed the setting on the hairdryer to "warm" instead of "hot" to accommodate my niece's preferences.

I often wish I could control the conditions of life as easily as I can change the setting on my hairdryer. I would choose a comfortable setting—not too hot, not too cold. I certainly wouldn't choose the heat of adversity or the fire of affliction. But in the spiritual realm, warm doesn't get the job done. We are called to holiness, and holiness often involves "heat." To be holy means to be set apart for God—separated from anything unclean or impure. To refine and purify us, God sometimes uses the furnace of affliction. The prophet Isaiah said, "When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned" (Isa. 43:2); he didn't say if. And the apostle Peter said that we should not be surprised by trials (1 Peter 4:12).

None of us knows when we'll be called to walk through the fire or how hot the furnace will be. But we do know this: God's purpose for the flames is to purify us, not to destroy us.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,

My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.

The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design

Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine. —Keen

The only way God hurries holiness is by turning up the heat.

Isaiah 43:1-13 Carwash Experiences

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. —Isaiah 43:2

I'll never forget my first experience using an automatic carwash. Approaching it with the dread of going to the dentist, I pushed the money into the slot, nervously checked and rechecked my windows, eased the car up to the line, and waited. Powers beyond my control began moving my car forward as if on a conveyor belt. With me cocooned inside, a thunderous rush of water, shampoo, and brushes hit my car from all directions. What if I get stuck in here or water crashes in? I thought irrationally. Suddenly the waters ceased. After a blow-dry, my car was propelled into the outside world again, clean and polished.

In the midst of all this, I remembered stormy times in my life when it seemed I was on a conveyor belt, a victim of forces beyond my control. "Carwash experiences," I now call them. I remembered that whenever I passed through deep waters, my Redeemer had been with me, sheltering me against the rising tide. When I came out on the other side, which I always did, I was able to say with joy and confidence that He is a faithful God!

Are you in the middle of a carwash experience? Trust God to bring you through to the other side. You'll then be a shining testimony of His keeping power.

How wonderful to know that He

Who watches from above,

Will always keep us sheltered in

His ever-present love! —King

When you come through the tunnel of testing, You'll shine brighter for the Lord.

Isaiah 43:1-4 Fear Not

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. —Isaiah 43:1

My wife became seriously ill during her pregnancy with our second child. As the doctors struggled to find the problem, she continued to grow weaker—dangerously so.

Watching her suffer was a helpless and horrible feeling for me, and there were days when it felt as if God were not hearing our prayers. One Sunday, while I was looking for comfort from Scripture, my eyes landed on the first verse in Isaiah 43.

"Fear not," it begins, and ends with "you are Mine." Instantly, the Holy Spirit made the words personal. The intimate way God addresses Israel reminded me of His always-present attention to us too: "When you pass through the waters ... through the rivers ... through the fire" (v.2). Each phrase rose up in crescendo, from the pages to my heart.

Our comfort in that hour came not from promises of healing or miracles, but from knowing we were never alone. We had many other frightening times, including just after Ethan's birth, when it looked as if both he and Cheryl would be lost. But God had used His words to comfort us and prepare us for those harder moments!

Let these words be a reminder to you that you are never alone.

At times our fears may loom so large,

We long for proof that God is near;

It's then our Father says to us,

"Have faith, My child, and do not fear." —D. De Haan

Never forget in the darkness, what you know to be true in the light.

Isaiah 43:1 A Winner Either Way

Read: Philippians 1:15-26

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. —Philippians 1:21

Lois had just undergone cancer surgery and was alone with her thoughts. She had faced death before, but it had always been the death of people she had loved—not her own.

Suddenly she realized that losing someone she loved was more threatening to her than the possibility of losing her own life. She wondered why. She remembered that she had asked herself before her operation, "Am I ready to die?" Her immediate answer had been, and still was, "Yes, I am. Christ is my Lord and Savior."

With her readiness for death assured, she now needed to concentrate on living. Would it be in fear or in faith? Then God seemed to say, "I have saved you from eternal death. I want to save you from living in fear." Isaiah 43:1 came to mind: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine."

Now Lois testifies, "Yes, I am His! That reality is more important than doctors telling me I have cancer." And then she adds, "I win either way!"

Lois' insight is a convinced echo of Paul's words in today's text, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Let's pray that those words will resonate in our heart. That confidence makes us a winner either way.

Safe in the Lord, without a doubt,

By virtue of the blood;

For nothing can destroy the life

That's hid with Christ in God. —Anon.

We can really live if we are ready to die.

Isaiah 43:2 Does Your Roof Leak?

Read: Psalm 66:8-16

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; ... they shall not overflow you. —Isaiah 43:2

In a book written in 1696, I found these statements: "Sharp afflictions are to the soul as a soaking rain to the house. We know not there are such holes in the roof till the shower comes, and then we see it drop down here and there. Perhaps we did not know that there were such unmortified cuts in our soul till the storms of affliction came, then we found unbelief, impatience, and fear dropping down in many places."

How true! Affliction tests us and proves what sort of Christians we are. If there are defects in our spiritual armor, they will show up under the strain and pressure of trouble.

When the floodgates of distress are opened, it is then we echo with understanding the words of the psalmist, who exclaimed, "Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck" (Ps. 69:1). Yet we need not fear, for it is our loving Father who allows the waters to come, not to drown us but to cleanse us and help us to see where our life needs repairing.

Have you been through a storm? Have you been disturbed, irritated, faithless, fearful, or rebellious? Consider that God may have put you through this difficulty to reveal your spiritual needs. By prayer, faith, and yielding to the Holy Spirit, repair the "leaky roof." —Henry G. Bosch (ODB Editor 1956-1981)

God's way is the best way, though I may not see

Why sorrows and trials oft gather 'round me;

He ever is seeking my gold to refine,

So humbly I trust Him, my Savior divine. —Leech

God takes us into deep waters not to drown us but to cleanse us.

Isaiah 43:2 Trust Me

Read: Psalm 121

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. —Isaiah 43:2

When I was a little girl, my aunt and uncle took me to Lake Michigan. While some of my cousins ventured far out into the waves, I played close to shore. Then my Uncle Norm asked me, "Can you swim?" "No," I admitted. "Don't worry," he said. "I'll take you out there." "But it's too deep," I protested. "Just hang on to me," he assured me. "Do you trust me?" Then I took his hand and we began to walk farther out into the lake.

When my feet couldn't touch the bottom anymore, Uncle Norm held me up and reassured me, "I've got you. I've got you." Then finally he said, "Okay, let your feet down. You can stand here." I was afraid because I thought we were still in deep water, but I trusted him and happily discovered that I was standing on a sandbar.

Have you ever been in so much despair that you felt as if you were sinking in deep water? The difficulties of life can be oppressive. God doesn't promise that we will escape the turbulent seas of life, but He does promise, "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

We can trust our faithful God to be there in all of our struggles. "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isa. 43:2).

God, give me the faith of a little child!

A faith that will look to Thee—

That never will falter and never fail,

But follow Thee trustingly. —Showerman

Before your burden overcomes you, trust God to put His arms underneath you.

Isaiah 43:2 Trouble

Read: John 16:25-33

In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. —John 16:33

I was glad to see the final days of the year draw to a close. It had held so much sorrow, sickness, and sadness. I was ready to welcome January with its very own brass band!

But as the first month of the new year arrived, so did one bit of sad news after another. Several friends lost their parents. My dad's brother slipped away in his sleep. Friends discovered they had cancer. A colleague's brother and a friend's son both died tragically and abruptly. Rather than the sad times ceasing, the new year seemed to bring a whole new tsunami of sorrow.

John 16:33 tells us, "In the world you will have tribulation." Even God's children are not promised a life of ease, of prosperity, nor of good health. Yet we are never alone in our trouble. Isaiah 43:2 reminds us that when we pass through deep waters, God is with us. Although we don't always understand God's purposes in the trials we experience, we can trust His heart because we know Him.

Our God is a God of abundant love and "neither death nor life... nor things present nor things to come [will ever] separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38-39). When trouble comes, His presence is His promise.

Swift cometh His answer, so clear and so sweet;

"Yea, I will be with thee, thy troubles to meet;

I will not forget thee, nor fail thee, nor grieve;

I will not forsake thee, I never will leave." —Flint

Faith is believing that God is present when all we hear is silence.

Isaiah 43:22-28 Life-Saver

I will not remember your sins. —Isaiah 43:25

The ice of winter had barely melted off a nearby lake when a 7-year-old Michigan boy decided to do some boating. His craft was half of an oil drum he found along the shore, and his oar was a battered snow shovel. The boy's makeshift paddle worked so well that he got to the middle of the lake, but then the drum began to take on water. Fortunately, neighbors heard his cries for help, and he was rescued just in time. Once more, a youngster learned the hazards of a "boys will be boys" experience.

Similarly, Isaiah 43 describes the dangers of a "men will be men" situation. Speaking to Israel, God told them that He alone could save them from their spiritual foolishness (vv.21-24). He reminded Israel that they had gone their own way. Like immature children, they lacked foresight. Yet, the Lord was quick to assure them that if they would remember Him and plead their case, He would blot out their transgressions, and they could be rescued (vv.25-26).

As believers, we too are promised that kind of help. When we find ourselves in deep waters as the result of our own sin, we can discover anew that God is our life-saver. Let's not allow our pride to keep us from crying out for help like a child.

What troubles overwhelm the soul

Because we've chosen paths of sin!

But if we humbly call on God,

He'll grant anew His peace within. —DJD

The first step in receiving God's forgiveness is to admit that we need it.

Isaiah 43:6 HERMENEUTICS

We cannot arrive at a true understanding of God's Word by detaching texts from their contexts to find personal meaning in them and be feeding them into the world of our private preoccupations and letting that world impose new senses on old phrases.

A theological student whom later I knew as a senior friend had committed himself to starting his ministry in the north of England when he received a very attractive invitation to join a teaching institution in South Wales instead. He did not feel able to withdraw from his commitments, but one day he read in Isaiah 43:6 (Authorized Version), "I will say to the north, Give up", and concluded that this was God telling him that he would be providentially released from his promise and so set free to accept the second invitation. No such thing happened, however, so he went north after all wondering what had gone wrong. Then he reread Isaiah 43:6 and noticed that it continued, "...and to the south, Do not withhold." At this point it dawned on him that he had been finding meaning in the text that was never really there. Instead, the concerns which he brought to his reading of the text had governed his interpretation of it.

To impose meaning on the text is not the way to learn God's Law. Yet we constantly do this (don't we?), and it is one chronic obstacle to understanding.

James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.

Isaiah 43:14-21 New Beginnings

Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? —Isaiah 43:19

New beginnings are possible. Just ask Brayan, a young man who joined a gang in elementary school. Brayan ran away when he was 12 years old, and for 3 years was lost in gang and drug life. Although he left the gang and returned home, it was difficult for him, as he had been expelled from school for selling drugs. When he enrolled in a new high school, however, a teacher inspired and encouraged him to write about his experiences rather than repeat them. He embraced the challenge and is now experiencing a fresh start.

God, through the prophet Isaiah, encouraged Jewish exiles to think about a new beginning as well. God said, "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old" (Isa. 43:18). He told them to stop dwelling on their punishment and even on His display

of power through the original exodus from Egypt. He wanted their attention to be focused on God who would give them a new beginning by bringing them home from Babylon through a new exodus (Isaiah 43:19).

With God, new beginnings are possible in our hearts. He can help us to let go of the past and start clinging to Him. Relationship with Him provides a new hope for all who will trust Him.

Lord, we need Your touch on our lives.

Work in our hearts in whatever areas need

a fresh start. Help us to do our part and to

trust You to do what only You can do.

God gives fresh starts from the inside out.

INSIGHT: In today's reading, we see the Hebrew remnant facing the arduous trek back to the Promised Land and the demands of rebuilding their lives. Certainly, a feeling of insecurity must have filled their hearts. Yet the Lord was with them and would provide protection and success. Today, believers also need to trust in God's provision. Inevitably, challenges of transition, new circumstances, and an uncertain future can cause anxiety. Yet the living God gives us this promise: "I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert" (v.19). No matter what difficulties we encounter, God will find a way for us.

Isaiah 43:19-28 "Sweet Cane" For God

You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your sacrifices. —Isaiah 43:24

Our giving to the Lord should include more than handing Him a "tip" on Sunday from money that's left over when the bills are paid. It should include all acts of devotion that cost us something.

In today's Bible reading, God's people had failed to learn this lesson. They didn't offer Him "sweet cane" (Isa. 43:24)—a gift that would have required self-sacrifice.

According to Jeremiah, this expensive delicacy came from "a far country" (Jer. 6:20). It was one of the ingredients God instructed Moses to use in the formula for the holy anointing oil (Ex. 30:23), and it was used in the sanctuary to produce a sweet-smelling sacrifice. An Israelite who brought sweet cane was expressing a sacrificial kind of giving that pleased God.

Ask yourself the following searching question: Is my life characterized by acts of self-denial, the gifts of sweet cane that mean so much to the Lord? How grieved the Savior must be when we don't offer Him worship and gifts that come from our heart!

Don't be satisfied to get by with a minimum of giving and service. Offer the Lord the sweet cane of a zealous, sacrificial life.

The gifts we offer to the Lord

Are by His standards measured;

Our sacrifice and lives of praise—

Such gifts are highly treasured. —Sper

Self-sacrifice is the true measure of our giving.

Isaiah 43:22-28 Think Of Them No More

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. —Isaiah 43:25

My early years as a believer in Christ were laden with foreboding. I had the impression that when Jesus comes back, all my sins will be portrayed on a giant screen for everyone to see.

I know now that God chooses not to remember against me a single one of my transgressions. Every sin has been buried in the deepest sea, never to be exhumed and examined again.

Amy Carmichael wrote, "A day or two ago I was thinking rather sadly of the past—so many sins and failures and lapses of every kind. I was reading Isaiah 43, and in verse 24 I saw myself: 'You have wearied me with your iniquities.' And then for the first time I noticed that there is no space between Isaiah 43:24 and Isaiah 43:25: 'I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.'"

Indeed, when our Lord comes back He will “bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one’s praise will come from God” (1 Cor. 4:5). On that day our works will be tried and we may suffer loss, but we will not be judged for sin (3:11-15). God will see what Christ has done for us. He “will not remember [our] sins.”

Where no far-reaching tide with its powerful sweep

May stir the dark waves of forgetfulness deep,

I have buried them there where no mortal can see!

I’ve cast all thy sins in the depths of the sea. —Anon.

When God saves us, our sins are forgiven forever.

INSIGHT: God’s people had been unfaithful and had stubbornly refused to repent and return to God (Isa. 43:22-24). Yet despite their sins and guilt, God in His mercy said He would forgive them (Isaiah 43:25), even though they were undeserving of His favor (Isaiah 43:26). From the time of “your first father and your mediators”—perhaps referring to Abraham and other covenantal leaders such as Moses—they were all sinners (Isaiah 43:27). Although their sins would be forgiven, they would still face the consequences of their actions and be disciplined through the exile (Isaiah 43:28).

Isaiah 43:25 Moving Past Sinful Failure

Read: 2 Samuel 12:1-23

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. —Isaiah 43:25

How should we handle moments of faith-failure, when we’ve damaged the kingdom of God in the eyes of our friends and family or dishonored God in our actions?

We can learn from King David after his humiliation in the Bathsheba scandal. Though the terrible consequences of that sin could not be avoided, he found his way back to a relationship with God that made it possible for him to continue to serve Him. We too can find our way back.

David’s pattern in 2 Samuel 12 serves us well: We need to declare our error candidly (2Sa 12:13) and seek God’s forgiveness. Then we can ask God that others be spared the consequences of our actions (2Sa 12:16). Finally, we need to recognize that sometimes the consequences simply cannot be avoided and must be endured. While we always mourn those consequences, we can’t allow them to so consume us that we cease to be servants of God (2Sa 12:20-23).

Satan not only delights in the moment of our failure but also in the spiritual inactivity that sometimes snares us in our remorse. When we’ve blown our witness, we are and should be humbled. But we should not multiply the damage by retreating into silence and obscurity as ambassadors of Christ. We can move past failure.

Action Suggestion

If after you’ve confessed your sin to God, you still suffer

with guilty feelings, memorize Proverbs 24:16 and

1 John 1:9 and ask God to help you believe His Word.

God forgives our sins completely to restore us to His presence and service.

Isaiah 43:25 Unable To Sleep

Read: Hebrews 10:12-22

I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. —

William Booth, the founder and commanding general of the Salvation Army, was unable to sleep one night. His son Bramwell, who lived next door, saw that the light was on in his father’s home. Thinking something might be wrong, he went to his parents’ house. He found his father pacing back and forth with a wet towel wrapped around his head. “Father,” he asked, “shouldn’t you be asleep?”

“No,” William replied, “I am thinking.” Seeing the puzzled look that crossed his son’s face, he put his hands on Bramwell’s shoulders and solemnly said, “I am thinking about people’s sins. What will they do with their sins?”

That question should disturb all of us. Sin separates people from a holy God, and it will do so forever unless it is forgiven. There is

nothing we can do nor any amount we could pay that could ever atone for our guilt.

But the joyful message of the gospel is that God through His Son's sacrifice on Calvary has made it possible for our sins to be completely forgiven (Heb. 10:12-14). That miracle of mercy takes place, however, only when we personally acknowledge in sincere trust that the death of Jesus Christ is our one hope for forgiveness.

I know I'm a sinner and Christ is my need;

His death is my ransom, no merit I plead.

His work is sufficient, on Him I believe;

I have life eternal when Him I receive. —Anon.

We are saved by what Christ did, not by what we do.

Isaiah 44

Isaiah 44:21-28 Amnesia

Remember these, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant. —Isaiah 44:21

A factory worker approached his supervisor at the end of the day looking confused. "How do I turn off my machine?" he asked. "You don't remember?" his boss asked. "No," the employee said. "In fact, I'm not sure where I am and what I'm doing here." The concerned supervisor sent him to a doctor. The diagnosis? Amnesia.

This situation has a spiritual parallel in Isaiah 44. God's people Israel apparently had forgotten who they were, for whom they worked (Isaiah 44:21), where they had come from (Isaiah 44:24), and how much the Lord had done for them (Isaiah 44:22). They needed to be reminded that it is foolish to depend on anything made by human hands (Isaiah 44:9-20), and that the Lord alone is able to control the course of human events (Isaiah 44:24-25).

What could be worse for us today than forgetting that we belong to Christ, that He has bought us with His own blood, that He knows how we should live, and that He is the One who is in control of all the circumstances of our lives? Let's check ourselves. Maybe we, like ancient Israel, have had a lapse of memory. If so, let's forsake our sin, return to the Lord, and remember who we are and why we are here.

Spiritual amnesia is a dangerous condition, but it can be reversed.

Christians who act like orphans have forgotten that God is their Father.

Isaiah 44:22 The Best Eraser

Read: Luke 16:19-31

I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions. —Isaiah 44:22

What is memory? What is this faculty that enables us to recall past feelings, sights, sounds, and experiences? By what process are events recorded, stored, and preserved in our brain to be brought back again and again? Much is still mystery.

We do know that memories can be blessings—full of comfort, assurance, and joy. Old age can be happy and satisfying if we have stored up memories of purity, faith, fellowship, and love. If a saint looks back on a life of Christian service and remembers the faithfulness of Him who promised: "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5), his or her sunset years can be the sweetest of all.

But memory can also be a curse and a tormentor. Many people as they approach the end of life would give all they possess to erase from their minds the past sins that haunt them. What can a person do who is plagued by such remembrances? Just one thing. He can take them to the One who is able to forgive them and blot them out forever. He's the One who said, "Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more" (Heb. 10:17).

You may not be able to forget your past. But the Lord offers to blot out, "like a thick cloud, your transgressions" (Isa. 44:22).

The deep remorse that's in the soul

No human eye may trace;

But Jesus sees the broken heart,

And can its woes erase. —Bosch

The best eraser is honest confession to God.

Isaiah 45

Isaiah 45:1-13 The Big Picture

I am the Lord, and there is no other; there is no God besides Me. —Isaiah 45:5

A reporter for Life magazine asked Kristi, an Iowa second grader, “Who is God?” She replied, “God makes the weather ... He gives us gifts like trees and ... green grass, but one gift He gave us that I don’t like: that there might be a war.” She continued, “But sometimes God’s sort of not nice because one time He made this machine where you try to get it to grab the stuffed animal. He didn’t give us luck on that, and we spent \$4.”

In her childish way, Kristi was trying to understand God’s ways. She recognized His goodness but couldn’t fit in the reality of war nor the \$4 in quarters that didn’t bring her “luck.” She couldn’t see the big picture.

We wrestle with similar issues. Yet God declares that He is like no other. He creates light and darkness, peace and calamity, and can do all things (Isa. 45:7).

How then do we gain an accurate perception of God? We start by reading the whole Bible, not just the parts that please us. Instead of blaming God for sin, we trust Him to bring good out of calamity. Most of all, we must believe in Jesus and His sacrifice for our sin on the cross. It is at Calvary that we see both God’s justice and His mercy. Looking at the cross helps us to see the big picture.

So far above us is our God,

His ways we can’t perceive

Until we look to Christ His Son

And in His Word believe. —Hess

God’s justice and mercy intersect at the cross.

Isaiah 45:18-25 Help From Above

Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. —Isaiah 45:22

Many people around the world claim they have been abducted by extraterrestrial beings. Researchers call it a “new psychological disorder.” Jeff Kanipe, an authority in this field of study, says that some people become so obsessed with the desire for help from another world that they “hallucinate help coming from the skies in the form of alien saviors—saviors, I might add, that oftentimes behave sinisterly.”

It’s as if people create their own gods to give meaning and purpose to their lives. Such deities, however, are an illusion and cannot help us.

Over the centuries, man has not changed. In Isaiah’s day, the nations worshiped gods of their own making. So the living and true God commanded people everywhere to discard these false and powerless gods and look to Him alone. He drew a sharp contrast between Himself and all other saviors when He said, “Look to Me, and be saved ... ! For I am God, and there is no other” (Isaiah 45:19).

The imaginary gods, then and now, do not tell us who we are, why we are here, and how we can be delivered from our sins. But the one true God does. He became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14). Let’s seek our help from Him.

O God, our help in ages past,

Our hope for years to come,

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home! —Addison

Our only hope here below is help from God above.

Isaiah 45:18-25 He's There All The Time

I did not say ... , "Seek Me in vain." —Isaiah 45:19

I'll never forget my frustrating experience when I went to Chicago's Union Station early one morning to pick up an elderly relative who was arriving by train. When I got there, she wasn't where I thought she would be. With increasing anxiety I scoured the place—to no avail. Thinking she had missed her train, I was about to leave when I glanced down a hallway toward the baggage area. There she was, luggage at her feet, patiently waiting for me to arrive. She had been there all the time. And, to my chagrin, she was right where she was supposed to be.

It's that way with God. He's there, patiently waiting for us. He assures us, "I did not say ... , 'Seek Me in vain'" (Isa. 45:19). Why, then, do we often have trouble finding Him? Probably because we are looking in all the wrong places.

You'll find Him right where He is supposed to be—in His Word, in prayer, and in the voice of the Holy Spirit who lives within you. The God who says "seek, and you will find" (Matt. 7:7) also promises that "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). So, you can rejoice that God is right where He is supposed to be, and He's waiting for you right now.

The Lord is near to all who call;

He promised in His holy Word

That if we will draw near to Him,

Our faintest heartcry will be heard. —Hess

Have we been looking for God in all the wrong places?

Isaiah 46

Isaiah 46:1-10 Miracle Material

To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal? —Isaiah 40:25 niv

CNN calls a derivative of graphite a "miracle material" that could revolutionize our future. Only one atom thick, graphene is being hailed as a truly two-dimensional material in a 3-D world. One hundred times stronger than steel, it is harder than diamond, conducts electricity 1,000 times better than copper, and is more flexible than rubber.

In and of themselves, such technological advances are neither moral nor evil. But we are wise to remember the limitations of anything we make for ourselves.

Isaiah spoke to a generation who found themselves carrying into captivity gods they had made with their own hands. The prophet wanted the Israelites to see the irony of needing to care for the silver and gold idols they had crafted to inspire, help, comfort, and protect them.

What was true of Israel holds true for us as well. Nothing we have made or bought for ourselves can meet the needs of our heart. Only God, who has been carrying us "from the womb" (Isa. 46:3-4), can carry us into the future.

Father, thank You for the miracle of relationship with You. Help us not to rely on our own efforts, strength, or possessions but instead sense Your loving care for us.

An idol is anything that takes God's rightful place.

INSIGHT: Isaiah assured the discouraged Jewish nation in exile in Babylon that God would come to their rescue and punish their

enemies (Isa. 40–55). The Babylonian conquerors and their gods (represented by their chief deity, Bel, and his son Nebo) would be defeated and destroyed (Isaiah 46:1-2). Unlike these false gods, who were crafted by human hands and were incapable of protecting or saving anyone (Isaiah 46:6-7), God asserted that He alone was God and there was none like Him (Isaiah 46:9). He reminded His people that He had faithfully cared for them since birth (Isaiah 46:3-4) and He alone had the power to save them (Isaiah 46:10).

Isaiah 46:1-9 Bel Bows Down

I will carry you! —Isaiah 46:4

The prophet Isaiah draws a picture for us in Isaiah 46 of the siege of Babylon and the evacuation of its idols. The carts and carriages that carry them creak, and the weary animals groan under the load (Isaiah 46:1).

In contrast, Isaiah says that God carries His children from birth (Isaiah 46:3). “Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you!” God declares (Isaiah 46:4). The contrast is precise and vivid in the Hebrew text: The carts and carriages are “loaded” with the weight of the idols (Isaiah 46:1), but we are loaded upon God (Isaiah 46:3). Idols are a “burden,” a thing carried (Isaiah 46:1), but God has gladly “carried” us from the womb (Isaiah 46:3).

The Lord has made us (Isaiah 46:4). Nothing could be more comforting, for our Father loves and cares for His children. He promises, “I will carry you!” and that includes every care and worry that comes our way throughout our lifetime.

So we may let Him carry us and our every burden. This song by Annie Johnson Flint challenges us to experience God’s care: “Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision, / Our God ever yearns His resources to share; / Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing; / Thy Father both thee and thy load will upbear.”

Heavenly Father, I want to unload my

burdens on You today. Help me to leave them with You.

I trust You with my past, present, and future.

Thank You for Your goodness to me. Amen.

Our work is to cast care; God’s work is to take care!

Isaiah 46:1-13 Carrying The Canteen

I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. —Isaiah 46:4

After he and his father had covered 3 miles on their 4-mile hike, 3-year-old Seth was tired out and stumbling along. Even so, he insisted on carrying the canteen that his dad, Pastor Daniel Little, had tried to persuade him they wouldn’t need. Finally, though, Seth tearfully requested, “Will you please carry me, Daddy?”

So the father hoisted his son onto his shoulders. As he put Seth down at the end of their hike, the boy exclaimed, “See, Dad, I carried the canteen all the way.”

Our first response may be to smile at the child’s naiveté. But in the boy’s response, the dad saw something of his own attitude toward God. Our heavenly Father has invited us to cast all our care upon Him (1 Pet. 5:7). Still we persist in thinking that we can do it all ourselves—holding tightly to those cares and claiming credit after we survive some difficulty.

Through the prophet Isaiah, the Lord reminded Israel that He had been carrying them from their birth as a nation (Isa. 46:3-4). Yet they had become proud and self-sufficient, and they were headed for disaster if they persisted.

Let’s stop fooling ourselves. We are weak and He is strong. As we hand over our “canteens” to Him, we will experience His gift of peace and His blessing.

Jesus loves me! This I know,

For the Bible tells me so;

Little ones to Him belong;

They are weak but He is strong. —Warner

God takes care of those who know they can’t take care of themselves.

Isaiah 46:1-4 Carried By God

I will carry you! ... Even I will carry, and will deliver you. —Isaiah 46:4

Henry Moorhouse, the 19th-century English evangelist, was feeling loaded down with the burdens of his ministry. Then the Lord gave him a tender reminder of His care.

When he came home one day, his young daughter, Minnie, whose legs were paralyzed, was sitting in her wheelchair. He was going to take a package upstairs to his wife when his daughter asked if she could carry it. Moorhouse said, "Minnie dear, how can you possibly carry the package? You cannot even carry yourself."

With a smile on her face, Minnie said, "I know, Papa. But if you will give me the package, I will hold it while you carry me."

Moorhouse saw this as a picture of his relationship to God and the burdens of ministry he was carrying. But praise God, he could proceed with confidence, knowing that the Lord was carrying him.

Almighty God, who promised to carry Israel (Isa. 46:4), is the One who can carry us. Even though we must fulfill our responsibilities, we have the assurance of His never-failing support. We need not sink beneath the weight of our burdens.

Ask the Savior to help you. He will carry your burdens—and you.

Nothing is too small for Him to carry,

Take your burdens to Jesus;

Nothing is too great, why longer tarry?

Take your burdens to Him. —Oliver

No burden is too heavy for the everlasting arms.

Isaiah 46:1-11 Carried In His Strong Arms

I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. —Isaiah 46:4

Missionary couple Ray and Sophie de le Haye served heroically in West Africa for more than 40 years. As she grew older, Sophie suffered from the loss of all motor control of her body. That once-strong servant of Christ, who had carried on a ministry of unimaginable stress, was suddenly reduced to helplessness, unable to button her clothes or lift a cup of water to her lips. But she refused to become bitter or self-pitying. In her moments of utter weakness, she would quietly remind herself, "For this you have Jesus."

Many centuries ago our heavenly Father gave a reassuring message to a burdened prophet of Israel—a message that we need today: "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, ... who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isa. 46:3-4).

What an encouraging picture of divine grace! It calls to mind the Good Shepherd bearing a helpless lamb. Whether young or old, we can learn to let God carry us. Weak and burdened, we can lean on His everlasting arms and remind ourselves, "For this I have Jesus."

The King of love my Shepherd is,

Whose goodness faileth never;

I nothing lack if I am His,

And He is mine forever. —Baker

You can rest in the arms of Jesus—He'll never let you down.

Isaiah 46:4 What We Cannot Lose

Read: Psalm 92:12-15

Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you. —Isaiah 46:4

Years ago I heard about an elderly gentleman who was suffering from the first stages of dementia. He lamented the fact that he often forgot about God. "Don't you worry," said a good friend, "He will never forget you."

Growing old is perhaps the hardest task we have to face in this life. As the saying goes, "Getting old is not for sissies."

Mainly, growing old is about losses. We devote most of our early life to acquiring things, but they are merely things we will lose as we age. We lose our strength, our looks, our friends, our job. We may lose our wealth, our home, our health, our spouse, our independence, and perhaps the greatest loss of all, our sense of dignity and self-worth.

But there is one thing that you and I will never lose—the love of God. "Even to your old age, I am He," God said to the prophet, "and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you" (Isaiah 46:4).

"The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree," wrote the songwriter (Psalm 92:12). "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" (Ps 92:13-14).

Jesus loves me, this I know,

Though my hair is white as snow;

Though my sight is growing dim,

Still He bids me trust in Him. —Warner

God's love never grows old.

Isaiah 46:4 Aging Gracefully

Read: Psalm 139:13-18

I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. —Psalm 139:14

Many people try to reverse the aging process. Those with wrinkles get facelifts, while others have injections to remove unwanted facial lines. Behind this current trend is the notion that an aging face is unacceptable.

But not everyone feels that way. An elderly woman being interviewed on television was asked, "Do you like your face?" She responded with conviction, "I love my face! It's the face God gave me, and I accept it happily."

In Psalm 139, David expressed the conviction that his entire being was fashioned by God and therefore is worthy of acceptance. He prayed, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps 139:14). He also believed that God fashioned all the days of his life (Ps 139:16).

Instead of fighting a losing battle against our waning youthful appearance, we should concentrate on cultivating inner qualities that last forever. One key attribute is a lifelong faith in God, who reassures His people: "Even to your old age, ... and even to gray hairs I will carry you!" (Isaiah 46:4).

Myron Taylor wrote: "Time may wrinkle the skin, but worry, doubt, hate, and the loss of ideals wrinkle the soul." As we gracefully accept the passing of years, God will smooth out the wrinkles of our souls.

The wrinkles on a time-worn face

Can be symbols of God's grace,

If through our laughter and our tears

His love has freed us from our fears. —D. De Haan

When you let God's love fill your heart, it will show on your face.

Isaiah 46:4-13 How to Grow Old

I will sustain you and I will rescue you. Isaiah 46:4

"How are you today, Mama?" I asked casually. My 84-year-old friend, pointing to aches and pains in her joints, whispered, "Old age is tough!" Then she added earnestly, "But God has been good to me."

"Growing old has been the greatest surprise of my life," says Billy Graham in his book *Nearing Home*. "I am an old man now, and

believe me, it's not easy." However, Graham notes, "While the Bible doesn't gloss over the problems we face as we grow older, neither does it paint old age as a time to be despised or a burden to be endured with gritted teeth." He then mentions some of the questions he has been forced to deal with as he has aged, such as, "How can we not only learn to cope with the fears and struggles and growing limitations we face but also actually grow stronger inwardly in the midst of these difficulties?"

God will care for us throughout our life.

In Isaiah 46 we have God's assurance: "Even to your old age and gray hairs ... I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you" (Isaiah 46:4).

We don't know how many years we will live on this earth or what we might face as we age. But one thing is certain: God will care for us throughout our life.

Lord, please teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (See Psalm 90:12)

Don't be afraid to grow old; God goes with you!

INSIGHT: Isaiah presents a stark contrast between the chief gods of Babylon—Bel (or Baal) and Nebo—and the God of Israel. The Babylonian gods needed their worshipers to care for and protect them (Isa. 46:1–2). But the God of Israel would care for, carry, sustain, and rescue His worshipers even when they were old and gray (Isaiah 46:4).

Isaiah 46:8-11 One Mysterious God

I am God, and there is none like Me. —Isaiah 46:9

My wife and I don't always understand each other. For instance, it's a great mystery to her how I can watch an entire baseball game between two teams that have no chance of making the playoffs. And I surely don't understand her love of shopping.

To love someone intensely doesn't mean you have to understand him or her completely. That's good news, because there's no way we can begin to grasp the deep mysteries of the God we love.

With our finite minds and our self-centered views, we can't deduce why God does what He does. Yet some people look at tragedies, for instance, and turn their backs on God—assuming that their finite knowledge about the situation is better than His infinite wisdom.

Indeed, if we could figure God out—if He were no more than a glorified human with no greater knowledge than that of the smartest person—where would be the awe and the majesty of the Almighty? One reason we know God to be so great is that we cannot reduce His thinking to ours.

The apostle Paul asked, "Who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?" (1 Cor. 2:16). Clearly, the answer is no one. Praise God that even when we don't understand Him, we know we can trust Him.

Your ways, O Lord, are higher and

Your knowledge is immense;

So give us strength to trust You when

Life doesn't make much sense. —Sper

To fully understand God is impossible; to worship Him is imperative.

Isaiah 47

Isaiah 47:1-11 Don't Be Fooled

Trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off. —Isaiah 47:11

A gang of thieves went down into Rome's sewers for 6 weekends and burrowed a tunnel toward \$68 million in a post office vault. But they were stopped just 2 inches from their goal. They were removing the last inches of soil before attacking the wall with drills. A passerby, hearing a mysterious clanking sound, alerted security guards. Police caught one man who was still digging. The others fled but were arrested as they emerged from different manholes.

Like those men, some people go through life thinking they will never get caught. They reflect the arrogance of the Babylonians who thought their nation would be "a lady forever" (Isa. 47:7). But as with Babylon, trouble will come to everyone who fails to

acknowledge God and turn from wrongdoing. God said through Isaiah, "Trouble shall fall upon you; you will not be able to put it off" (v.11).

If you have never done so, acknowledge your sinfulness and accept Christ's sacrifice on the cross for you (Acts 16:31; Rom. 3:23). If you have strayed from the Lord, confess to Him your wrongdoing and receive His forgiveness (1 Jn. 1:9). Don't be fooled into thinking you are getting away with sin.

A foolish person thinks that judgment will not come,

That for his sins he'll never have to pay;

But God's Word says we all must stand before His throne

And give account to Him on judgment day. —Hess

Playing with sin is toying with judgment.

Isaiah 48

Isaiah 48:17-22 Chess Master

He caused the waters to flow from the rock for them; He also split the rock, and the waters gushed out. —Isaiah 48:21

An intriguing painting is on display in the Louvre in Paris. It portrays Faust (the legendary German magician who bartered away his soul to the devil) sitting across from Satan at a chessboard. Satan is gloating over what appears to be the checkmate of Faust's king. The magician's expression is that of a beaten man.

According to an often told story, a famous chess master visited the gallery one day and studied the painting with great care. All at once he startled everyone around him by shouting excitedly, "It's a lie! It's a lie! The king and the knight have another move."

Isaiah assured the people of Judah that God always provides a way of escape. Although they would be deported to Babylon because of their sinfulness, Isaiah prophesied that a future day of release would come when they would have to leave hurriedly. But they wouldn't have to worry. Just as God had provided water for the Israelites in the desert, He would also provide for them on their long trek homeward.

Many of us have experienced situations that appeared hopeless. We saw no way out, but we prayed and God opened a way. He made that "impossible" move. We can trust Him. He can never be checkmated.

When problems seem impossible

And we can't face another day,

The Lord extends His helping hand

And shows us He can make a way. —Sper

God is the only King who can never be defeated.

Isaiah 48:10 The Furnace On a wall in his bedroom Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 on it: "I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction." "It is no mean thing to be chosen of God," he wrote. "God's choice makes chosen men choice men...We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed; yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice." W. Wiersbe, *Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching & Preachers*, p. 223.

Isaiah 48:16-22 Desert Places

They did not thirst when He led them through the deserts. —Isaiah 48:21

Dry. Dusty. Dangerous. A desert. A place where there is little water, a place hostile to life. It's not surprising, then, that the word deserted describes a place that is uninhabited. Life there is hard. Few people choose it. But sometimes we can't avoid it.

In Scripture, God's people were familiar with desert life. Much of the Middle East, including Israel, is desert. But there are lush

exceptions, like the Jordan Valley and areas surrounding the Sea of Galilee. God chose to “raise His family” in a place surrounded by wilderness, a place where He could make His goodness known to His children as they trusted Him for protection and daily provision (Isa. 48:17-19).

Today, most of us don't live in literal deserts, but we often go through desert-like places. Sometimes we go as an act of obedience. Other times we find ourselves there through no conscious choice or action. When someone abandons us, or disease invades our bodies, we end up in desert-like circumstances where resources are scarce and life is hard to sustain.

But the point of going through a desert, whether literally or figuratively, is to remind us that we are dependent on God to sustain us—a lesson we need to remember even when we're living in a place of plenty.

Are you living in a place of plenty or of need? In what ways is God sustaining you?

In every desert, God has an oasis of grace.

INSIGHT: Easton's Bible Dictionary says of the prophet Isaiah: “He exercised the functions of his office during the reigns of Uzziah (or Azariah), Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Uzziah reigned fifty-two years (810–759 bc) and Isaiah must have begun his career a few years before Uzziah's death... He lived till the fourteenth year of Hezekiah, and in all likelihood outlived that monarch (who died [in] 698 bc) ... His first call to the prophetic office is not recorded. A second call came to him 'in the year that King Uzziah died' (Isa. 6:1). He exercised his ministry in a spirit of uncompromising firmness and boldness.”

Isaiah 48:11 Glory Deflectors

Read: Acts 14:8-18

I will not give My glory to another. —Isaiah 48:11

Barbara Mertz has a complaint about Egypt's Pharaoh Ramses II. In her book *Temples, Tombs, and Hieroglyphs*, archaeologist Mertz writes, “One gets so tired of Ramses; his face, his figure, and/or his name are plastered over half the wall surfaces still standing in Egypt—at least it seems that way.” Insatiably thirsty for glory, Ramses reveled in Egyptian religion, which taught that the pharaoh was divine.

Contrast Ramses' desire for glory with the attitude of Paul and Barnabas. On one of their missionary journeys, they faced a situation during which they refused to accept vainglory. When a crowd in the idolatrous city of Lystra saw them heal a crippled man, the people exclaimed, “The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!” (Acts 14:11). They immediately prepared animals to sacrifice in honor of Paul and Barnabas. But the two quickly objected, saying, “We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God” (Acts 14:15).

We do not rival the apostles in our accomplishments for God, but we all have things we do for Him. It's then that we must be “glory deflectors,” making sure God gets all the glory for everything we have done.

May everything we do—

By word or deed or story—

Be done to please the Lord;

To Him be all the glory. —Roworth

Man's greatest goal: Bringing glory to God.

Isaiah 49

Isaiah 49:1-7 He Calls Us By Name

May 15, 1996

He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. —John 10:3

Hearing our name spoken makes an impression on us one way or another. Whenever my mother asked in an authoritative voice, “Haddon William Robinson, what are you doing?” I knew she wasn't seeking information. But hearing “Haddon William Robinson” read in stately tones as I strode across the platform at graduation had a very different feel.

Names convey a sense of who we are and how others relate to us. Before the Messiah came into the world, He declared, "The Lord has called Me from the womb; ... He has made mention of My name" (Isa. 49:1). That demonstrated the special relationship the Messiah had to God the Father.

What is even more exciting is that this relationship extends through Jesus to us. Because of Christ, we who trust in His completed work on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins have been adopted into the family of God (Rom. 8:15; Eph. 1:5). When we trust Christ as our Savior and Lord, He calls us by name (Jn. 10:3).

What a privilege! And what a comfort to those of us who place our faith in Christ! God loves us more than we can imagine. He has sworn never to let us go (Jn. 10:27-30).

Do you hear Him calling you?

When I heard the Savior call my name,

I was sinking deep in sin and shame;

Now my life will never be the same,

Since I heard the Savior call my name. —Hess

You're not just a number computers can trace; Christ knows your need, your name, and your face.

Isaiah 49:15 COVENANT - In modern times we define a host of relations by contracts. These are usually for goods or services and for hard cash. The contract, formal or informal, helps to specify failure in these relationships. The Lord did not establish a contract with Israel or with the church. He created a covenant. There is a difference. Contracts are broken when one of the parties fails to keep his promise. If, let us say, a patient fails to keep an appointment with a doctor, the doctor is not obligated to call the house and inquire, "Where were you? Why didn't you show up for your appointment?" He simply goes on to his next patient and has his appointment secretary take note of the patient who failed to keep the appointment. The patient may find it harder the next time to see the doctor. He broke an informal contract. According to the Bible, however, the Lord asks: "Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" (Isaiah 49:15) The Bible indicates the covenant is more like the ties of a parent to her child than it is a doctor's appointment. If a child fails to show up for dinner, the parent's obligation, unlike the doctor's, isn't canceled. The parent finds out where the child is and makes sure he's cared for. One member's failure does not destroy the relationship. A covenant puts no conditions on faithfulness. It is the unconditional commitment to love and serve. - Bruce Shelley.

Isaiah 49:1-6 Small Ways In Small Places

For who has despised the day of small things? —Zechariah 4:10

Often I meet with people who serve in what they think are seemingly small ways in small places. They are frequently discouraged by loneliness, feeling that their acts of service are insignificant. When I hear them speak, I think of one of the angels in C. S. Lewis' book *Out of the Silent Planet*. He said: "My people have a law never to speak of sizes or numbers to you... It makes you do reverence to nothings and pass by what is really great."

Sometimes culture says bigger is better—that size is the truest measure of success. It takes a strong person to resist that trend, especially if he or she is laboring in a small place. But we must not "pass by what is really great."

It's not that numbers aren't important (after all, the apostles counted their converts; see Acts 2:41). Numbers represent living people with eternal needs. We should all work and pray for large numbers of people to enter the kingdom, but numbers mustn't be the basis for self-esteem.

God doesn't call us to find fulfillment in the amount of work we do for Him, or the number of people who are a part of that work, but in faithfully doing our work for His sake. Serving our great God with His strength in a small way is not a stepping-stone to greatness—it is greatness.

Lord, help me remember that there are no

small places or small people. All are precious

in Your sight. May I see the value of my work

and cherish it as You do.

Anyone doing God's work in God's way is important in His sight.

INSIGHT: Isaiah prophesied under Kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, meaning that his ministry may have continued for more than 64 years. He was the son of Amoz (Isa. 1:1), was married (his wife was referred to as "the prophetess," 8:3), and had two sons, whose names symbolized the turbulent times in which Isaiah served his God. His first son's name, Shear-Jashub (7:3), means "a remnant shall return" and his second son's name, Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz (8:3), means "spoil quickly, plunder speedily."

Isaiah 49:8-16 God's Constant Care

Thus says the Lord: ... "I will not forget you." —Isaiah 49:8,15

Some days we find ourselves intensely absorbed in busyness. Our attention must be riveted on the details of our work if we are to do it well.

Sometimes the hours can slip by without even a momentary thought of God. When that happens, it's comforting to know that our heavenly Father has not been too busy to think about us.

We can probably identify with the prayer offered by Sir Jacob Astley before the battle of Edgehill on October 23, 1642: "O Lord, Thou knowest how busy I must be this day. If I forget Thee, do not Thou forget me."

Without using those words as an excuse for spiritual indifference, we can sincerely say what Astley said. And as we lie down at night to rest our weary bodies, we can rest our souls in the assurance that God, who neither slumbers nor sleeps, lovingly watches over us in ceaseless vigilance.

At the same time, though, let's consciously include God in all we do and say—seeking His wisdom, relying on His strength, and praising His goodness. We should not take Him for granted, but we can be grateful that He will not forget us (Isa. 49:15; Heb. 13:5).

Never a heartache and never a groan,

Never a teardrop and never a moan;

Never a danger, but there on the throne,

Moment by moment, He thinks of His own. —Whittle

In God's Garden of Love, you are His forget-me-not.

Isaiah 49:8-18 Do We Matter To God?

In an acceptable time I have heard You, and in the day of salvation I have helped You. —Isaiah 49:8

When I consider Your heavens," wrote the psalmist, "what is man that You are mindful of him?" (Ps. 8:3-4). The Old Testament circles around this question. Toiling in Egypt, the Hebrew slaves could hardly believe Moses' assurances that God would concern Himself with them. The writer of Ecclesiastes phrased the question more cynically: Does anything matter?

I was entertaining that same doubt myself when I received an invitation to address a conference on the theme: "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Isa. 49:16).

God made this stirring declaration to people suffering through a low point in their history as Isaiah prophesies that they would be taken away captive to Babylon. Hearing this, the people lamented, "The Lord has forsaken me, and ... forgotten me" (Isa. 49:14). To this lamentation God gave a series of promises—the Servant Songs (Isa. 42–53)—in which He sets the stage of hope for deliverance from hostile enemies. He foretells of the incarnation and sacrificial death of the Servant.

Do we matter to God? Christmas memorializes God's answer: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).

Love brought Him down from the glory,

Love made Him come from the sky;

Love in His heart for the sinner

Led Him to suffer and die. —Anon.

The fact of Jesus' coming is the final and unanswerable proof that God cares. —Barclay

Isaiah 49:13-16 Not Abandoned

I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands. —Isaiah 49:15-16

Years ago, while my husband and I were visiting the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum in Washington, DC, we noticed a baby stroller by itself with no one nearby. We assumed that the parents had left it there because it was too bulky and were now carrying their child. But as we approached, we saw a sleeping baby inside. Where was a parent ... a sibling ... a babysitter? We hung around for quite some time before hailing a museum official. No one had shown up to claim that precious child! The last we saw of him, he was being wheeled away to a safe place.

That experience made me think about what it's like to be abandoned. It's an overwhelming feeling that no one cares anything about you. It's a real and excruciatingly painful feeling. But even though people may abandon us, God's love and presence is assured. The Lord promises that He will never leave us (Deut. 31:8). He will be with us wherever we go, "always, even to the end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

The Lord will never falter in His commitment to His children. Even if we have been abandoned by others, we can find confidence in His promise that nothing will ever "separate us from [His] love" (Rom. 8:35-39).

Father, thank You for Your never-failing presence

in every aspect of our lives. We count on Your

promise never to abandon us. Please teach us

to rest in that truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

Confidence in God's presence is our comfort.

Isaiah 49:13-18 No Need Is Too Trivial

As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him. —Psalm 103:13

Several mothers of small children were sharing encouraging answers to prayer. Yet one woman said she felt selfish about troubling God with her personal needs. "Compared with the huge global needs God faces," she explained, "my circumstances must seem trivial to Him."

Moments later, her little son pinched his fingers in a door and ran screaming to his mother. She didn't say, "How selfish of you to bother me with your throbbing fingers when I'm busy!" She showed him great compassion and tenderness.

As Psalm 103:13 reminds us, this is the response of love, both human and divine. In Isaiah 49, God said that even though a mother may forget to have compassion on her child, the Lord never forgets His children (Ps 103:15). God assured His people, "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands" (Ps 103:16).

Such intimacy with God belongs to those who fear Him and who rely on Him rather than on themselves. As that child with throbbing fingers ran freely to his mother, so may we run to God with our daily problems.

Our compassionate God doesn't neglect others to respond to our concerns. He has limitless time and love for each of His children. No need is too trivial for Him.

You take great delight in me, Lord, and quiet me with Your love. You rejoice over me with singing, like a mother singing a lullaby over her child. Thank You for Your tender love for me.

God holds His children in the palm of His hand.

INSIGHT: Isaiah has the most messianic references of any Old Testament prophetic book, containing extraordinary prophecies of both Christ's miraculous birth and His atoning death. Today's reading begins a section of prophecies about the Divine Servant, highlighted by the description of His suffering in Isaiah 53. This suffering comes to the Servant from God's own hand and ultimately finds its fulfillment at the cross where Christ bore the sins of the world.

Isaiah 49:13-18 Greater Compassion

Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you. —Isaiah 49:15

I first met my wife, Marlene, in college. I was majoring in pastoral studies, and she was working on a degree in elementary education. The first time I saw her working with children, I knew what a natural fit this was for her. She loved children. It became even more obvious when we got married and had children of our own. Seeing her with them was an education in unconditional love and acceptance. It was clear to me that there is nothing in all the world like the tender love and compassion of a mother for her newborn child.

That's what makes Isaiah 49:15 so remarkable. It's here that God told His people, who were feeling forsaken and forgotten (v.14), that His compassion is even greater than a mother's: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you."

Sometimes we face struggles in life, and we are tempted to think that God has forgotten us. We may even believe that God no longer loves us. But God's love for us is as expansive as the open arms of Christ on the cross. And the tender compassion of our heavenly Father is more dependable and more enduring than the love of a nursing mother for her infant. Be comforted—His love never fails.

God will not forget His children

Nor will He forsake our care;

His compassion is enduring—

Even when we're unaware. —Sper

God's love for us is as expansive as the open arms of Christ on the cross.

Isaiah 49:13-20 For This I Have Jesus

The Lord comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones. Isaiah 49:13

There is rarely a problem-free season in our lives, but sometimes the onslaught is terrifying.

Rose saw her entire family, except for her two little daughters, slaughtered in the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. Now she is a widow among many widows with little money. But she refuses to be defeated. She has adopted two orphans and simply trusts God to provide for the food and school fees for her family of five. She translates Christian literature into the local language and organizes an annual conference for other widows. Rose wept as she told me her story. But for every problem in her life she has one simple remedy. "For this," she said, "I have Jesus."

God knows exactly what you are facing today. Isaiah reminds us that God's knowledge of us is so intimate that it is as if our names were written on the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:16). We may sometimes neglect the needs of others, even those who are closest to us, but God is aware of every detail of our lives. And He has given us His Spirit to guide, to comfort, and to strengthen us.

Think of the challenges you face at this moment, and then write these words beside each one as a reminder of His faithfulness and care: "For this, I have Jesus."

Thank You, Jesus, for being near to me right now. I'm grateful for Your faithfulness.

Life takes on perspective in the light of Christ.

INSIGHT: The book of Isaiah is a book of extremes. In chapters 1–2 Isaiah describes how far away from God the people of Israel have wandered. In chapter 3 he warns of the punishment and judgment that is coming because of their sin and disobedience. Later he discusses God's provision to bring them back to Himself (ch. 4) and how much they will flourish despite the current and coming disasters (ch. 49). In God's eyes there is always hope for redemption, restoration, and blessing. J.R. Hudberg

Isaiah 50

Isaiah 50:4-10 Something To Say

The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. —

Isaiah 50:4

I read that Albert Einstein was the featured speaker at a dinner given at Swarthmore College. When it came time for him to speak, he astonished everyone by standing up and announcing, "I have nothing to say." Then he sat down.

A few moments later he stood up and added, "In case I have something to say, I will come back and say it." Six months later he sent a message to the president of the college: "Now I have something to say." Another dinner was held and he gave his speech.

Perhaps you have had opportunities "to speak a word in season" to those who are weary (Isaiah 50:4), but you didn't feel as if you had anything to say. If so, follow the example of the Servant of the Lord, the promised Messiah, whom we read about in Isaiah 50:4-10. Because He listened and obeyed what He heard, He had a message to give to others.

Open God's Word with an eagerness to learn and do what He tells you to do. Think of the Lord as present and speaking to you, disclosing His mind and emotions and will. Meditate on His words till you know what He is saying.

Then, as the Servant discovered, in time God will give you "the tongue of the learned" (v.4). If you listen to the Lord, you'll have something worth saying.

Instill within my heart, dear Lord,
A deep desire to know Your Word,
I want to learn to hear Your voice
And always make Your will my choice. —D. De Haan

Open your ears to God before you open your mouth to others.

Isaiah 50:4-10 A Word To The Weary

God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. —Isaiah 50:4

The people of Israel were struggling. They had been taken captive by the Assyrians and forced to live in a country far from home. What could the prophet Isaiah give these weary people to help them?

He gave them a prophecy of hope. It was a message from God relating to the promised Messiah. In Isaiah 50:4, the Savior Himself described the comfort and consolation He would one day bring: "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary."

These were words of dual comfort—both to the people in exile and to future generations whose lives would be touched by Jesus' compassion. In the Gospels we see how Christ fulfilled the prophecy with "a word in season to him who is weary." To the crowds who followed Him, Christ proclaimed: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). Words of compassion indeed!

Jesus left us an example of how to minister to people who have grown weary. Do you know someone who needs a timely word of encouragement or the listening ear of a concerned friend? A word of comfort to the weary can go a long way.

Neither life nor death can ever
From the Lord His children sever,
For His love and deep compassion
Comforts them in tribulation. —Berg

Compassion is needed to heal the hurts of others.

Isaiah 50:4-10 What Do You Believe?

The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. —Isaiah 50:4

Francis Collins earned a Ph.D. in physical chemistry at Yale University and then entered medical school. During his training at a North Carolina hospital, a dying woman often talked to him about her faith in Christ. He rejected the existence of God, but he couldn't ignore the woman's serenity. One day she asked, "What do you believe?" Caught off guard, Collins' face turned red as he stammered, "I'm not really sure." A few days later the woman died.

Curious and uneasy, the young doctor realized that he had rejected God without adequately examining the evidence. He began to read the Bible and the writings of C. S. Lewis. A year later he fell to his knees and gave his life to Jesus Christ. The catalyst? A sincere question from an elderly woman whose physical heart was failing but whose concern for others was strong.

In a prophetic picture of the Messiah, Isaiah 50:4 says, “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary.”

May we be ready with a timely word or a caring question to point others toward our Savior who offers life and peace to all.

Lord, let me be a shining light

In all I say and do,

That Your great love displayed in me

May lead someone to You. —Sper

The next person you meet may need to meet Christ.

Isaiah 50:4-5 The Secret Chamber

Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light. —Matthew 10:27

People have some needs that are excruciatingly deep. Poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson wrote, “Never morning wore to evening, but some heart did break.”

We find ourselves in conversation at times with heartbroken friends and may feel at an utter loss to know what to say. How can we “speak a word in season to him who is weary,” as it says in Isaiah 50:4?

Telling people what human teachers have taught us may have some impact on them. But the most helpful or persuasive words are spoken by those who are taught by the Lord Himself.

That’s why it’s essential for us to sit at Jesus’ feet and learn from Him. The more we receive from Him, the more we have to give to others. George MacDonald pictures this time with the Lord as having “a chamber in God Himself.” He continues: “Out of [that] chamber ... man has to bring revelation and strength for his brethren. This is that for which he was made.”

It’s through our thoughtful and prayerful Bible study, reading, and quiet meditation that God speaks to our hearts. He gives us “the tongue of the learned” (Isa. 50:4) so that we have something to share with those who are in the depths of despair.

The comfort God has given us

He wants us all to share

With others who, with broken hearts,

Are caught in deep despair. —Sper

Listen to God’s heart, then speak from your heart to others.

Isaiah 51

Isaiah 51:1-16 What Do You Fear?

Who are you that you should be afraid of a man who will die. —Isaiah 51:12

A large number of people admit that they have a serious fear of computers. Just being in the same room with a computer causes some to suffer from feelings of panic, irregular heartbeat, breathing difficulties, dizziness, and trembling. One therapist says that these individuals have more than the normal fear of failure while learning to work with computers. They become so anxious that they are afraid they’re going to lose control, go crazy, or pass out. Does this make sense? No, but no phobia makes much sense. Yet the fear is real.

This reminds me of another phobia that many of us have—the fear of the opinions and actions of others. How must it look to God when we think and act as if our well-being rests solely in the hands of people? How does it look to the One who is in control when

we become so afraid of people that we panic and forget to trust entirely in Him? Well, the prophet Isaiah told us. He said that fearing the reproach of people is foolish because they are dying creatures who, like grass, are here today and gone tomorrow (Isaiah 51:12).

Yes, people can do us great harm (Isaiah 51:13-14), but the Lord has the last word (vv.15-16). Our future and everlasting well-being depend on Him and Him alone.

What others do or think can make
Us hesitate to take a stand
Until we realize God holds
The now and future in His hand. —Sper

Faith can break the stranglehold of fear.

Isaiah 51:7-16 Healthy Fear

The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord shall be safe. —Proverbs 29:25

Fear of the disapproval of others can often affect the way we act. Some Native Americans recognized this and used scorn and ridicule to promote social order. For instance, when a child of the Fox tribe was taught the do's and don'ts of his culture, his elders didn't hold over his head an abstract rule of morality. Nor did they threaten him with punishment now or in the hereafter. Instead, they said to him, "The people of the village may say things about you."

In that culture the power of social restraint was used as a motivation for right conduct. But in speaking to the tribes of ancient Israel, the Lord warned His people that the "reproach of men," worrying about what people think, could be their downfall (Isa. 51:7-16). Their concern with what others said about them could cause them to make compromises. Instead, they were called on to trust the Lord and seek only His approval.

This is also good advice for us, for "the fear of man" is a snare to many Christians. How much better to find our fulfillment in doing what pleases God! Then the crippling fear of what others think can give way to the confidence of a healthy fear—a reverence for God that frees us to live for His approval.

Living for Jesus a life that is true,
Striving to please Him in all that I do;
Yielding allegiance, gladhearted and free,
This is the pathway of blessing for me. —Chisholm

The fear of the Lord can deliver us from the fear of others.

Isaiah 52

Isaiah 52:7-15 Yesterday And Tomorrow

The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. —Isaiah 52:12

On New Year's Eve 1916, a chaplain spoke to a gathering of British Commonwealth soldiers in Cairo, Egypt. Standing before men whose lives had been turned upside down by World War I, Oswald Chambers talked to them about yesterday and tomorrow.

Chambers said, "At the end of the year we turn with eagerness to all that God has for the future, and yet anxiety is apt to arise from remembering the yesterdays. Our present enjoyment of God's grace is apt to be checked by the memory of yesterday's sins and blunders. But God is the God of our yesterdays, and He allows the memory of them in order to turn the past into a ministry of spiritual culture for the future. God reminds us of the past lest we get into a shallow security in the present... Let the past sleep, but let it sleep on the bosom of Christ. Leave the irreparable past in His hands, and step out into the irresistible future with Him" (My Utmost For His Highest).

God promised Israel, "The Lord will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard" (Isaiah 52:12). We too can take

comfort in knowing that our God will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5).

As we begin a new year, we can place ourselves—and all our yesterdays and tomorrows—safely in His care. —DCM

Excerpt from My Utmost For His Highest by Oswald Chambers, © Renewal 1963 Oswald Chambers Publication Association, Ltd.

If you walk with God today, you can be confident about tomorrow.

Isaiah 52:7 The Runner

Read: Romans 10:14-21

How beautiful ... are the feet of him who brings good news. —Isaiah 52:7

In Old Testament times, there was no instant way of getting news. No television programs could be interrupted to announce that a coup had overthrown a government somewhere. No e-mails conveyed information instantly from the Chief of Staff to his Field Marshal. There was no CNN or Associated Press.

So, if an army was fighting a battle, the news of the outcome was sent to the homeland by a runner. The people of the city knew a battle was being fought, so they lined the city walls, eagerly awaiting the news of their army's defeat or victory.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have the marvelous news of a victory to share. We can report that the battle for our souls was won by Christ on Calvary when He gave His life for us (Matthew 27:45-50; Romans 6:23). We have the proof: God raised Him from the dead in triumph (Matthew 28:1-10). Now we can proclaim the good news of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life in heaven with the Father. This is assured for those who trust in Jesus, His Son (John 3:16; Ephesians 1:7).

As we tell the good news to others, let it be with the joy of victory in our hearts, and with feet that are "beautiful" because of the glorious message we bear.

Go to the lost, in the home, in the mart,

Waiting no longer, today make a start;

Tell them of Jesus who died in their place,

Share the good news of salvation by grace. —Bosch

The next person you meet may need to meet Jesus.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The Value Of Prophecy

Read: Psalm 22:1-18

Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. —2 Peter 1:21

Some people believe that the Bible is merely a haphazard collection of ancient writings. But we have good reason to believe it is God's inspired Word. For example, the Bible contains prophecies that have been fulfilled. Centuries before specific events took place, the writers of Scripture predicted their occurrence, and in the course of time those events came to pass.

No matter how farsighted we may be, we cannot foretell the future with any precision. Indeed, our best guesses often turn out to be wrong. Here are some examples:

"Airplanes are interesting toys but of no military value." Who said that? A renowned professor of military strategy. "Stocks have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau." This pronouncement was made by a distinguished economist just before the financial crash of 1929.

The Bible, however, is filled with dramatic examples of fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 and Psalm 22:1-18 record details about the crucifixion of Christ hundreds of years before this cruel form of execution was ever practiced.

When we pick up the Bible, we can rest assured that we are holding in our hands the one authoritative divine revelation of truth—a claim verified by fulfilled prophecy. —VCG

God's Word is always true;

So when my faith grows dim,
I look into His Word
And trust my life to Him. —Hess

You can trust the Bible—God always keeps His word.

Isaiah 52:7 Beautiful Feet

Read: Romans 10:14-18

How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? —Romans 10:14

Recently, I met the man who introduced me to Jesus 35 years ago. Warren Wiersbe, former pastor of Moody Church in Chicago and Bible teacher for the Back to the Bible ministry, had preached the gospel at a Bible conference in 1972. It was the first time I heard the good news of God's love for me as shown in Jesus' death on the cross. The Spirit opened my eyes and heart that night, and I received Jesus Christ as my Savior (John 1:12).

We praise the Lord for people like Warren Wiersbe who faithfully preach the gospel and introduce others to Christ. According to the apostle Paul, they have beautiful feet: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15).

But spreading the gospel isn't just the responsibility of Bible teachers and pastors. All who know Jesus can share on a personal level with friends, co-workers, family members, and strangers. It's our privilege and duty. Otherwise, how will people "believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" (v.14).

Let's make our feet beautiful by bringing the good news of Jesus to others.

Christ has no hands but our hands to do His work today;

He has no feet but our feet to lead men in His way;

He has no tongue but our tongue to tell men how He died;

He has no help but our help to bring them to His side. —Flint

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news! —Isaiah 52:7

Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53 Hope In Him

The virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. —Isaiah 7:14

As we drove home from a Christmas party one evening, my family and I approached a small country church nestled between glittering snowbanks. From a distance, I could see its holiday display. Strings of white lights formed the capital letters: H-O-P-E. The sight of that word shining in the darkness reminded me that Jesus is, and always has been, the hope of humankind.

Before Jesus was born, people hoped for the Messiah—the One who would shoulder their sin and intercede with God on their behalf (Isa. 53:12). They expected the Messiah to arrive through a virgin who would bear a son in Bethlehem and would name Him Immanuel, "God with us" (7:14). The night Jesus was born, their hope was fulfilled (Luke 2:1-14).

Although we're no longer waiting for Jesus in the form of an infant, He is still the source of our hope. We watch for His second coming (Matt. 24:30); we anticipate the heavenly home He is preparing for us (John 14:2); and we dream of living with Him in His celestial city (1 Thess. 4:16). As Christians, we can look forward to the future because the baby in the manger was, and still is, "the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1).

That night so many years ago
Which brought the Savior's birth,

Gave promise of a brighter hope:
Good will—and peace on earth. —Anon.

The key word of Christmas is “Immanuel”— God with us!

Isaiah 53 A Place For Sorrows

Read: Isaiah 53:1-12

He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. —Isaiah 53:4

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial was dedicated in 1982. In the first 15 years, 54,000 items were left at the Wall. It still takes almost an hour every night, and much longer on Memorial Day, to collect the mementos—a teddy bear, a photo of a soldier’s grandchild, a letter from a daughter who never knew her dad.

Every item is labeled and taken to a warehouse. No one knows quite how to deal with it all. “No one ever expected this to happen,” a park ranger says. “It’s so personal. It caught everyone by surprise.”

Loss comes to us all, and we often carry our grief for many years. We struggle with our emotions. Is there a place where we can leave our sorrows and find healing for the wounds of life?

Isaiah 53 speaks of the Messiah as the One who “has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... By His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:4-5). When we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin, we also come to know Him as the One who can lift the weight of sadness from our shoulders.

We can bring our grief to the Man of sorrows. There is help and healing and closure at the cross for the deepest pain of our hearts.

When trials come, and storms arise,

When tempests darken earth and skies

And everything my spirit tries,

I'll hide myself in Jesus. —Anon.

Leave your sorrows with the "Man of Sorrows."

Isaiah 53 The Clue Of Silence

The chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. —Mark 15:3

The story *Silver Blaze* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle centers around a clue of silence. Detective Sherlock Holmes investigates the theft of a prized racehorse, which had been guarded by a watchdog. In gathering evidence, Holmes learns that the dog didn’t bark during the intrusion. The detective deduces that the dog knew the culprit, and this leads to solving the crime.

For anyone investigating the identity of Jesus, the Bible holds many clues. One of them is His silence. Centuries before Jesus lived, the prophet Isaiah wrote of Him: “As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (53:7). The significance of this remained obscure until Jesus was brought before His accusers and “answered nothing” (Mark 15:3).

It’s a small but important piece of evidence, especially when combined with other clues: His birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4), His Davidic lineage (Isaiah 11:10; Luke 3:31), and the casting of lots for His clothes (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24). These and more than 200 other fulfilled prophecies provide overwhelming evidence of the identity of Jesus.

He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of all who put their faith in Him.

THINK ABOUT IT

Are you convinced that Jesus is the promised Savior?

Have you accepted the forgiveness and eternal life He offers?

If you have doubts, read the gospel of John.

Believing Christ died—that’s history; believing Christ died for me—that’s salvation.

Isaiah 53 Why Did Jesus Die?

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. —Romans 5:8

The atoning death of Christ is a truth so profound that scholars have been unable to fully plumb its depths. Think of it—Jesus, God's Son, died to pay the penalty for our sins! Various theories have been advanced to explain what happened, but Scripture teaches that substitution lies closest to the heart of this great mystery. One innocent man bore the sins of all humanity.

Cliff Barrows tells of the time his two young children did something wrong. Although they were gently warned, they repeated the offense and needed to be disciplined. Cliff's tender heart was pained at the thought of having to punish the ones he loved. So he called Bobby and Bettie into his room, removed his belt and shirt, and with bare back he knelt by his bed. He told each child to whip him 10 times. Oh, how they cried! But the penalty had to be paid. The children sobbed as they lashed their daddy's back. Then Cliff hugged and kissed them, and they prayed together. "It hurt," he recalls, "but I never had to spank them again."

Are you haunted by the memory of some cowardly, selfish, or shameful acts? Jesus took the lashes for all our sins. Now He invites us to accept His forgiveness and devote the rest of our lives to Him. He wants us to know the greatness of His Father's love. That's why He died!

The Lamb of God was crucified,

The penalty for sin was paid,

God's holiness was satisfied,

For all our sins on Christ were laid. —Sper

God the judge not only declared us guilty but also paid our penalty.

Isaiah 53 He Died For Me!

If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him. —Matthew 27:42

William and Mary Tanner were crossing the railroad tracks when it happened. Mary's foot slipped and wedged itself between the rail and the wooden crosswalk. She tried frantically to pull her foot free as the sound of an approaching train was heard. There were but seconds left as the express came rushing toward her around a curve. Will Tanner pulled on her foot, desperately trying to free her.

As the train came closer and its whistle screamed and brakes shrieked, Will held her in his arms. While people shuddered in horror, the train thundered over them. One witness said that just before the engine hit them, he heard the brave man cry, "I'll stay with you, Mary!" That is great love!

This story reminds me of our Savior, who loved us with a love that can save us (John 3:16). Death came hurtling at Him as He hung on a cross and took the full penalty we deserved. He heard people cry out to Him to save Himself and come down from the cross (Matthew 27:40). But to save others He chose not to save Himself (Mt 27:42).

With divine, sacrificial love, Jesus refused to spare His own life. He died so that He could provide forgiveness of sins for us. Our Savior stayed on the cross—for you and for me!

Oh, can it be, upon a tree

The Savior died for me?

My soul is thrilled, my heart is filled,

To think He died for me! —Newton

Nails could not have kept Jesus on the cross if His love for us had not held Him there.

Isaiah 53 The Agony Of The Cross

[Jesus] humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. —Philippians 2:8

As Christians, we understand the spiritual significance of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, but it's easy to forget about the tremendous agony He endured there. The worst aspect was separation from the Father, but the physical suffering was also horrible beyond comprehension.

In his book *Dare To Believe*, Dan Baumann shares some thoughts that can deepen our gratitude for what the Savior did for us. He wrote, “We have perhaps unwisely and sometimes unconsciously glamorized the cross. Jewelry and steeples alike are often ornamental and attractive but carry nothing of the real story of crucifixion. It was the most painful method of public death in the first century. The victim was placed on a wooden cross. Nails ... were driven into the hands and feet of the victim, and then the cross was lifted and jarred into the ground, tearing the flesh of the crucified and racking his body with excruciating pain. Historians remind us that even the soldiers could not get used to the horrible sight, and often took strong drink to numb their senses.”

With a fresh awareness of our Savior’s physical agony, let’s thank Him anew for His sacrifice at Calvary. He loved us so much that He was willing to die for us—even the painful death of the cross.

Was it for crimes that I have done

He groaned upon the tree?

Amazing pity! Grace unknown!

And love beyond degree! —Watts

We can never sacrifice enough for the One who sacrificed His all for us.

Isaiah 53 The Clue of Silence

The chief priests accused Him of many things, but He answered nothing. —Mark 15:3

The story *Silver Blaze* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle centers around a clue of silence. Detective Sherlock Holmes investigates the theft of a prized racehorse, which had been guarded by a watchdog. In gathering evidence, Holmes learns that the dog didn’t bark during the intrusion. The detective deduces that the dog knew the culprit, and this leads to solving the crime.

For anyone investigating the identity of Jesus, the Bible holds many clues. One of them is His silence. Centuries before Jesus lived, the prophet Isaiah wrote of Him: “As a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth” (Isaiah 53:7). The significance of this remained obscure until Jesus was brought before His accusers and “answered nothing” (Mark 15:3).

It’s a small but important piece of evidence, especially when combined with other clues: His birth in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Luke 2:4), His Davidic lineage (Isaiah 11:10; Luke 3:31), and the casting of lots for His clothes (Psalm 22:18; John 19:23-24). These and more than 200 other fulfilled prophecies provide overwhelming evidence of the identity of Jesus.

He is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of all who put their faith in Him.

THINK ABOUT IT

Are you convinced that Jesus is the promised Savior?

Have you accepted the forgiveness and eternal life He offers?

If you have doubts, read the gospel of John.

Believing Christ died—that’s history; believing Christ died for me—that’s salvation.

Isaiah 53:1-6 Blue Christmas

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. —Isaiah 53:4

A growing number of churches are holding annual Blue Christmas services for those faced with grief and loss. The holiday season’s emphasis on happiness and good cheer often makes people who are dealing with heartbreak feel even worse.

An Associated Press article quoted a pastor who described the Blue Christmas service as “an opportunity for people to come and be in the presence of God and acknowledge their grief and despair and loneliness and give it to God.” One participant added, “And it’s a good place to have a cry and no one will mind.”

During the Christmas season, we often read Isaiah’s prophecies of the coming Messiah who would be born of a virgin (Isa. 7:14) and called “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). But perhaps we should also include the words of Isaiah 53: “He is ... a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief... Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... And by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:3-5). The psalmist reminds us that “[The Lord] heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds” (Ps. 147:3).

If you're hurting this Christmas, remember: Jesus came to save us, to help us, and to heal us.

Whenever darkness grips your soul

And you are tempted to despair,

Remember Christ's unfailing love,

And trust His faithful, tender care. —Sper

Jesus provides an oasis of grace in the desert of grief.

Isaiah 53:1-6 Seeing Jesus

He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. —Isaiah 53:2

When I was young, I thought I knew exactly what Jesus looked like. After all, I saw Him every day whenever I looked at some pictures in my bedroom. One showed Jesus knocking at a door and the other depicted Him as a Shepherd with His sheep.

What I didn't know was that a mere decade before I was born, those pictures of Jesus didn't exist. Warner Sallman painted the well-known "Head of Christ" and other portraits of Jesus in the 1940s. Those images were just one man's idea of what Jesus might have looked like.

The Bible never gives a physical description of Jesus. Even the men who saw Him every day didn't tell us what He looked like. In fact, the only clue we have is a passage in Isaiah that says: "There is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isaiah 53:2). It seems that Jesus' human form was deliberately de-emphasized. He looked like an ordinary man. People weren't drawn to Him because of a regal appearance but because of what He said and did and because of the message of love He came to give (John 3:16).

But the next time Jesus comes to earth, it will be different. When our Savior returns, we will recognize Him as the sovereign King of kings and Lord of lords! (1 Tim. 6:14-15).

The more I see His beauty,

The more I know His grace,

The more I long, unhindered,

To gaze upon His face. —Anon.

To see Jesus will be heaven's greatest joy.

Isaiah 53:1-6 Pack Up Your Sorrows

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. —Isaiah 53:4

During the turbulent years of the 1960s, popular music in America was a strange mixture of protest and patriotism. Some songs lashed out against war, greed, and injustice in society, while others affirmed duty to country and traditional values. But "Pack Up Your Sorrows," written by Richard Farina and Pauline Baez Marden, seemed to fit all of the categories with its focus on the quest for personal peace. The refrain said the following:

Well, if somehow you could pack up your sorrows,

And give them all to me

You would lose them, I know how to use them,

Give them all to me.

Perhaps everyone hoped that someone really could bring them peace.

The good news is that there is Someone who can! Isaiah 53 is a prophetic picture of Israel's promised Messiah. Christians see its fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Jesus took our sins and sorrows on Himself so that we could be forgiven and have peace with God. Will you give Him your sorrows today?

No sorrow is too heavy for our Savior to bear.

Isaiah 53:1-10 Why He Died

He was wounded for our transgressions, ... and by His stripes we are healed. —Isaiah 53:5

Jesus died so we could live. His death on Calvary's cross was not an accident or a surprise to God. It was an absolute necessity in His plan for our salvation.

The Lord declared that death is the penalty for those who sin (Gen. 2:17), and every person since Adam and Eve has sinned (Rom. 3:23). Yet, in love He longed to rescue us. God could not merely say, "I feel sorry for you. I love you. I will just save you, overlook your sin, and forget about it." No, an absolutely holy and just God could not treat sin so lightly. The penalty for sin must be paid; guilt must be removed.

Here's the marvel of it all: Jesus Christ, God's Son, took our sin, carried it to Calvary, paid the penalty, and rose on the third day. Jesus, the absolutely sinless One, bore the guilt of our sin, as predicted by the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 53). His resurrection was the proof that the Father accepted His sacrifice and that justice was done.

That was 2,000 years ago, long before you and I were born. It was all prepared by God. It was all of grace. All we have to do is receive what He has prepared. God's offer today is "that whoever believes in [Jesus] should not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16).

Do you have everlasting life? That's why He died.

God's justice and mercy met at the cross.

Isaiah 53:1-10 Claiming Responsibility

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

As images of burning rubble and frantic people flash on the TV screen, a reporter says, "A terrorist organization has claimed responsibility for last night's bombing that left 23 dead and scores injured." It was not a random act of violence but one that was calculated to frighten people and advance the agenda of those who stepped forward to say, "We did it."

In stark contrast, one of history's most brutal acts was intended to bring peace and healing, not fear. In addition, God claimed responsibility in the prophecy of Isaiah, seven centuries before it happened. The prophet foretold the death of the Messiah in these words: "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief" (Isa. 53:5,10).

Just before Jesus Christ was crucified, He said, "No one takes [My life] from Me, but I lay it down of Myself... This command I have received from My Father" (John 10:18). Jesus died willingly for our sin so that we might live through faith in Him.

God claimed responsibility for the death of His Son, allowing anyone to claim His gift of forgiveness.

When Jesus died upon the cross

He took our sin and shame;

He offers us His righteousness,

A gift that we must claim. —Sper

The search for forgiveness ends when we find Christ.

Isaiah 53:4-12 Wounded For Me

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

When you study the painting of the crucifixion by the famous Dutch artist Rembrandt, your attention is first drawn to the cross and to Jesus. Then, as you look at the crowd around the cross, you are drawn to the faces of the people involved in the awful crime of crucifying the Son of God. Finally, your eyes drift to the edge of the picture and catch sight of another figure—almost hidden in the

shadows. This, we are told, was a self-portrait of Rembrandt, for he recognized that by his sins he helped nail Jesus there!

Someone has aptly said, "It is a simple thing to say that Christ died for the sin of the world. It is quite another thing to say that Christ died for my sin! It may be an interesting pastime to point fingers at those who crucified Jesus, but it is a shocking thought that I can be as indifferent as Pilate, as scheming as Caiaphas, as calloused as the soldiers, as ruthless as the mob, or as cowardly as the disciples. It isn't just what they did—it was I who nailed Him to the tree. I crucified the Christ of God. I joined the mockery!"

Think again of Rembrandt's painting. If you look closely, you will see that in the shadows you too are standing with bloodied hands, for Christ bore the penalty of your sin! And you will say, "He was wounded for me."

Wounded for me, wounded for me,

There on the cross He was wounded for me;

Gone my transgressions, and now I am free,

All because Jesus was wounded for me. —Ovens

Calvary's cross reveals man's hatred for God and God's love for man.

Isaiah 53:4-12 Wounded For Me -2

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

A man who was deeply troubled by his sins was having a vivid dream in which he saw Jesus being savagely whipped by a soldier. As the cruel scourge came down upon Christ's back, the onlooker shuddered, for the terrible cords left ugly, gaping wounds upon His bleeding, swollen body. When the one wielding the lash raised his arm to strike the Lord again, the man rushed forward to stop him. As he did, the soldier turned, and the dreamer was startled to see his own face!

He awoke in a cold sweat, conscious that his sin had inflicted this grievous punishment upon the Savior. As he thought of Christ's suffering, he remembered these words in Isaiah 53:5, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

How wonderful that the Lord Jesus Christ suffered and died to redeem a sinful and lost world! He was wounded for our transgressions. "All we like sheep have gone astray," but praise God, "the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).

In one sense, Good Friday was the darkest day in human history. But because of Jesus' sacrifice for us, the cross was actually the greatest victory of all the ages!

Wounded for me, wounded for me,

There on the cross He was wounded for me;

Gone my transgressions, and now I am free,

All because Jesus was wounded for me. —Ovens

Christ was delivered for our sins that we might be delivered from our sins.

Isaiah 53:4-12 Trail Trees

They pierced My hands and My feet... They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots. —Psalm 22:16-18

In recent years, my daughter has become fascinated with the history of the indigenous people in northern Michigan where she lives. One summer afternoon when I was visiting, she showed me a road that had a sign designating "Trail Trees." She explained to me that it's believed that long ago the Native Americans bent young trees to point the way to specific destinations and that they continued to grow in an unusual shape.

The Old Testament serves a similar purpose. Many commands and teachings of the Bible direct our hearts to the way the Lord wants us to live. The Ten Commandments are great examples of that. But in addition, the prophets of the Old Testament pointed the way to a coming Messiah. Thousands of years before Jesus came, they spoke of Bethlehem—Jesus' birthplace (see Micah 5:2 and Matt. 2:1-6). They described Jesus' death on the cross in striking detail (see Ps. 22:14-18 and John 19:23-24). And Isaiah 53:1-12 points to the sacrifice Jesus would make as the Lord "laid on Him the iniquity of us all" (v.6; see Luke 23:33).

Millennia ago, God's Old Testament servants pointed to God's Son—Jesus—the One who has now “borne our griefs and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4). He is the way to life.

Thank You for the simple message of salvation. Jesus, You are the way, the truth, and the life. Thank You for giving Your life for me. I love You.

Jesus sacrificed His life for ours.

Isaiah 53:4-12 That's Jesus!

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

As a Jewish kid growing up in New York, Michael Brown had no interest in spiritual things. His life revolved around being a drummer for a band, and he got mixed up with drugs. But then some friends invited him to church, where he found the love and prayers of the people to be irresistible. After a short spiritual struggle, Michael trusted Jesus as Savior.

This was a monumental change for a wayward Jewish teen. One day he told his dad he had heard about Old Testament texts describing Jesus. His dad, incredulous, asked, “Where?” When Michael opened his Bible, it fell to Isaiah 53. They read it, and Michael exclaimed, “That’s Him! That’s Jesus!”

Indeed, it is Jesus. Through the help of Christians and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Brown (today a Bible scholar and an author) came to recognize the Messiah of Isaiah 53. He experienced the salvation that changes lives, forgives sin, and gives abundant life to all who trust the “Man of sorrows” (Isaiah 53:3). Jesus is the One who was “wounded for our transgressions” and who died for us on the cross (Isaiah 53:5).

The Bible reveals Jesus, who alone has the power to change lives.

God, I struggle with this idea of Jesus as Savior.

I know He’s a good man, but I need to see that He is

more than that. Please show me—through others or

through the Bible—how I can know for sure who Jesus is.

The Spirit of God uses the Word of God to change hearts.

Isaiah 53:4-10 Why Is Sin So Bad?

He was wounded for our transgressions. —Isaiah 53:5

Pain. Abject, horrible, excruciating pain. Unrelenting, unbearable, unspeakable pain. With each slash across Jesus’ back and with every muscle-burning step up Golgotha’s hill, our Savior received the punishment for our sin.

In our let’s-make-everything-okay world we often look at sin and wonder, what’s the big deal? After all, our sin isn’t so bad. If we lie a little or cheat just a bit—what’s the harm? If we gossip some or use coarse language a few times—whom will it hurt? What’s so bad about sin?

It’s bad because of what it put Jesus through. Yes, our sin was the reason for the torment Jesus suffered as He made His way to the cross—and as He hung on that cross and ultimately died a horrific death.

Of course we can never undo what has been done; that pain can never be reversed. Yet we must understand that if we continue to sin knowingly, we are in effect turning our back on Jesus and His pain. It’s as if we’re saying that it doesn’t matter to us what we put Jesus through, we’re going to do what we want. To sin in the light of the cross is to tell Jesus that even His intense suffering has not taught us about the awfulness of sin.

Why is sin so bad? Look what it did to Jesus.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,

Sorrow and love flow mingled down;

Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,

Or thorns compose so rich a crown? —Watts

Jesus took our sin so that we might have His salvation.

Isaiah 53:4 Where Was God?

Read: Hebrews 13:5-8

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. —Isaiah 53:4

Was God sadistically absent? That's what Robert McClory, professor emeritus of journalism at the Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, asked after Hurricane Katrina devastated the New Orleans area of the US.

We may want to try to exonerate the Almighty for permitting disasters that rip apart vulnerable communities. But is God absent in such situations? No, McClory insists. Talking about the Katrina tragedy, he said that God was invisibly present "with the suffering and the dying. He was in the individuals, communities, churches, and schools that organized aid for the victims and took evacuees into their cities and homes. He was with the hundreds of thousands who showed compassion by prayer and financial assistance."

So it is in our own lives when a heartbreaking tragedy occurs, such as the death of someone we love. We have no completely satisfactory answer to life's painful problems. We do know, however, that the Lord is present with us, for He said He would never leave us (Heb. 13:5). Jesus' name "Immanuel" literally means "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

Even though suffering baffles our minds, we can trust God to be near and to work out His purposes.

God's unseen presence comforts me,

I know He's always near;

And when life's storms besiege our soul,

He says, "My child, I'm here." —D. De Haan

The storms of our life prove the strength of our Anchor.

Isaiah 53:5 The Burned- Over Place

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

Some early settlers were traveling together across the western prairies of the United States. One day they were horrified to see a fire fanned by strong wind coming their way.

As the flames raced closer and closer, one man, to the amazement of the others, set fire to a large patch of grass downwind. The tinder-dry grass burned quickly and left behind a charred and barren area. Then he told them to move onto the burned-over place. They watched as the fire swept toward them until it reached the burned area—and then stopped! They were safe as the fire passed by them on both sides.

The fires of God's judgment will descend on a wicked world, but God has provided a burned-over place. At Calvary, the fire of God's justice was met by Jesus. He bore our sin there and fully paid for our transgressions. He made full satisfaction for our sins, and we who have taken our stand by faith in the finished work of Christ are safe in the burned-over place. There is nothing left to burn.

Jesus "bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed" (1 Pet. 2:24). Are you in the burned-over place?

The flames of God's judgment can never touch me,

For Jesus has borne all God's wrath on the tree;

I now stand secure in the burned-over place,

A sinner, unworthy, yet saved by His grace! —Bosch

Jesus died in our place to provide a place of safety.

Isaiah 53:5 A Fragile Lamb

Read: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. —Isaiah 53:5

After the Easter eggs were located and the Easter baskets had been opened, Uncle Jay felt compelled to find out whether the white chocolate lamb was hollow or solid. Without thinking of the potential consequences, he squeezed the lamb. Suddenly Jay's whole body stiffened, as if he'd ingested some paralyzing poison. Finally his eyes moved to see if anyone had witnessed the deed. His thumb, however, remained stuck in the side of the lamb.

We waited for the reaction. A wail. A howl. A cry of anguish over the crushed chocolate candy. As the adults in the room scrambled for words that would soothe the sorrow of 3-year-old Jenna, she calmly spoke words that soothed us. "That's okay, Uncle Jay. The lamb would have been broken when I ate him anyway."

While we adults tried to make sacred memories out of Easter traditions, a 3-year-old made a sacred moment for us. She reminded us that Easter is about the perfect Lamb of God, broken so that we can be whole. Her youthful wisdom reminds me of the words we recall at communion: "This is My body which is broken for you." May we taste and see that the life He offers is sweeter than anything we concoct for ourselves.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,

Sorrow and love flow mingled down;

Did e'er such love and sorrow meet

Or thorns compose so rich a crown? —Watts

Nothing speaks more clearly of God's love than the cross.

Isaiah 53:5 The Deadliest Disease

Read: Joshua 7:1,19-26

[Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, ... and by His stripes we are healed. —Isaiah 53:5

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) was identified in 2003 in Vietnam. By the time it was brought under control, SARS had spread globally and killed nearly 800 people. One reason for the high mortality rate was that the virus was not recognized initially. But once recognized and understood, SARS was contained.

An even more dangerous disease is on the loose in our world—sin. It too is difficult to bring under control because many people do not recognize its deadliness. And many dispute the Bible's diagnosis of sin.

In Joshua 7, we read the tragic story of Achan. We may recoil at the extreme way God dealt with him. Against God's command, he had taken some of the spoils from Jericho and hid them in his tent (Joshua 7:21). He and his entire family paid with their lives (Joshua 7:25).

Thankfully, God does not deal with us in that way. If He did, none of us would remain alive. Yet we must never underestimate sin's deadliness. It sent Christ to the cross for us.

Like SARS, the first step to deal with sin is to recognize it for what it is. Receive with gratitude the gift of eternal life. Then "put to death your members which are on the earth"—the selfish things that displease God (Col. 3:5). That's the way to deal with our deadliest disease.

The Remedy for Sin -Have you received Christ's gift of salvation? He died for your sins and rose from the dead. He offers forgiveness to all who believe in Him (Rom. 10:9).

Sin is a heart disease that can be cured only by the Great Physician.

Isaiah 53:6 Make A U-Turn

Read: Psalm 32:1-5

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6

When we went on a weekend road trip with some friends, we had our first experience using a Global Positioning System. The GPS has a female voice, so our friends John and Mary call their device Gladys. We programmed our destination into the GPS, and she did her job and plotted our course. Then we sat back. Having put our faith in this little navigator, we let her direct us.

“Turn right in .2 miles,” Gladys said confidently. She was right—Gladys is always right. In fact, when we made an unexpected detour to get gas, she got a bit insistent: “Please make a U-turn ... Please make a U-turn at your earliest convenience!”

Gladys had calculated a route for us, but we had gone a different way. That was our choice, naturally. But if we had continued going our own way, we would have become lost.

Isaiah 53:6 reminds us that just like sheep, we have a tendency to go astray. That’s why we need a Shepherd to guide us and a Savior to pay the penalty for our sin.

No matter how far you’ve traveled in the wrong direction, it’s not too late to turn around. God is ready to forgive and restore (Ps. 32:5). If you’re headed down the wrong road, please make a U-turn.

I’ve strayed, O Lord, and turned aside,

I’ve disobeyed Your voice;

But now with contrite heart I turn

And make Your will my choice. —D. De Haan

No matter how far you’ve run from God, He’s only a prayer away.

Isaiah 53:6 Condemnation Certain

After World War 1, 900 German soldiers who had violated international law were summoned to appear before the World Court. Their condemnation was certain. In a dramatic move, however, the former crown prince of Germany volunteered to be their substitute. His offer included taking upon himself both the accusation against them and their penalty. This act, though most noble, was impractical. Although he was royalty, he did not have in his own person the value of the 900. There is another Prince who took upon Himself the judgment due the entire human race. Unlike that German leader, He is not implicated in any evil. Because of His sinless humanity, He could be “delivered for our offenses.” Because of His deity, He could be “raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). He was able to pay in full the ransom demanded by God’s holy law, because in Him was the intrinsic worth needed to provide salvation. Yes, the Father laid upon His sinless Son the iniquity of us all. Our redemption has been purchased by Heaven’s Crown Prince. So don’t depreciate the cross. Don’t underrate Christ’s great sacrifice. It will cost you your soul. It will shut you out from God. It will darken your eternity. Thank God for a royal Substitute! Our Daily Bread

Isaiah 53:6 - Six-Inch Christians

I met a young man not long ago who dives for exotic fish for aquariums. He told me that one of the most popular aquarium fish is the shark. He explained that if you catch a small shark and confine it, it will stay a size proportionate to the aquarium you put it in. Sharks can be six inches long yet fully matured. But if you turn them loose in the ocean, they grow to their normal length of eight feet. That is like what happens to some Christians. I have seen some of the cutest little six-inch Christians who swim around in a little puddle. You can look at them and comment on how fine they are. But if you were to put them out into a larger arena—into the broad view of a whole creation—they might become great. God help us not to be confined to a little puddle out of insecurity, but instead to see that Jesus Christ is Lord of all. He made us, and if we will both have internal integrity and relate ourselves to the larger structures in the ways he has ordained, we will be able to serve him according to a holistic vision of his purpose on the earth. - Pastoral Renewal, February 1985,

Isaiah 53:6 Calvary’s Deepest Pain

Read: Matthew 26:36-46

The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6

After washing His disciples’ feet and celebrating the Passover with them, Jesus led them into a familiar garden and “began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed” (Matthew 26:37). Going a bit farther with Peter, James, and John, He said, “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me” (Mt 26:38).

Then, walking a short distance away, Jesus “fell on His face” before God, saying, “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will” (Mt 26:39). He did this three times (Mt 26:44).

How do we account for such a surge of emotional turmoil? Only by understanding the “cup” that Jesus asked His Father to take from Him. He was about to bear “the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). That “cup” was filled with the sins of the whole world.

The agony of Gethsemane would culminate on the cross in His heart-wrenching cry: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Jesus’ physical pain was nothing compared with Calvary’s deepest pain—the awful reality of being abandoned by His Father. God made Jesus “to be sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21), so the Father had to turn away from Him.

Praise God for His great love for us!

"Man of Sorrows," what a name

For the Son of God who came

Ruined sinners to reclaim!

Hallelujah! What a Savior! —Bliss

Christ braved the shadow of eternal death to bring us the sunshine of eternal life.

Isaiah 53:6 Who's To Blame?

Read: Luke 23:13-33

All we like sheep have gone astray; ... and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. —Isaiah 53:6

What is the worst of all evils? It's not homicide or even genocide. No, it's decide, the murder of God's Son! Unimaginable as it may be, that is what occurred at a place called Calvary (Lk. 23:33).

Whom does God the Father hold responsible for what happened there? Shall we indict the religious leaders who plotted the Savior's execution? Pilate, the spineless Roman governor? The callous soldiers who nailed Jesus to the cross? The fickle multitude who clamored for His blood? All these, to be sure, share the guilt.

The great artist Rembrandt captured the truth of Scripture in one of his paintings. It depicts Christ on the cross, with a mob surrounding Him. In the shadows at the edge of that appalling scene stands a man. Who is it? Rembrandt himself! By including himself, the artist confessed that he too was responsible for the Savior's death.

Have we acknowledged that Jesus bore our guilt on the cross? (Isa. 53:6). Because we all have sinned, the whole race of rebellious transgressors is responsible for the crucifixion as much as the soldiers who did the grisly execution.

Let us, then, take our place alongside Rembrandt. Only let's not stand there. Let's kneel in contrite gratitude.

When Jesus Christ my Savior suffered loss,

He gave Himself because He saw my need;

It was my sin that nailed Him to the cross;

I cannot blame another for the deed. —Hess

The only people God forgives are those who confess their guilt.

Isaiah 53 A Portrait of Jesus

Read: Isaiah 53:4-12

We have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6

In Portraits of Famous American Women, Robert Henkes writes, “A portrait is not a photograph, nor is it a mirror image.” A portrait goes beyond the outer appearance to probe the emotional depth of the human soul. In a portrait, a true artist tries “to capture what the person is really about.”

Over the centuries, many portraits have been painted of Jesus. Perhaps you've seen them in a church or museum of art or even have one in your home. Not one of these is a true portrait, of course, because we have no photograph or mirror image of our Lord's physical appearance. We do, however, have a magnificent word portrait of Him in Isaiah 53. This God-inspired description captures in vivid detail what He is all about: “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering ... But he was pierced for our transgressions,

he was crushed for our iniquities; ... and by his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:4-5 niv).

This passage enables us to see love and sorrow, anguish and pain on Jesus' face. But His lips do not accuse or condemn. He has no sins of His own to grieve; only ours to bear. And deep inside, He knows that "He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isaiah 53:11).

What a portrait of our Savior!

What amazing love You have for us, Jesus! As I think of how awesome You are, I bow in silence before You.

Love was when God became a man.

INSIGHT: Isaiah 53 is the last of four prophecies of Isaiah (Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) known as the "Servant Songs" because they speak of the "Servant" (Isaiah 42:1; 49:3; 50:10; 52:13). These Songs prophetically identify Jesus the Messiah as the Servant. Sim Kay Tee

Isaiah 53:7 Like A Lamb

Read: John 15:9-17

He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. —Isaiah 53:7

In 1602, Italian artist Caravaggio produced a painting called *The Taking of Christ*. This work, an early example of the Baroque style, is compelling. Created in dark hues, it allows the viewer to contemplate Jesus' arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Two main elements of the scene depicted in the painting demand the observer's attention. The first is Judas as he delivers the traitor's kiss. Immediately, however, the viewer's focus is drawn toward Jesus' hands, which are passively clasped together to show that He offered no resistance to this injustice. Although He possessed the power to create a universe, Christ gave Himself up voluntarily to His captors and to the waiting cross.

Long before this scene took place, Jesus told His listeners that no one could take His life from Him—He would lay it down willingly (John 10:18). This heart of voluntary surrender was prophesied by Isaiah, who wrote, "He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth" (Isa. 53:7).

Christ's lamblike self-sacrifice is a grand indicator of His powerful love. "Greater love has no one than this," He explained, "than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13). Think of it. Jesus loved you that much!

Love sent the Savior to die in my stead.

Why should He love me so?

Meekly to Calvary's cross He was led.

Why should He love me so? —Harkness

The nail-pierced hands of Jesus reveal the love-filled heart of God.

Isaiah 53:12 Sin Hurts

Read: Hebrews 2:10-18

He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many. —Isaiah 53:12

Sooner or later we all feel the painful effects of sin. Sometimes it's the weight of our own sin and the shame and embarrassment of having failed miserably. At other times, it's the load of someone else's sin that weighs us down—someone who betrayed, deceived, abandoned, ridiculed, cheated, or made a fool of us.

Think about a time when the weight of that guilt or pain was so heavy that you couldn't pull yourself out of bed. Now try to imagine the heaviness of the combined grief that everyone's sin has caused your family, your church, your neighborhood. Add to that all the suffering sin has caused everyone in your city, state, nation, and the world. Now try to imagine the accumulated grief that sin has caused throughout the centuries since creation.

Is it any wonder that the weight of all this sin began squeezing the life out of Jesus on the night He was called to bear it? (Matt. 26:36-44). The next day, even His beloved Father would forsake Him. No other suffering can compare.

Sin put Jesus to the ultimate test. But His love endured it, His strength bore it, and His power overcame it. Thanks to Jesus' death and resurrection, we know beyond a doubt that sin will not and cannot win.

Is God aloof from human pain

That ravages our mortal frame?

Oh, no, Christ felt our agony

When sin and death He overcame! —D. De Haan

Christ's empty tomb guarantees our victory over sin and death.

Isaiah 53:4 (multiple other Isaiah passages) and Healing -

Christ's healing ministry served various purposes; all of them primarily contributed to authenticate the person of Jesus as the true Messiah. The healing miracles never were performed merely for their physical benefit. Matthew 8:17—A fulfillment of the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 53:4. Matthew 12:15-21—To fulfill the Messianic prophecy in Isaiah 42:1-4....When John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus truly was the Messiah or if he should look to someone else, John sent his disciples to Jesus for an answer (Matthew 11:2-19, Luke 7:18-23). In reply, Christ first healed, and then he told John's men to report these miraculous events back to John, remembering Isaiah 35:5-6. On another occasion, Jesus healed in order to fulfill Isaiah 42:1-4 (Matthew 12:15-21). Healing in Mark 7:31-37 alludes to Isaiah 35:5-6. On those occasions, Jesus healed to preview His kingdom power as an appropriate credential in order to be rightly recognized as the King of Israel. These brief bursts of power in the Gospels pointed to something yet future which the Old Testament (especially Isaiah) had predicted. The Bible anticipates two future periods when human health will be dramatically improved—the Millennium and eternity future. The Millennium - Isaiah 29:18-19, 32:3-4, 33:24, 35:5-6, 42:7-16, 65:19-20, 22....Eternity Future - Isaiah 25:8. (Excerpt from Richard L Mayhue - The Pattern for Divine Healing)

Isaiah 54

Isaiah 54:1-10 Close The Gate

"With everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you," says the Lord, your Redeemer. —Isaiah 54:8

After a round of golf, a British statesman and his friend walked through a field in which cows were grazing. The men were so absorbed in conversation that they forgot to close the gate when they left the fenced area.

The statesman happened to notice the open gate, however, and went back to close it. Then he told his friend that this little incident reminded him of a doctor who was dying and was asked by a minister whether there was anything he wanted to say before he slipped away. "No," the doctor replied, "except that through life I think I have always closed the gates behind me." The dying man had learned to put failures and disappointments behind him so they wouldn't rob him of his joy and peace.

As Christians, we should learn that lesson well. When we sin, we can "close the gate" to nagging guilt by confessing our sin to our merciful Lord and accepting His forgiveness (Isaiah 54:7-10; 1 John 1:9). Or, if we have a misunderstanding with someone, rather than allowing the irritation to fester, we should go to that person and make things right (Matthew 18:15).

Let's close the gate to the failures and disappointments of the past—then move on!

Look not back to yesterday,
So full of failure and regret;
Look ahead and seek God's way—
Sins confessed you must forget. —D. De Haan

To enjoy the future, accept God's forgiveness for the past.

Isaiah 54:4-10 Predicting The Future

The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you. —Isaiah 54:10

During the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, a group of social analysts gazed 100 years into the future and tried to forecast what the world would be like in 1993. Some of their predictions were:

Many people will live to be 150.

The government will have grown more simple, as true greatness tends always toward simplicity.

Prisons will decline, and divorce will be considered unnecessary.

They were wrong on all counts! So, what does the future really hold? Two things are certain: Circumstances will change; God will not.

We know these truths from observation. We see them throughout the Bible. Yet, we must prove them for ourselves when our life turns upside down and everything seems out of control.

We can give way to fear and panic, or we can choose to trust God's promise: "'The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be removed,' says the Lord, who has mercy on you" (Isa. 54:10).

Although circumstances will change, God will never change. We can be confident that He will always be faithful. Therefore, we can be at peace.

Be still my soul; the Lord is on thy side!

Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;

Leave to thy God to order and provide;

In every change He faithful will remain. —von Schlegel

To know the faithfulness of God is to know the peace of God.

Isaiah 54:13 Instructed By God

Read: Deuteronomy 6:1-19

All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. —Isaiah 54:13

Our oldest daughter, Lisa, was preparing to get married, and I found myself doing things I don't normally do. I paid for stuff I wouldn't otherwise buy. I grew interested in things I don't care much about: decorations, catering, candles.

And I reflected. As I thought back on the 22 years that had gone into the preparation for the big day, a couple of things stood out.

The first was the wonder of it all. Just the other day (it seems) my little girl had ringlets in her hair as a preschool mascot for the basketball team I coached. Now she was a high school music teacher about to become the wife of a youth pastor.

The second thing that stood out was the thrill of knowing she had made it this far by God's instruction. She had learned what it is "to be taught by the Lord," as Isaiah put it (Isaiah 54:13). Only God could have touched her heart to receive salvation. Only the Holy Spirit could direct her in the right paths. Only God's teaching is flawless.

No matter how much we strive to prepare our children for life, none of it matters without "the training and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4). Whether we're preparing them for kindergarten or for a wedding, that's the basis for training that will last a lifetime.

Oh, teach God's Word to these your precious ones,

For guidance tell your daughters and your sons

Of One who loves them even more than you,

And He will be their Guide a lifetime through. —Anon.

Train up a child in the way he should go, but make sure you go that way yourself.

Isaiah 55 Making Things Square

Read: Isaiah 55:1-7

You who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. —Isaiah 55:1

No one is good enough to deserve heaven. Even our best deeds are tainted by elements of selfishness and vanity. Salvation can come to us only as a gift of God's grace. This is good news, but it offends our pride.

Bill Walker, a character in George Bernard Shaw's play *Major Barbara*, portrays this well. He is angry and drunk when he enters a Salvation Army shelter. He seeks out a young worker there who has introduced his ex-girlfriend to Christ. Bill finds the worker and hits her in the face.

When bystanders taunt him for this cowardly act, Bill becomes remorseful. He attempts to "make things square" by spitting in the eye of a wrestler who is present, hoping the man will strike him. But the wrestler is also a Christian, and he and the girl are willing to forgive Bill. Enraged, he leaves. Pride prevents Bill from accepting forgiveness.

We can no more make things square with God than Bill Walker could atone for hitting that girl. But we don't have to even the score. God freely offers forgiveness and eternal life.

Don't let foolish pride keep you from receiving the greatest of all gifts! Acknowledge your sin and helplessness. Believe what God has said. Put your trust in Jesus Christ. He has already made things square for us.

For Further Study

What do these verses say about salvation?

Romans 3:28; 6:23; 8:1-2;

Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-8.

Salvation is free, but it's not yours until you ask for it.

Isaiah 55 The Price Of Food

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:2

A hummingbird near Bingham Canyon, Utah, was seen pressing its bill against the biggest red "flower" in town. No one knows for sure how long it took for the bird to realize you can't get nectar out of a traffic light!

National Wildlife magazine also told about a red-tailed hawk in North Carolina that was seen swooping down in an attempt to carry off a large tomcat. The cat fought back with such fury that the hawk barely escaped with its life.

This kind of foolishness is not just for the birds. Expending a lot of energy to feed our souls with food that doesn't satisfy is something all of us know about. Sometimes we're merely left empty, while at other times we are nearly consumed by the things we pursue. This is why the Lord's words in Isaiah 55 are so relevant. He asks, "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?"

God doesn't just leave us with the question. He goes on to assure us that our heart's deepest longing can be fulfilled—in Him alone (Isaiah 55:1-7). There is strength in feeding on mercy rather than revenge, truth rather than falsehood, and peace rather than conflict. That's why we must choose Christ over religion, and the Bible over tradition. When we eat right, we'll discover that the Lord is good (Isaiah 55:2).

Now none but Christ can satisfy,

None other name for me;

There's love and life and lasting joy,

Lord Jesus, found in Thee. —McGranahan

There's a longing in every heart that only Jesus can satisfy.

Isaiah 55:1-3 The Toy Search

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:2

Don Weiss realized that he had gone over the edge. He had just taken his 3-year-old daughter Megan to their third fast-food restaurant of the day, searching not for a meal but for a character from an animated film. “Here I was,” he said, “driving all over town looking for a little plastic toy.”

I'll reluctantly admit that I've done the same thing. Oh, and you too? It should come as no surprise that most children are drawn to fast-food restaurants by toys, not burgers. A national chain handed out 50 million action figures during just one promotion.

This obviously isn't the most crucial problem facing our culture. But in our search for physical or spiritual satisfaction, we can easily and sometimes unknowingly shift from what we need to what we want.

Through the prophet Isaiah, God put His finger on our condition: “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance” (Isa. 55:2).

When we approach Almighty God through His Word and prayer, are we seeking food for our soul or merely a spiritual trinket? The choice is ours.

Instill within my heart, dear Lord,

A deep desire to know Your voice;

I want to learn to hear Your Word

That I may make Your will my choice. —DJD

A well-read Bible is the companion of a well-fed soul.

Isaiah 55:1-7 Stumbling Christians

Let the wicked forsake his way, ... let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him. —Isaiah 55:7

A sheep and a pig will react differently in a mudhole. A sheep that falls into the mud will not be happy there. He will struggle and cry until he gets out.

On the other hand, a pig goes around looking for a mudhole. When he finds it, he slides in with a grunt of satisfaction. In fact, he will squeal if an attempt is made to pull him out.

By nature, and without the convicting work of God's Spirit, a sinner is like a pig—he seeks evil and temptation and has no desire to be delivered from sin. The follower of Christ, however, is compared in the Bible to a sheep. He should never be found in the mud of sin.

It is a sad fact that many of Christ's sheep do fall into sin, but no born-again Christian will ever be comfortable in such a place. They will cry for forgiveness and cleansing. In Psalm 32, King David said, “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long” (Ps 32:3). He found, though, that the Lord was ready to provide forgiveness and relief when he confessed his sin to Him (Ps 32:5). The same is true for us.

Have you yielded to temptation? Do you ever doubt your salvation? Then return to Him and He will have mercy—and He will “abundantly pardon” (Isa. 55:7).

Lord, I'm prone to halt and stumble,

Grief and sorrow dwell within,

Shame and guilt my spirit humble,

Help me, pardon all my sin! —Anon.

The way back to God begins with a broken heart.

Isaiah 55:1-7 Something For Nothing

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:2

During a long layover at an airport, I noticed that one business in the main terminal attracted more people than any other. For hours,

a steady stream of customers approached with cash in hand, stood in line, made a purchase, and left quickly. All seemed to know exactly what they wanted.

The thriving business was a lottery sales office. Even though the chance of winning the big powerball jackpot was 1 in 146 million, people seemed compelled to spend something and, in almost every case, get nothing. It seemed to be a vivid picture of our enduring quest for satisfaction and security in material things.

When God questioned His people through the prophet Isaiah, He asked why they spent their money for things that neither nourished nor satisfied them. The Lord invited those who had no resources to “come, buy wine and milk without money and without price... And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me” (Isa. 55:1-3).

God offers to give us what we can't buy—mercy, pardon, and a changed life infused with His presence. He invites us to “Seek the Lord while He may be found” (Isaiah 55:6).

By God's grace, we can freely receive His something—for nothing.

Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,

Freely bestowed on all who believe!

You that are longing to see His face,

Will you this moment His grace receive? —Johnston

God's grace accepted is God's peace experienced.

Isaiah 55:1-7 God Loves Atheists

Let the wicked forsake his way, ... let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him. —Isaiah 55:7

Madalyn Murray O'Hair was perhaps the most notorious atheist of the 1900s. Often profane and sarcastic, she was a powerful debater who shouted down her religious opponents.

After O'Hair mysteriously disappeared in 1995, her diaries were auctioned to pay back taxes she owed the federal government. They reveal an unhappy human being who didn't trust even the members of the American Atheists Association. She passed this harsh judgment on herself: “I have failed in marriage, motherhood, and as a politician.” Yet she yearned for acceptance and friendship. In her diary she wrote six times, “Somebody, somewhere, love me.”

Instead of viewing atheists like O'Hair as enemies, we should see them as sin-sick people whom God loves. They have a void in their lives that only He can fill. In Isaiah 55:7 we hear God calling out to the godless, inviting them to come to Him and experience His mercy and forgiveness.

We who have experienced the Lord's grace have an opportunity to proclaim His invitation to others. Even in the face of hostility, we can tell those who have turned their backs on God that if they respond to His love for them they will find peace for their troubled hearts.

Lord, help us to tell of Your love for mankind—

A love for the sin-sick, the broken, the blind;

Help them to see by the way that we live

The wholeness of being that You long to give. —DJD

To love sinners is to be like Jesus.

Isaiah 55:1-7 What Money Can't Buy

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. —Isaiah 55:6

Money is a necessary part of living. Without it, we couldn't secure the necessities or luxuries of life. But there are things money can't buy. As preacher W. A. Criswell said, “Money will buy luxuries, but it will not buy spiritual power. Money will buy advancement and preferment, but it will not buy the recognition of God. Money will buy ... favor and accolades, but it will not buy soul respect.”

The greatest good—so great that it is in a category all by itself—cannot be bought. If the entire human race were to bankrupt its

resources in an effort to buy forgiveness of sin and eternal life with Jesus, it would be infinitely insufficient. All the wealth of the whole world cannot purchase the supreme blessing of forgiveness and heaven.

We'll never accumulate enough riches to purchase a place in the paradise of God. But there's good news! Salvation can be ours "without money and without price," according to Isaiah 55:1.

Have you trusted Jesus as your Savior? You need only to stretch out your empty hands in childlike faith to the Lord (John 1:12). Cry out to Him and confess your sin. "He will abundantly pardon" (Isa. 55:7).

I am redeemed, but not with silver;

I am bought, but not with gold;

Bought with a price—the blood of Jesus,

Precious price of love untold. —Gray

The faintest knock of faith opens wide the door to forgiveness.

Isaiah 55:1-5 Buy Without Money

Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live. —Isaiah 55:3

A story was told of a wealthy man who felt his son needed to learn gratefulness. So he sent him to stay with a poor farmer's family. After one month, the son returned. The father asked, "Now don't you appreciate what we have?" The boy thought for a moment and said, "The family I stayed with is better off. With what they've planted, they enjoy meals together. And they always seem to have time for one another."

This story reminds us that money can't buy everything. Even though our bodies can live on what money can buy, money can't keep our souls from withering away. In Isaiah 55, we read: "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat" (Isaiah 55:1).

Is it possible to buy what truly satisfies without money? Yes, the prophet Isaiah is pointing to the grace of God. This gift is so invaluable that no price tag is adequate. And the one who offers it—Jesus Christ—has paid the full price with His death. When we acknowledge our thirst for God, ask forgiveness for our sins, and accept the finished work of Christ on the cross, we will find spiritual food that satisfies and our soul will live forever!

He's calling, "Come to Me" (Isa. 55:3).

I came to Jesus, and I drank

Of that life-giving stream;

My thirst was quenched, my soul revived,

And now I live in Him. —Bonar

Only Jesus, the Living Water, satisfies the thirsty soul.

Isaiah 55:1-6 Taking The Medicine

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. —Romans 10:13

Suppose you are rushed to the hospital, where a physician examines you and informs you that you are critically ill. He says you'll die unless you have proper treatment. He then prescribes medicine and says, "If you will take this, I can assure you with absolute certainty that you will get well."

Now, what should you do? Should you just lie there on your sickbed and believe that the doctor has diagnosed your illness correctly, and that the prescription will surely make you well? No, that's not enough. To live, you must take the medicine.

It's the same with salvation. You may believe everything the Bible says about Christ—that He died for your sins and rose from the dead. But if you refuse to "take Him"—that is, to trust Him and His work on the cross in your behalf—you will be just as lost as if you had openly and blatantly denied Jesus.

Saving faith, you see, is not simply acknowledging that certain facts about Christ are true. It is reaching out to personally accept God's remedy for sin. It is entrusting the destiny of your soul to Him for eternity. It is saying, "Save me, Lord Jesus. I believe that You can and will." That's "taking the medicine"—that's receiving Jesus Christ! Have you done that? If not, do it right now.

The perfect righteousness of Christ

Is free to everyone;

But we by faith must take that gift,

And trust God's precious Son. —D. De Haan

Faith is not just believing that Jesus can save; it's asking Him to do it.

Isaiah 55:1-6 The Search For Satisfaction

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:2

When it comes to jigsaw puzzles, we all know that to enjoy a satisfying outcome you need all the pieces. In many ways, life is like that. We spend our days putting it together, hoping to create a complete picture out of all the scattered parts.

Yet sometimes it seems like a piece is missing. Perhaps we've been pursuing the wrong pieces to the puzzle. Even though we may know that life without God at the center is a life that has lost the most important piece, do we live as though He isn't particularly relevant? And even though we may attend church regularly, is He the throbbing center of our lives? Sometimes we grow accustomed to feeling distant from God. This makes it easier to sin, complicating the sense that something important is missing.

But no matter how far we may drift from God, He wants us near. He appealed to His people through the prophet Isaiah: "Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance" (Isa. 55:2).

If something is missing in your life, remember that God is the only One who can fully and abundantly satisfy you. Let Him complete the picture of your life.

The God-shaped void within our heart

Cannot be filled by treasure;

It's only God who satisfies

In ways we cannot measure. —Sper

There's a longing in every heart that only Jesus can satisfy.

Isaiah 55:1-7 Just As I Am

Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live. —Isaiah 55:3

Good memories flooded my mind as I sat in a concert. The group's leader had just introduced the song they were about to sing: "Just As I Am." I remembered how years ago at the end of his sermons my pastor would ask people to come forward while we sang that song, indicating they would like to receive the forgiveness Christ offers for their sins.

But the leader of the musical group at the concert suggested another occasion when we might sing this song. He commented that he likes to think that when he dies and goes to meet the Lord one day, he will sing in thanks to Him:

Just as I am, without one plea

But that Thy blood was shed for me,

And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,

O Lamb of God, I come!

Years before writing this song, Charlotte Elliott asked a minister how she might find the Lord. He told her, "Just come to Him as you are." She did, and later during a discouraging time of illness, she wrote this hymn about the day she came to Christ and He forgave her sin.

In His Word, the Lord encourages us to seek Him: “Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near” (Isa. 55:6). He calls to our hearts: “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters ... Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live” (vv.1,3).

Because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can come to Him right now and will one day go into eternity to be with Him forever. Just as I am ... I come!

Let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. —Revelation 22:17

INSIGHT: Isaiah 55 has rich words of hope for us in its first seven verses. Arguably, however, the chapter’s most familiar words are found in the next two verses: “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts’” (vv.8-9). These verses offer hope and assurance. God is in control and sees the big picture.

Isaiah 55:1-9 Welcome To All!

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. —1 Samuel 16:7

A beautifying project on the main road of my town prompted the demolition of a church built in the 1930s. Although the windows of the empty church had been removed, the doors remained in place for several days, even as bulldozers began knocking down walls. Each set of doors around the church building held a message written in giant, fluorescent-orange block letters: KEEP OUT!

Unfortunately, some churches whose doors are open convey that same message to visitors whose appearance doesn’t measure up to their standards. No fluorescent, giant-size letters needed. With a single disapproving glance, some people communicate: “You’re Not Welcome Here!”

How people look on the outside, of course, is not an indicator of what is in their hearts. God’s focus is on the inner life of people. He looks far below the surface of someone’s appearance (1 Sam. 16:7) and that’s what He desires for us to do as well. He also knows the hearts of those who appear to be “righteous” but are “full of hypocrisy” on the inside (Matt. 23:28).

God’s message of welcome, which we are to show to others, is clear. He says to all who seek Him: “Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters” (Isa. 55:1).

Thank You, Lord, that You welcome all into

Your family, and You have welcomed me. Show me

how to be as accepting of others as You are.

May I reveal Your heart of love.

No one will know what you mean when you say, “God is love”—unless you show it.

Isaiah 55:6 "Better Late Than Never!"

Read: John 3:1-18

Seek the Lord while He may be found. —Isaiah 55:6

A group of senior citizens asked me to be their guest speaker. I chose to talk about Jesus’ words to Nicodemus, “You must be born again” (Jn. 3:7).

As I spoke, I noticed the downcast face of an elderly woman. Afterward, over tea, I asked her if she had ever been born again, if she had sought Christ and His forgiveness. She shook her drooping head and replied, “No, I haven’t.” “Wouldn’t you like to seek Him now?” I gently urged. “I’m afraid I’ve left it a bit late,” she answered with sad finality. I simply replied, “Better late than never!”

Instantly her expression brightened. “I’ve never seen it like that before!” she exclaimed. As we prayed together, this elderly woman became a joyful “babe in Christ.” Although her life on earth was coming to a close, her new life in Christ was eternal.

This eleventh-hour conversion is a reminder to us all that God is still knocking at the door of our lives. It’s also a solemn warning that “too late” is a possibility. As someone has said, “Don’t wait to be saved until the eleventh hour—you might die at 10:30!”

Whatever your age, if you’ve never been born again, seek the Lord now, while He may be found (Isa. 55:6).

Don't expect to have tomorrow

What is offered you today;

Jesus asks you now to follow;

Trust in Him and don't delay. —Sper

You can't repent too soon, but soon it may be too late.

Isaiah 55:6 When It's Too Late

Read: Mark 9:42-48

Seek the Lord while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. —Isaiah 55:6

An insurance agent repeatedly tried to convince a man to buy fire coverage for his home. "No," the homeowner kept saying. "It's well built, and I maintain it properly. My house will never catch fire." But one day it did! Imagine the look on that insurance agent's face when the homeowner foolishly ran to him to buy an insurance policy—as smoke filled the sky and flames gutted his home. It was way too late!

Although this story seems too absurd to be true, it teaches the folly of presumption, and of putting off until tomorrow a decision that needs to be made today. This is especially important when it comes to escaping what Jesus described as "the fire that shall never be quenched" (Mark 9:43).

By paying for our sins on Calvary's cross, Jesus has provided the only way of escape from the judgment to come. But we must make an important decision before we can enjoy that salvation. We must accept the offer while it is still good—before death overtakes us.

So don't be foolish. Believe that Christ died and rose again to provide eternal life for you, and receive Him as your Savior today. Right now, while there is still time, accept God's free gift of salvation. —RWD

God's time is now, for the days fly fast,

And swiftly the seasons roll;

Today is yours, it may be your last;

Choose life for your priceless soul! —Fithian

You can't repent too soon, for you don't know how soon it may be too late.

Isaiah 55:6-13 Do I Have To Read Leviticus?

Read: Isaiah 55:6-13

My Word ... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please. —Isaiah 55:11

Do I really have to read Leviticus?" A young executive asked me this in earnest as we talked about the value of spending time in reading the Bible. "The Old Testament seems so boring and difficult," he said.

Many Christians feel this way. The answer, of course, is that the Old Testament, including Leviticus, offers background and even contrasts essential to grasping the New Testament. While Isaiah challenges us to seek God (Isaiah 55:6), he also promises us that God's Word accomplishes what the Lord wants it to accomplish (v.11). Scripture is alive and powerful (Heb. 4:12), and it is useful to teach, correct, and instruct us (2 Tim. 3:16). God's Word never returns void (Isa. 55:8-11), but sometimes it is not until later that God's words come to mind as we need them.

The Holy Spirit uses the truths we've stored from reading or memorization, and He helps us to apply them at just the right time. For example, Leviticus 19:10-11 speaks of business competition and even caring for the poor. The Spirit can remind us of these concepts, and we can use them, if we've spent time reading and contemplating that passage.

Reading the Bible turns our minds into storehouses through which the Spirit can work. That's a great reason to read Leviticus and the other 65 books as well.

Lord, I want to learn to love Your Word more and more.

Teach me and help me to hide it in my heart

so that I can live it, be encouraged by it, and

help others to know it too. Amen.

To understand the Word of God, rely on the Spirit of God.

Isaiah 55:6-13 The Plantings Of Grace

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree. —Isaiah 55:13

Today's text states that God causes the cypress tree and the myrtle tree to flourish where once thorns and briars encumbered the ground. This analogy reminds us that God can bring forth beauty and grace where evil once flourished.

Where cynicism once grew, hope and optimism can begin to emerge. Where sarcasm thrived, gentle words of healing can appear. Where lust grew rampant and unrestrained, pure love can spring up. This—a transformed life—is the living and lasting sign of God's work, the memorial He seeks (Isaiah 55:13).

Do you long for this kind of transformation in your life? Then "seek the Lord while He may be found" (Isaiah 55:6). There are moments when we grow tired of the evil within us, and our heart aches for holiness. This is God calling, reminding us that He is near. At such times we must sink our roots deep into God's Word and ask Him to conform us to His likeness. He says that "as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and ... water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, ... so shall [His] word be that goes forth from [His] mouth" (Isaiah 55:10-11).

Seek the Lord while He may be found. Plantings of grace can replace the thorns of our sinful nature

Sift the substance of my life,

Filter out the sin and strife;

Leave me, Lord, a purer soul,

Cleansed and sanctified and whole. —Lemon

God can transform a sin-stained soul into a masterpiece of grace.

Isaiah 55:6-13 Keep At It!

My word ... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please. —Isaiah 55:11

They know Tom Dotson pretty well in the prisons of Michigan. They ought to. He spent more than a decade behind bars.

Tom gave his testimony at the annual banquet for prison chaplains in Muskegon, Michigan. He said he had grown up in a Christian home but had rebelled and rejected the gospel. His wife, who sang at the banquet, stayed with him in spite of his repeated failures. A prison chaplain faithfully worked with him, Tom genuinely surrendered to Jesus Christ, and his life was changed.

Dotson urged Christian workers, "Continue on in your ministry with people like me, no matter how frustrating. We may have lots of setbacks. But don't give up. There's power for change in even the most frustrating person through the sacrifice of Christ, the One who really sets us free." Then, looking right at the chaplain who had patiently witnessed to him, Tom said tenderly, "Thank you for not giving up on me."

God will "abundantly pardon" all who come to Him (Isaiah 55:7). His powerful Word can bring change (v.11), freeing men and women from the prison of sin (John 8:32).

Are you about to give up on someone you think will never change? Don't! Keep at it!

Be not weary in well-doing,

Though your labors cause you pain—

There could never be a harvest

Without sowing of the grain. —Anon.

Instead of giving up on a person, give that person to God.

Isaiah 55:8-13 Upside Down

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. —Isaiah 55:8

There are a lot of things that intrigue me about Jesus. One of the aspects of His ministry that has always produced jaw-dropping, head-scratching responses is His upside-down teaching about life.

As we journey through life, we may get to the point where we think we've got it figured out and our thought patterns and responses for navigating through life are deeply engrained. Yet Jesus interrupts us in the midst of our routines and calls us to a new and better way. But beware! This encounter with the ways of Jesus will be challenging.

Consider these paradoxical propositions: to live you must die (Mark 8:35); to gain you must give (Matt. 19:21); "blessed are those who mourn" (5:4); to rule you must serve (Luke 22:26); and suffering has purpose (Matt. 5:10-11).

It is pronouncements like these that make people think Christ is strangely out of touch. But we are the ones out of touch. He is not upside down, we are! We're like children who think they know better than their parents what is best.

No wonder God has told us, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways" (Isa. 55:8). So, rather than relying on our mixed-up instincts, let's ask Him to help us reflect His ways.

Lord, You know what is best, and You desire to lead

us in paths that are right and good. Give us the

courage to trust and to follow You in the ways

of righteousness for Your name's sake. Amen.

What may seem upside down to us is right side up to God.

Isaiah 55:8 Surprise Me!

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. —Isaiah 55:8

When our family went out for an ice cream cone, my dad would ask my mother what flavor she'd like. Often she would reply, "Surprise me!" She told me she was rarely disappointed in his choice.

Do you like surprises? Would you ever dare say, "Surprise me!" to God? A lot of us are a little scared to do that. Yes, we have faith that God is good and that He loves us. Yet we're afraid we won't like what He chooses for us.

Throughout the Bible we read that God delights in doing the unexpected. Sometimes it's folding back the waters for His people to cross a sea on dry ground (Ex. 14:21-22). Or forgiving and embracing those who repent of their sin (Ps. 130:1-4). Jesus' time on earth was filled with amazing events that pointed people to His Father—He turned water into wine, calmed storms, healed the sick, and raised the dead.

What kind of God do we serve? One who is not confined by our finite imagination (Eph. 3:20). God's thoughts and ways are not like ours (Isa. 55:8), and He wants to bless us with far more than a special flavor of ice cream. He delights in His children who trust Him and are willing to say, "Surprise me, Lord!"

O Lord, give me the grace to be

Content with what You give to me.

No! More than that, let me rejoice

In all You send me—it's Your choice! —Anon.

Those who let God provide will always be satisfied.

Isaiah 55:8 Gimme It!

Read: James 3:13-18

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. —Isaiah 55:8

I heard the screams long before I could see him, but as I wheeled my grocery cart around to the next aisle of the store, there he was!

With angry tears streaming out of squinty eyes, the little boy was shouting, "Gimme it!" His mom glanced at me for a moment. I won't debate the merits of her actions, but, embarrassed and worn down, she grabbed the cheap trinket and tossed it into her cart.

I think I recognized that kid. He looked a lot like me. Yes, I've often been the willful child. And sometimes I've even pleaded with God, "Why not? Why can't I have it?" On occasion, God's given me what I wanted, but not because I wore Him down. No, I think He wanted me to see what happens when I put myself in charge.

What we think is best is not necessarily the best that God desires for us. In Isaiah 55:8, the Lord said, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways."

In his book Days of Grace, tennis champion Arthur Ashe paraphrased James 1:5 when he wrote this advice to his young daughter: "Ask God for the wisdom to know what is right, what God wants done, and the will to do it."

That's just the kind of sincere prayer that God wants to hear from His children.

We can't presume to know what's best

When we begin to pray;

So we must ask, "What honors God?"

Then seek His will and way. —Sper

If God doesn't give us what we ask for, we can be sure that He has something far better.

Isaiah 55:8 Doesn't God Care

Read: Habakkuk 1:1-11

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. Isaiah 55:8

Why does the intoxicated driver escape an accident unharmed while his sober victim is seriously injured? Why do bad people prosper while good people suffer? How often have you been so confused by things going on in your life that you have cried out, "Doesn't God care?"

Habakkuk struggled with this same question as he saw the distressing situation in Judah where wickedness and injustice were running rampant (Hab. 1:1-4). His confusion drove him to ask God when He would act to fix the situation. God's reply was nothing short of perplexing.

When we don't understand God's ways, we can #trust His unchanging character.

God said that He would use the Chaldeans as the means of Judah's correction. The Chaldeans were notorious for their cruelty (Hab 1:7). They were bent on violence (v. 9) and worshiped nothing but their military prowess and false gods (Hab 1:10-11).

In moments when we don't understand God's ways, we need to trust His unchanging character. That's exactly what Habakkuk did. He believed that God is a God of justice, mercy, and truth (Ps. 89:14). In the process, he learned to look at his circumstances from the framework of God's character instead of looking at God's character from the context of his own circumstances. He concluded, "The Sovereign Lord is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights" (Hab. 3:19).

Lord, it is easy to let my circumstances change how I understand You. Help me to remember that You are good and faithful, even though I can't see everything and may not understand how You are working.

Our situation may look very different from God's point of view.

INSIGHT: The book of Habakkuk is a dialogue between the prophet Habakkuk and God. Ministering to the rebellious kingdom of Judah 120 years after Assyria destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel, Habakkuk was perplexed as to why God had not punished Judah for her sin (Hab 1:2-4). God responded that He would use the Babylonians to punish Judah (Hab 1:5-11). Habakkuk was even more perplexed that a holy God would use an evil pagan nation to discipline His own people (Hab 1:12-2:1). He then learned that God would punish Babylon too (2:2-20). Habakkuk, praising God's faithfulness (Hab 3:1-15), affirms his trust in God to do what

is right (Hab 3:16-19). Sim Kay Tee

Isaiah 55:8-13 The Miracle We All Need

My word ... shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please. —Isaiah 55:11

Recently members of a distressed family confided in me, “We need a miracle—fast!” We all know what it’s like to be upset by disturbing circumstances or broken relationships. In our anxiety, we want God to intervene without delay.

I once thought that “fast miracles” were God’s most effective means of overcoming trials. But over a 3-year period, God used His Word to change my thinking. I discovered that divine interventions are only part of God’s powerful ministry to His people. His slower, unfolding miracles are equally supernatural and often result in more lasting fruit.

In Isaiah 55:10-11, God used nature to illustrate this slower, fruitful process. Just as rain and snow water the earth, which gradually produces seed for sowing and bread for eating, so shall God’s Word fulfill its purpose. He said, “It shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.” And what is that “thing”? It is the renewal of people’s lives and the glorifying of God’s name.

That’s the kind of miracle we all need—the unfolding work of God being accomplished in our own lives through His Word. It’s not an instantaneous work, but it is supernatural.

We want a striking miracle—

We hope God thinks that’s best;

But He gives us the miracle

Of love and peace and rest. —Cetas

Growth that results from waiting on God may be the greatest MIRACLE.

Isaiah 55:8-13 Hope For Skeptics

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please. —Isaiah 55:11

As a workplace chaplain, I’m privileged to be in conversation with many different people. Some are skeptics of the Christian faith. I’ve discovered three major hurdles that keep them from trusting in Christ for salvation.

The first barrier, surprisingly, isn’t an unwillingness to believe that God exists; instead some doubt that they’re important enough for God’s attention. Second, some believe they are unworthy of His forgiveness. People are often their own harshest judges. The third hurdle? They wonder why God is not communicating with them if He is out there.

Let’s work backward through the hurdles to see what God’s Word says. First, God doesn’t play head games. He promises that if we read His Word, He will make sure it accomplishes His purpose (Isa. 55:11). In other words, if we read it we will discover that God is communicating with us. This is precisely why the Bible speaks so often of His grace and mercy toward all (v.7). His willingness to forgive surpasses our own. Once we learn that we can hear God in the Bible and once we see the emphasis on His mercy, it becomes easier to believe we have His attention when we cry out to Him.

God’s story is amazing. It can give hope for all of us.

There can be times when one’s mind is in doubt,

Times when one asks what the faith is about;

But we can believe Him, we know that He cares—

Our God is real, as the Bible declares. —Fitzhugh

Honest skepticism can be the first step to a strong faith.

Isaiah 55:8 Knowing The Unknowable

Read: John 14:1-11

My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways. —Isaiah 55:8

In an attempt to express the inexpressible, a Christian businessman kept this motto on his desk: “How great must be the God we need! How much greater is our God than our greatest need!”

John Wesley captured that same truth in a different way. “Give me a worm that can understand a man,” he wrote, “and I will give you a man who can understand God.” And in Psalm 145:3, David said of God, “His greatness is unsearchable.”

In trying to grasp the mind-baffling nature of our Creator, the best we can do is use comparisons. He is like a faithful shepherd, a wise and just king, a loving parent, a trustworthy friend. All these analogies give us a glimpse of God’s greatness, but they are wholly inadequate to comprehend Him fully.

That is why it is so difficult to understand how we may know the Creator at all. Yet that is the glorious message of the gospel. Our infinite God has revealed Himself to us in His incarnate Son Jesus Christ. In the Gospels we read with awe and gratitude that the Creator became our Savior. Jesus said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). When we look to Jesus and listen to what He has said, we can know the unknowable.

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,

In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,

Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,

Almighty, victorious—Thy great name we praise. —Smith

If you're looking for God, you'll find Him in Jesus.

Isaiah 55:8-11 Six Degrees Of Separation

My Word ... shall not return to Me void. —Isaiah 55:11

Eighty years ago, Hungarian author Frigyes Karinthy wrote a short story he called “Chain-Links,” in which he proposed the idea that any two individuals in the world are connected through, at most, five acquaintances. The thesis has been revived today and is usually described as “Six Degrees of Separation.” It’s an unproven theory, of course. But there is a dynamic at work that links us to others around the world: It is the wisdom and providence of God working through His Word to accomplish His will.

Some years ago, I received a letter from a man whom I had never met telling me that a note I had sent to a nearby friend had found its way to him, and it had encouraged him in a time of weariness and dark despair. The friend to whom I had sent the note sent it to a friend, who, in turn, sent it to a friend, and so on, until it was sent to the man who wrote to me.

It may be that a simple word offered in love, guided by the wisdom of God, and borne aloft on the wings of the Spirit will have eternal consequences in someone’s life.

Should we not then fill ourselves with God’s Word and pass it on to others with the prayer that God will use it for His intended purposes? (Isa. 55:11).

Do a deed of simple kindness,

Though its end you may not see;

It may reach, like widening ripples,

Down a long eternity. —Norris

As the blossom can’t tell what becomes of its fragrance, we can’t tell what becomes of our influence.

Isaiah 55:7 Repenting And Rejoicing

Read: Psalm 51

Let the wicked forsake his way ... ; let him return to the Lord, and He will have mercy on him. —Isaiah 55:7

A Christian woman asked another believer how he was doing. With a broad smile he replied, “Repenting and rejoicing, sister!”

I believe this man was walking in a spirit of repentance—daily confessing and turning from sins and rejoicing in God’s forgiveness.

Because honest repentance involves sorrow, we may forget that repenting leads to rejoicing. When we first repent and become new believers, we experience great joy. But if we then choose to live with unconfessed sin, our joy is lost.

David believed his joy could be restored. After pouring out his prayer of repentance to God, he made this humble plea: “Restore to me the joy of Your salvation” (Psalm 51:12). As David turned back to the Lord, his sense of purpose returned: “Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners shall be converted to You” (Ps 51:13). Through his faith in a forgiving and merciful God, David began rejoicing again in his salvation (Ps 51:14-15).

Do you sometimes lose the joy of your salvation because you fail to deal with your sins? If you’ll confess them, God will forgive you (1 John 1:9). He’ll restore your joy and help you overcome sins that trouble you. That’s what it means to be a “repenting and rejoicing” Christian.

When we confess our sins to God,

We’re washed as white as snow,

And He keeps on forgiving us

Each time to Him we go. —Sper

Conviction makes us sad—confession makes us glad.

Isaiah 55:1-9 It's Free!

Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? —Isaiah 55:2

The owner of a Denver restaurant reported, “I first tried to sell buffalo tongue as an hors d’oeuvre at \$1.75 and had no takers. So I priced it at \$6.75, set a limit of two to a customer, and sold out every night.”

I’m glad God doesn’t operate that way. He does just the opposite—He offers something of great value for free. In Isaiah 55, He is portrayed as a vendor in a marketplace calling out to the passing throngs, “Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?” (Isaiah 55:1-2).

The crowds push past. They mill about the stalls, shopping for satisfaction. They spend their money for food that won’t nourish them and for drink that won’t quench their thirst. But money can’t buy what they really need.

God offers real nourishment, lasting joy, and forgiveness from sin—and it’s all free! The shoppers don’t take Him seriously, yet He doesn’t alter His marketing strategy.

Are you spending all you have on what will never satisfy? The salvation Jesus purchased at great cost is free to anyone who will accept it. Have you?

Salvation is infinitely costly, but absolutely free.

Isaiah 55:9 Mysterious Ways

Read: Job 40:1-14

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways. —Isaiah 55:9

When my son began attending Chinese language classes, I marveled at the papers he brought home after his first session. As a native English speaker, it was difficult for me to understand how the written characters related to the spoken words. The language seemed incredibly complex to me—almost incomprehensible.

Sometimes I feel the same sense of bewilderment when I consider the way God operates. I know He has said, “My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways” (Isa. 55:8). Still, there’s a part of me that feels like I should be able to understand why God allows certain things to happen. After all, I read His Word regularly and His Holy Spirit lives inside of me.

When I feel entitled to understand God’s ways, I try to recommit myself to humility. I remember that Job did not get an explanation for all his heartache (Job 1:5,8). He struggled to understand, but God asked him: “Shall the one who contends with the Almighty

correct Him?" (Job 40:2). Job contritely responded, "What shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job 40:4). Job was speechless before God's greatness.

Although God's ways may seem to be mysterious and unfathomable at times, we can rest confidently that they are higher than our ways.

Father, please help me to trust You even when I don't understand why things happen as they do. Please comfort my heart and remind me of Your goodness and love.

If you know that God's hand is in everything, you can leave everything in God's hand.

INSIGHT: In trying to explain why he was suffering, Job argued that he had not committed any wrong deserving of such punishment. In so justifying himself, Job was in essence questioning God's fairness and justice (Job 40:8; see also Job 21,24). God confronted Job, asserting that only He is qualified and has the absolute power, wisdom, and ability to rule this world justly (Job 40:15-24).

Isaiah 55:8-11 God's Refreshing Word

My word ... shall not return to Me void. —Isaiah 55:11

When I was a boy, our family would occasionally travel across Nevada. We loved the desert thunderstorms. Accompanied by lightning bolts and claps of thunder, huge sheets of rain would blanket the hot sand as far as the eye could see. The cooling water refreshed the earth—and us.

Water produces marvelous changes in arid regions. For example, the pincushion cactus is completely dormant during the dry season. But after the first summer rains, cactuses burst into bloom, displaying delicate petals of pink, gold, and white.

Likewise, in the Holy Land after a rainstorm, dry ground can seemingly sprout vegetation overnight. Isaiah used rain's renewal to illustrate God's refreshing Word: "As the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:10-11).

Scripture carries spiritual vitality. That's why it doesn't return void. Wherever it encounters an open heart, it brings refreshment, nourishment, and new life.

God's Word is like refreshing rain

That waters crops and seed;

It brings new life to open hearts,

And meets us in our need. —Sper

The Bible is to a thirsty soul what water is to a barren land.

INSIGHT: We cannot know God unless He reveals Himself to us. An attribute of God is a characteristic that God has chosen to reveal about Himself through His Word. Incommunicable attributes are those that belong to God alone (e.g., omniscience [all-knowing]; omnipotence [all-powerful]; omnipresence [present everywhere]; immutability [unchangeable]; infinite [having no limits]; transcendence [beyond comprehension]). Communicable attributes are those that human beings can also possess (e.g., compassion, love, mercy, goodness). In Isaiah 55:8-9, God reveals that He is unlike any other being and our finite minds can never fully understand Him (see Job 11:7-9; Ps. 131:1; Rom. 11:33). Throughout Scripture we are told that there is no one like God (see Ex. 15:11; Ps. 35:10; 89:6-8; Isa. 40:25).

Isaiah 55:9 Unanswered Prayer

Read: Romans 11:26-36

As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways. —Isaiah 55:9

The apostle Paul had one overriding desire: that fellow Jews would embrace the Messiah he had encountered. "I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart," he said. "For I could wish that I myself were ... cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers" (Ro 9:2-3NIV). Yet in city after city his fellow Jews rejected him and the Christ he preached.

In his most elegant letter, Paul set as his centerpiece (Ro 9–11) a passionate passage in which he struggled openly with this great

unanswered prayer of his life. He acknowledged one important side benefit of this distressing development: The Jews' rejection of Jesus led to His acceptance by the Gentiles. Paul concluded that God hadn't rejected the Jews; to the contrary, they had the same opportunity as Gentiles. God had widened, not closed, the embrace of humanity.

Paul's prose began to soar as he stepped back to consider the big picture. And then came this burst of doxology:

Oh, the depth of the riches

both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!

How unsearchable are His judgments

and His ways past finding out! (Ro 11:33).

The unsolved mysteries and unanswered prayers all fade to gray against the panorama of God's plan for the ages.

In the end, unanswered prayer brings me face to face with the mystery that silenced Paul: the profound difference between my perspective and God's.

Prayer imparts the power to walk and not faint. —Chambers

Isaiah 55:9 Unanswered Questions

Pastor William E. Sangster told of an experience in his youth when he went on a vacation with some friends. Within a short time he had spent all the funds given him for the trip, so he wrote home for more. His father, thinking he should teach his son the value of money, did not respond to the request. Sangster's companions wondered why he had been turned down and suggested several reasons. Young William said to them, "I'll wait till I get home, and he'll tell me himself." That's the kind of attitude we as Christians should have toward our Heavenly Father. Life itself holds many unanswered questions. But we know that God is sovereign and that He works all things after the counsel of His own will (Eph. 1:11). Our Lord has said, "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa. 55:9). We are limited in our comprehension of all that He is doing in our lives (1 Cor. 13:12). An explanation for many of the problems that confront us, the trials through which we pass, and the wounds that bring such hurt will have to wait until we get to heaven. Although God does not need to explain the reasons for His dealings with us, someday He will unveil His matchless wisdom to us. We need patience to wait for the final answer. In that day when we awake in glory, we shall be fully satisfied. Though now we may not trace God's hand, we can always trust His heart. - Paul R. Van Gorder. Our Daily Bread,

ISAIAH 57

Isaiah 57:14-21 The First Step

Let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord. —Jeremiah 9:24

I'm distressed that so many sermons and books today are exclusively devoted to techniques on how to help people cope successfully with life's pains, problems, and struggles. There is a place, of course, for preaching on everyday subjects and for "how-to" books. But without teaching people the great biblical truths of God, His power, His sovereignty, His grace, and His salvation through Christ, they get no help in building a solid spiritual foundation for their lives.

When we accept the reality of these great theological truths, we have a sound basis for a godly life. Once we come to know and understand the Lord, whom Isaiah called "the High and Lofty One" (57:15), we gain a stability in life that is essential for any difficulty we may encounter.

But what is usually suggested first when a marriage is falling apart? See a marriage counselor. Get into group therapy. Read a popular book on success in marriage. These approaches have some merit, but the first step in solving any problem is to make sure we have a right relationship with God, and then seek His wisdom.

Lord, help us to look to You and Your Word as the first step in solving our problems.

Give me the Bible when my heart is broken,
When sin and grief have filled my soul with fear—

Give me the precious words by Jesus spoken,
Hold up faith's lamp to show my Savior near. —Owen

Many books can inform, but only the Bible can transform.

Isaiah 57:15-21 The Restless Sea

The wicked are like the troubled sea, ... whose waters cast up mire. —Isaiah 57:20

I fight a losing battle with black silt on the lake bottom near our cabin. In the morning before my grandchildren awaken, I rake the lake bottom close to the dock so they can wade on clean sand.

It works well—until noon. That's when the powerboaters begin to run, pulling an assortment of people on a variety of devices. They make waves, which carry fresh silt to the shore. Even when no high-speed craft appear, the wind usually rises about then, creating neat little whitecaps. They too stir up the silt and deposit it, covering the cleared lake bottom with black gunk and littering it with debris.

Imagine a sea that is always churning with turbulence. The foaming restlessness never quiets, sending up plumes of dirt and mire. Isaiah described the wicked that way (Isaiah 57:20). Their lives are like a frothy, wave-tossed, unsettled, restless sea—never calm, never at peace (Isaiah 57:21).

Peace is available to all who believe in Christ. Not only can we be at peace with God, but we can have the peace of God firmly settled in our hearts (Jn. 14:27).

If you don't have peace, if you are worn out by the turbulence of unrest, turn in faith to Jesus. He has the power to calm the restless sea of your life.

If life feels like a storm-tossed sea

With crashing waves of endless pain,

Then turn to Christ and trust in Him,

He'll give you peace that will remain. —Sper

Christ calls the restless ones to find their rest in Him.

Isaiah 57:15 Back On The Farm

Read: Psalm 24:1-10

I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit. —Isaiah 57:15

As a 5-year-old keeping the cows out of my father's fields, I was awed by the sounds and sights of a North Dakota summer day. Only the occasional mooing of a cow or the whistling of a meadowlark broke the soft stillness. Shimmering heat waves danced across the prairie while a cautious coyote skulked nearby. Hungry hawks circled overhead as snow-white clouds lazily floated in the sky.

My parents taught me that far above the idyllic Dakota scene was a personal God, great and holy beyond all imagining. I felt small and vulnerable. But my parents also taught me that God loved me so much He sent Jesus to die for me, so I felt love for Him.

Children can sense those kinds of essential truths long before they understand terms like God's transcendence (His immeasurable difference from us) and His immanence (His nearness). I know the words now, but I still find it helpful to recapture that innocent wonder by imagining myself back on the farm as a child.

We can't relive our childhood, nor should we want to do so. But remember that the Lord lives "with him who has a contrite and humble spirit" (Isa. 57:15). Recall the wonder of your early days. Then, with a childlike sense of awe, reflect on the majesty of the "High and Lofty One."

Across the expanse God stretched out His creation—

Established the stars, gave the earth its foundation;

His strength claims our worship, His power our fear;

Yet Calvary's cross sets us free to draw near. —Gustafson

The Creator hides secrets from sages, yet He can be known by children.

Isaiah 57:21 Conscience

The glory of a good person is the testimony of a good conscience. A good conscience is able to bear very much and is very cheerful in adversities. An evil conscience is always fearful and unquiet. Never rejoice except when you have done well. You shall rest sweetly if your heart does not accuse you. Sinners never have true joy or feel inward peace, because 'there is no peace for the wicked,' says the Lord (Isaiah 57:21). The glory of the good is in their consciences, and not in the tongues of others, The gladness of the just is of God, and in God; and their joy is of the truth.

A person will easily be content and pacified whose conscience is pure. If you consider what you are within, you will not care what others say concerning you. People consider the deeds, but God weighs the intentions. To be always doing well and to esteem little of one's self is the sign of a humble soul. For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends, 'says Paul (2 Corinthians 10:18). To walk inwardly with God, and not to be kept abroad by any outward affection, is the state of a spiritual person. Conscience is that faculty in me which attaches itself to the highest that I know, and tells me what the highest I know demands that I do. It is the eye of the soul which looks out either toward God or toward what it regards as the highest authority. If I am in the habit of steadily facing toward God, my conscience will always introduce God's perfect law and indicate what I should do. The point is, will I obey? I have to make an effort to keep my conscience so sensitive that I walk without offense. I should be living in such perfect sympathy with God's Son that in every circumstance the spirit of my mind is renewed. The one thing that keeps the conscience sensitive to Him is the habit of being open to God on the inside. When there is any debate, quit. There is no debate possible when conscience speaks. - C.F.H. Henry, Christian Personal Ethics, Eerdmans, 1957, p. 509ff.

ISAIAH 58

Isaiah 58:1-12 Cry for Help

David Willis hadn't been in the bookshop long when he walked downstairs and found the lights were turned off and the doors were locked. He was trapped inside the store. Being in the age of social media, he cried out for help on Twitter: "Hi. I've been locked inside your Trafalgar Square bookstore for 2 hours now. Please let me out." He was rescued not too long after his tweet!

As helpful as Twitter can be, we have Someone more powerful than the social media giant. If you feel trapped and are crying for help, Isaiah has some advice for you—and it may not be what you expect.

The prophet communicated that God had charged His people with practicing their religious devotion irresponsibly (Isaiah 58:1-2). They were going through the motions of religious practices and masking their oppression of the poor with empty and self-serving rituals (Isaiah 58:3-5). This didn't win them any divine favor. In fact, God said, "I will not look" and "I will not listen" (Isaiah 1:15).

The Lord told the people through Isaiah that if they had an inner righteousness, evidenced by repentance and outward acts of social righteousness and mercy (Isaiah 58:6-7), His blessings would fall upon them. Among other things, they could call on the Lord as a genuine act of worship, and He would answer their prayers and provide them with His immediate presence (Isaiah 58:8-9).

Do we desire to hear God say "Here I am" when we cry for help? Then perhaps we should seek to be God's answer to the prayers of the poor and marginalized in our community. Let's get close to those who need us and extend the love and compassion of our faithful God. He hears each cry for help and can use us to bring the hope and encouragement they need.

Isaiah 58:1-10 Let Freedom Ring

Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, ... to let the oppressed go free? —Isaiah 58:6

In 1963, during a peaceful march on Washington, DC, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his now famous "I Have a Dream" speech. He eloquently called for freedom to ring from every mountaintop across the nation. The cost to him personally and to those who joined his peaceful resistance movement was steep, but real change soon began. God used that speech to awaken the conscience of the US to fight for the freedom of the oppressed and downtrodden.

In the 8th century BC, amid personal and national injustice, the prophet Isaiah was used by God to awaken the conscience of His

people. Their convenient spirituality had led them to violence and insensitivity toward their fellow humans. God's people were oppressing the poor and substituting religious practices for genuine righteous living (Isaiah 58:1-5). God indicted them (Isaiah 58:1) and prescribed spiritual living that would be expressed through turning to God in genuine repentance and setting people free (Isaiah 58:6-12).

Like Isaiah, we have been sent to let freedom ring. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we must proclaim that the captives can be released, that the downtrodden can be freed from their oppressors, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come.

I've got a river of life flowing out of me:

Makes the lame to walk and the blind to see,

Opens prison doors, sets the captives free;

I've got a river of life flowing out of me. —Casebolt

No righteousness, no freedom!

Isaiah 58:1-9 Religion And Reality

I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. —Revelation 3:20

"Religion and reality don't mix"—that's what a group in Grand Rapids, Michigan, believes. These 24 people call themselves "freethinkers" who have chosen "reality over religion." Most of them grew up in churchgoing families but have left their faith.

Like those freethinkers, two Filipino students from prominent families became deeply disturbed by religious people who exploited the poor. They too rejected all religion. They sought reality in alleviating the suffering of the masses. But eventually they began to sense that life without God left them empty. Through a series of near-miraculous events, both students came to know Jesus as their Savior and Lord. They continued to work among the poor, but with a new perspective. They found the reality of a living faith in contrast to mere external religion.

The Israelites also wondered why God seemed unreal to them. They had gone through the motions of religion but continued to live for themselves (Isaiah 58:2,4). Isaiah told them to repent and become real—to free the oppressed, to share their bread with the hungry, to house the poor, and to clothe the naked. Only then would God be real to them (Isaiah 58:6-9).

If we truly know Jesus, religion and reality do mix.

When people turn away from God,

They think they will be free,

But only Christ who died for them

Will bring reality. —D. De Haan

Unless Christ is the center of interest, life will be out of focus.

Isaiah 58:1-10 Spend Less, Give More

If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, ... your darkness shall be as the noonday. —Isaiah 58:10

Michelle Singletary and her husband decided to reduce their Christmas spending. They made some presents themselves and thought of creative ways to give their time and service to others.

In her newspaper column on personal finance, Michelle summarized her purpose in taking a hard look at her spending: "Building and maintaining relationships—what really matters over the holidays and throughout the year—are priorities that shouldn't get crowded out by our conspicuous consumption."

Deciding to spend less money at Christmas is a personal choice. But if relationships are high on our list of priorities, we could resolve to give more by giving ourselves away. Isaiah described the kind of spiritual sacrifice that pleases God as one of serving others. "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday" (Isaiah 58:10).

Jesus our Savior, whose birth we celebrate, said of Himself, "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

As we observe Christmas this year, let's give more by giving ourselves away.

Putting It Into Practice

Is your holiday spending out of control?

How could you give more of yourself this year and invest in your relationships?

Spend yourself for others this Christmas.

Isaiah 58 Willing To Change

Read: Isaiah 58:1-14

If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land. —Isaiah 1:19

A recent news feature chronicled the growing search for stress relief through spas, massage, pills, and exercise tapes. The craving to ease tension has spawned an entire industry, including walk-in backrub stores in shopping malls across the country. The report ended by saying, "Although people will pay to fix their stress, they are not about to change the lifestyle that is causing it."

No matter what the problem, our initial response is to treat the symptoms rather than the cause.

During the days of Isaiah, God's people were not experiencing the Lord's blessing. They went through the motions of worship and couldn't understand why God wasn't noticing their religious efforts (Isa. 58:3). But while they were fasting, they were also exploiting their workers and fighting among themselves (Isaiah 58:3-4). Isaiah condemned their hypocrisy and told them they needed to change. If they would free the oppressed, share with the hungry, house the homeless, and clothe the naked, God would bless them with healing, answered prayer, guidance, strength, and joy.

Religious activity is no substitute for an obedient heart. With God's help—and a willingness to change—we can eliminate the root problems, not just the symptoms.

The Christian life is not confined

To church one day a week;

God wants us to obey His Word,

Each day His will to seek. —Sper

Religious activity is no substitute for an obedient heart.

Isaiah 58:1-12 Misapplied First Aid

Why have we fasted," they say, "and You have not seen?" —Isaiah 58:3

A woman was enthusiastically telling some friends about the value of a first-aid class she had recently completed. "Just yesterday," she said, "I was driving down 52nd Street when I heard this awful crash. I jammed on the brakes, ran back, and found a car wrapped around a telephone pole. When I got to the injured driver, I saw a horrible sight. My knees went limp, and I didn't know what to do. But all at once I remembered something from my first-aid training. Immediately I bent down and put my head between my knees, and it worked! I didn't faint!"

That's not the conclusion you expected, is it? In a similar way, the Israelites had failed to grasp the wider implications of their spiritual training. The prophet Isaiah charged them with looking after their own interests but disregarding the needs of others. Their enthusiasm for God was nothing more than hollow ritual. The condemning evidence of their sinful neglect was the poor, hungry, and afflicted among them who remained oppressed and unassisted.

True religion is more than a love for sound doctrine and proper worship. It includes first aid to our neighbor. That's the strongest evidence that our spiritual training is not being misapplied.

Thinking It Over

What has God taught you recently?

How are you putting it into practice?

How can you use your knowledge to help others?

When it comes to doing things for others, some people stop at nothing.

Isaiah 58:6-12 Hoarding Or Helping

If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness. —Isaiah 58:10

In August 1914, when Britain entered World War I, Oswald Chambers was 40 years old with a wife and a 1-year-old daughter. It wasn't long before men were joining the army at the rate of 30,000 a day, people were asked to sell their automobiles and farm horses to the government, and lists of the dead and wounded began appearing in daily newspapers. The nation faced economic uncertainty and peril.

A month into the war, Chambers spoke of the spiritual challenge facing followers of Christ: "We must take heed that in the present calamities, when war and devastation and heart-break are abroad in the world, we do not shut ourselves up in a world of our own and ignore the demand made on us by our Lord and our fellowmen for the service of intercessory prayer and hospitality and care."

God's call to His people rings true in every age: "If you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, then your light shall dawn in the darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday" (Isa. 58:10).

Fear causes us to grasp what we have; faith in God opens our hands and hearts to others. We walk in His light when we help others, not hoard for ourselves.

Give me a heart sympathetic and tender—

Jesus, like Thine, Jesus, like Thine—

Touched by the needs that are surging around me,

And filled with compassion divine. —Anon.

As Christ's love grows in us, His love flows from us.

Isaiah 58:6-12 Helping Hand

If you take away ... the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness, ... [then] your darkness shall be as the noonday. —Isaiah 58:9-10

An 89-year-old man who enjoys creating new words to describe old problems calls a person who finds fault with everything an *againstovist*. "Whatever you suggest," he says, "that person is against it, and will find something wrong with everything you do."

I have pondered his words and too often find myself guilty of being the kind of person he describes. What I would like to call being a "realist" is, in truth, more like being an "againstovist." And that is not pleasing to God.

In the 58th chapter of Isaiah, the prophet said that the sacrificial lifestyle God desires includes: "to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free" (Isaiah 58:6), to "take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger, and speaking wickedness" (Isaiah 58:9).

If I'm oppressing someone by my critical spirit and stinging words, then God says it's time for me to change. He doesn't want me to find fault; He wants me to give freedom and release. Instead of pointing an accusing finger, I am to lend a helping hand.

I can't think of a new word to describe the person who lifts burdens and gives freedom, but I'm sure my friend can. And I hope that word describes me. — David McCasland

It was only a sunny smile

And little it cost in the giving,

But it scattered the night like morning light

And made the day worth living. —Anon.

Build people up—don't tear them down.

Isaiah 58:6-12 All Year Long

[The Lord said], "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: ... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry?" —Isaiah 58:6-7

During Lent (the 40 days prior to Easter) many Christians follow the practice of giving up something and taking the time to reflect on Jesus' sacrifice of Himself for us.

One group of middle-class believers in a church in the UK decided to live on the minimum wage. Their goal was to identify with those who live on little, to learn the joy of giving, to invite God to change their attitude toward money, and to challenge others in their church to do the same. For their study they chose Isaiah 58.

Afterward, one of the leaders of the group said they learned an important lesson. Living on less "makes you realize just how much you really can give away. It makes you look at what you normally give and realize that it is far from being sacrificial."

What they learned agrees with God's idea of what fasting and sacrificial living are all about. The Lord said to Israel, "Is this not the fast that I have chosen: ... Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out?" (Isaiah 58:6-7). God was chiding His people because their fasting had become an empty ritual with no concern for others.

Let's give sacrificially to others—not just during Lent but all year long.

Grant us, then, the grace for giving

With a spirit large and free,

That our life and all our living

We may consecrate to Thee. —Murray

Your standard of giving is more important than your standard of living.

Isaiah 58:8 "Don't Worry, Dad!"

Read: Exodus 14:19-25

The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. —Isaiah 58:8

Last summer, my husband and I hosted a concert and fundraiser for childhood cancer research. We planned to have the event in our backyard, but weather forecasts were dismal. A few hours before the event, we began calling our 100+ guests to inform them of a change in venue. As our friends and family began feverishly toting food, decorations, and equipment from our house to our church gym, our daughter Rosie took a moment to give her dad a hug and remind him on behalf of the kids and grandkids that they were there for him: "Don't worry, Dad! We've got your back."

Hearing that expression is comforting because it reminds us that we're not on our own. Someone is saying, "I'm here. I'll take care of whatever you might miss. I'll be a second set of eyes and hands for you."

As the Israelites were escaping a life of slavery, Pharaoh sent his army of chariots and horsemen to give chase (Ex. 14:17). But "the Angel of God ... and the pillar of cloud went from before them and stood behind them" (Ex 14:19). In this way, God hid and protected them throughout the night. The next day, He parted the Red Sea so they could safely cross over.

God tells us "Don't worry" as well. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Ro 8:31).

God's hand that holds the ocean's depths

Can hold my small affairs;

His hand that guides the universe

Can carry all my cares. —Anon.

Our work is to cast care; God's work is to take care!

Isaiah 58:10-12 A Healing Community

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. —Matthew 5:16

In 1976 a giant earthquake struck Guatemala City, bringing death to 25,000 people. Many workers went to assist in the rescue and cleanup. At the airport Art Beals, head of a Christian relief agency, spotted Dr. Raymond Benson, former president of the American College of Surgeons. Both had come to help meet the physical needs of the survivors.

That night in the hotel, Dr. Benson told of the deeper motivation that had prompted him to come. He told Beals that he was not only

a doctor but also a Christian. He enjoyed his work as a surgeon, but said that his higher calling was to witness to others about his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ through his medical skills. "That's what really brings me to Guatemala today," he said.

Thank God for the many Christian doctors who share that vision and are bringing help and hope to the sick and suffering all over the world. Truly they are a healing community!

God promised to bless His people when they extended help to the hungry and afflicted (Isaiah 58:10-12). And He will do the same for us today. As believers, we can pray for the sick, help the needy, visit the lonely, comfort the sorrowing, and reach out with the gospel to those bound by sin. We are all part of a healing community.

Hurting souls are everywhere—

We must not pass them by;

Jesus longs to touch their lives,

So let us heed their cry. —D. De Haan

Bending down to lift up another is good exercise for the heart.

Isaiah 58:11 Eye In The Sky

Read: Psalm 139:1-10

The Lord will guide you continually. —Isaiah 58:11

Creating a system by which an "eye in the sky" can help guide cars and planes and boats all the time is complicated. For instance, the Global Positioning System (GPS) that most people are familiar with works because there are always 24 to 32 satellites orbiting the Earth at an altitude of 12,500 miles. These satellites must maintain a constant speed and altitude if the guidance they provide is to be accurate.

Today's complicated GPS is just a tiny analogy of what God can do. God promised the nation of Israel: "The Lord will guide you continually" (Isa. 58:11). The psalmist was aware that there was no place he could go without God knowing where he was (Ps. 139:7-8). Long before GPS, God sat "above the circle of the earth" (Isa. 40:22) and saw everything.

The knowledge that there is someone who tracks you wherever you are can bring fear to those who are trying to get away. But for the Christian, this brings great joy and assurance. No matter where he was, the psalmist was confident that God's hand would lead him (Ps. 139:10).

God has promised to guide and lead you today. He's the best Guide you could have, and He wants to lead you along the right paths.

We need God's guidance from above;

And as we trust Him for direction,

His daily leading and His love,

He'll give to us His full protection. —Fitzhugh

To avoid going wrong, follow God's leading.

Isaiah 59

Isaiah 59 What Can We Do?

Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. —Psalm 96:2

The conditions Isaiah confronted in his country were strikingly similar to those that surround us today. Violence, deceit, injustice, and self-destructive conduct abounded (Isa. 59:3-8). In looking for solutions to their problems, the people resembled a person without eyes, stumbling about in darkness (Isaiah 59:10).

Today the public is reacting to crime by demanding action. Some politicians advocate gun control; others urge all law-abiding citizens to have a gun and know how to use it. All the while we are spending billions to enlarge our prisons. The problem is that these efforts

deal only with the symptoms; they don't cure society's illnesses.

Today, as in Isaiah's time, the real problem behind the ills of society is rebellion against the Lord. If people repent, He will show mercy. If they don't, God will bring judgment.

As Christian citizens, we should be promoting what God says is right and just, but we can do much more. Because we know that God is in control, we can proclaim the good news of His salvation. We may not be able to effect great changes in our society, but we can be God's instruments in delivering individuals from eternal destruction.

Continuing crises need more than concern—

Solutions are found in obedience to God;

Conditions will worsen unless people turn

From self-devised ways that are seriously flawed. —Hess

Instead of going with the crowd, we are to show the way.

Isaiah 59 A Call For Justice

No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. —Isaiah 59:4

When a particular judge was assigned to a potentially volatile trial involving racial issues, many lawyers praised the choice. "He's fair—very fair—and he's just," said one. "He cares about people—victims and defendants," said another. Many others also spoke highly of his qualifications as a fair judge.

Such praise should be common, not the exception, for we expect justice from a judge. But God, the Judge of the universe, requires fairness from all of us and wants us to plead for justice for the oppressed. Israel's failure to do this accounted in part for the nation's downfall (Isaiah 59:9-15).

Today in many countries, more people are living in cities than ever before. And deep within those densely populated areas are conditions that breed anger, hopelessness, and despair. Landlords charge high rent for rundown apartments. Double standards of justice prevail for different races and nationalities. Unfair hiring and housing practices are common. And many other inequalities lead to new injustices.

As Christians, we must be among the first to work for justice in every area of society, not primarily for ourselves but for others. And we must banish prejudice and unfair attitudes from the inner citadel of our hearts.

POINTS TO PONDER

How does my response to injustice

strengthen or weaken my witness for Christ?

How is prejudice related to injustice?

God's justice leaves no room for prejudice.

Isaiah 59 Inner-City Injustice

No one calls for justice, nor does any plead for truth. —Isaiah 59:4

The trial of three police officers accused in the fatal beating of Malice Green was one of Detroit's most potentially volatile cases. So when Judge George Crockett III was assigned to the trial, lawyers praised the choice. "He's fair—very fair— and he's just," said one. "He cares about people—victims and defendants," said another.

Justice, fairness, equity—we expect it from a judge. But God, the Judge of the universe, requires it of us and wants us to call for justice in behalf of the oppressed. Israel's failure to do this accounted in part for the nation's downfall (Isa 59:9-15).

Today in many countries, more people are living in cities than ever before. And deep within these densely populated areas exist conditions that breed anger, hopelessness, and despair. Landlords charge high rent for rundown apartments. Double standards of justice prevail for different races and nationalities. Unfair hiring and housing practices are common. And many other inequities lead to new injustices.

As Christians, we must be the first to call for justice in every area of society, not primarily for ourselves but for others. And we must be the first to rid prejudice and unfair attitudes from the inner citadel of our hearts.

Points To Ponder

How does my response to injustice

strengthen or weaken my witness for Christ?

How is prejudice related to injustice?

God's standard of justice leaves no room for prejudice.

Isaiah 59:12 You Won't Get Away With It!

Read: Galatians 6:1-9

Our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us. —Isaiah 59:12

A group of students at Renaissance High School in Detroit decided to cut classes to attend a rock concert in Hart Plaza. They felt they had gotten away with it, but the next day when The Detroit News appeared on the newsstand, it carried a color photo of the concert—right there on the front page. And who was in that picture? That's right—the delinquent students of Renaissance High, easily recognizable by anyone.

The Bible teaches that we cannot hide our iniquities. Oh, we may be able to cover them up for a while and even get away with them for an extended period of time. But the day will inevitably come when we must face up to them, either in this world or in the next. Paul told the Galatians, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Galatians 6:7).

Perhaps you have some secret sin that you are hiding. If so, I urge you to confess and forsake it. Or maybe you are gradually being drawn into a situation that you know is wrong and you're tempted to pursue it, thinking you won't get caught. Then I plead with you to go no further. Your picture may not appear on the front page of a newspaper, but the Bible says you won't get away with it!

The sinful things that we may do

Are often hid from human view,

But judgment day will bring to light

Those things that we have not made right. —D. De Haan

The seeds of wrongdoing may be sown in secret, but the crop cannot be concealed.

Isaiah 53:9 Why?

On February 15, 1947 Glenn Chambers boarded a plane bound for Quito, Ecuador to begin his ministry in missionary broadcasting. But he never arrived. In a horrible moment, the plane carrying Chambers crashed into a mountain peak and spiraled downward. Later it was learned that before leaving the Miami airport, Chambers wanted to write his mother a letter. All he could find for stationery was a page of advertising on which was written the single word "WHY?" Around that word he hastily scribbled a final note. After Chambers' mother learned of her son's death, his letter arrived. She opened the envelope, took out the paper, and unfolded it. Staring her in the face was the question "WHY?"

No doubt this was the questions Jesus' disciples asked when He was arrested, tried, and crucified. And it was probably the questions Joseph of Arimathea asked himself as he approached Pilate and requested the Lord's body (v.58). It must have nagged at him as he wrapped the body in a linen cloth, carried it to his own freshly hewn tomb, and rolled the massive stone into its groove over the tomb's mouth. In the face of his grief, Joseph carried on. He did what he knew he had to do. None of Jesus' relatives were in a position to claim His body for burial, for they were all Galileans and none of them possessed a tomb in Jerusalem. The disciples weren't around to help either.

But there was another reason for Joseph's act of love. In Isaiah 53:9, God directed the prophet to record an important detail about the death of His Messiah. The One who had no place to lay his head would be buried in a rich man's tomb. Joseph probably didn't realize that his act fulfilled prophecy. The full answer to the why of Jesus' death was also several days away for Joseph and the others. All he knew was that he was now a disciple of Jesus -- and that was enough to motivate his gift of love. Today in the Word, April 18, 1992.

Isaiah 60

Isaiah 60:19-22 Piercing the Darkness

The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Isaiah 60:19

I caught my first glimpse of them as a college student. On a frosty, fall night, far from the lights of the city, I was riding on a hay wagon loaded with noisy friends when the sky lit up and colors flashed across the horizon. I was mesmerized. Ever since that night I have been fascinated with the phenomenon called aurora borealis, also known as northern lights. Mostly they are seen far north of where I live, but occasionally they appear in lower latitudes. Having seen them once, I long to see more. Whenever the conditions are favorable, I say to my equally fascinated friends, "Maybe tonight ..."

Throughout Scripture, light and glory are used to describe the coming of the Lord. A time is coming when the sun and moon will be unnecessary (Isa. 60:19). And in describing God on His throne, the apostle John wrote, "The one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow that shone like an emerald encircled the throne" (Rev. 4:3).

God's glory is a light that pierces through the darkness. An emerald circle is an apt description of the northern lights. So whenever I see glorious light displays in the skies above—whether in person or via picture or video—I think of it as a foretaste of what is to come, and I praise God that even now His glory pierces the darkness.

Lord, the world around us is sometimes so dark that it is difficult to see Your power and goodness. Thank You for the reminders that the darkness does not and will not last forever. Help us wait with great expectation for the day when we will see You on Your throne.

Jesus came to give light to a dark world.

INSIGHT: In today's passage, Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of what life will be like in God's eternal kingdom. Using the imagery of light and darkness, Isaiah tells the people of Israel that the presence of God will ensure that their problems will never appear again. It is not that light simply makes problems disappear; it is that in the presence of God, only goodness and righteousness can exist. One day the darkness of our lives will be illuminated by the presence of God. J.R. Hudberg

Isaiah 60:17-22 Gone The Sun

Your sun shall no longer go down , ... for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. — Isaiah 60:20

In 1862, during the US Civil War, General Daniel Butterfield wanted a new melody for "lights out." And so, without any musical training, he composed one in his head.

Years later, the general wrote, "I called in someone who could write music, and practiced a change in the call of 'Taps' until I had it suit my ear, and then ... got it to my taste without being able to write music or knowing the technical name of any note, but, simply by ear, arranged it." General Butterfield gave the music to the brigade bugler, and the rest is history.

While there are no official lyrics to the hauntingly familiar strains of "Taps," here is a commonly accepted version of one verse:

Day is done, gone the sun,

From the hills, from the lake, from the sky;

All is well, safely rest, God is nigh.

What a comforting lyric as faithful members of the military are laid to rest! And what hope in the acknowledgment that God is near, even—especially—in death!

At a time when death and evil reigned, the prophet Isaiah anticipated a day when death itself would die. "Your sun shall no longer go down," he wrote to Israel, "for the Lord will be Your everlasting light" (Isaiah 60:20).

For those who follow Jesus, the strains of "Taps" are not a funeral dirge but a song of hope. "The days of your mourning shall be ended" (Isaiah 60:20). All is well. God is nigh.

Sunset in one land is sunrise in another.

Isaiah 61

Isaiah 61:1-3 The Oil Of Helpfulness

The Lord has anointed Me ... to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning. —Isaiah 61:1,3

There's a story of an eccentric old man who carried an oil can with him everywhere he went. If he passed through a squeaky door or a stiff gate, he applied oil to the hinges. His practice of lubricating made life easier for those who followed after him.

Nearly every day we encounter people whose lives creak and grate harshly with problems. In such situations we face two choices—either to aggravate their problems with a spirit of criticism or to lubricate their lives in the Spirit of Christ.

Some people we meet carry unbearable burdens and long for the oil of a sympathetic word. Others are defeated and feel like giving up. Just one drop of encouragement could restore their hope. Still others are mean and sin-hardened. Such people can become pliable toward the saving grace of Christ through regular applications of the oil of kindness.

When we receive Christ as our Savior and Lord, the Holy Spirit indwells us and equips us to bless others. If we're prepared to pour out God's oil of helpfulness every day and everywhere, beginning at home, we'll minister Christ's beauty and the oil of joy to many hurting people.

Perhaps the old man with the oil can wasn't so eccentric after all.

Putting It Into Practice

Lend a listening ear.

Pause to pray specifically.

Speak a word of encouragement.

The human spirit can gain new hope from an encouraging word.

Isaiah 61:1-3 New Start For A Broken Heart

He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted. —Isaiah 61:1

The Museum of Broken Relationships in Zagreb, Croatia, is filled with anonymously donated remnants of love gone wrong. There is an axe that a jilted lover used to destroy the furniture of an offending partner. Stuffed animals, love letters framed in broken glass, and wedding dresses all speak volumes of heartache. While some visitors to the museum leave in tears over their own loss, some couples depart with hugs and a promise not to fail each other.

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah wrote, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted" (Isa. 61:1). When Jesus read from Isaiah 61 at the synagogue in Nazareth, He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Extending far beyond help for an emotional wound, Isaiah's words speak of a changed heart and a renewed spirit that come by receiving God's gift of "beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:3).

All of us have experienced regret and broken promises in our lives. Whatever has happened, the Lord invites us to find healing, hope, and new life in Him.

Lord, You are the promise-keeping God who has said He will make all things new. Today we give You our ashes in exchange for Your beauty, our mourning for the joy of finding comfort in You. Thank You!

God can transform tragedies into triumphs.

INSIGHT: Today's Bible reading is a prophetic text that points to the arrival of the Messiah. It is not surprising, therefore, that in the synagogue of Nazareth Jesus selected a portion of this passage to announce His arrival and mission (Isa. 61:1-2). Luke 4:18-19 records for us this significant announcement rooted in Isaiah's ancient words. In the verbs used by Isaiah, we see the core of Christ's work (preach, heal, proclaim), and in the nouns we find word-pictures of the needy people for whom He had come (poor, brokenhearted, captives, bound).

Isaiah 61:1-3 The Power Of Praise

The Lord has anointed Me ... to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning. —Isaiah 61:1,3

Praise is powerful! When Scottish pastor Robert Murray McCheyne was troubled with a coldness of heart toward the things of the Lord, he would sing the praises of God until he felt revived in his spirit. Those in his household were often able to tell what hour he awoke because he began the day with a psalm of praise.

One day, while he was trying to prepare his heart for preaching, he wrote in his journal: "Is it the desire of my heart to be made altogether holy? ... Lord, You know all things ... I've felt so much deadness and grief that I cannot grieve for this deadness. Toward evening I revived. Got a calm spirit through [singing psalms] and prayer." McCheyne had been uplifted by praising God.

Perhaps you feel as if you are mired in what John Bunyan called the "slough of despond." Lift a song of praise to the Lord. The psalmist said, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever" (Ps 89:1). When we do that, the praise will flow not only from our lips but also from our heart. The Lord delights to give "the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness" (Isa. 61:3).

Yes, "it is good to sing praises to our God"—at all times (Ps. 147:1).

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,

To His feet your tribute bring;

Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,

Evermore His praises sing. —Lyte

If you find yourself wearing a spirit of heaviness, try on a garment of praise.

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Answers Can Wait

Read: Luke 4:14-22

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. —1 Timothy 1:15

David Herwaldt, a thoughtful, reflective pastor friend of mine, was slowly dying after 50 years of faithful ministry. He often talked with me about the nature of God and the eternity he would soon enter. We realized that we had only a superficial grasp of these mysteries, but we were not distressed. We knew that God had rescued us from our sin and guilt, and we rejoiced in our salvation. We had all we needed to obey the Lord gladly, live confidently, and serve Him gratefully.

When we are distressed by our inability to answer life's most vexing questions, we must remember that Christ did not come to satisfy our curiosity. Rather, He saw us as fallen and hurt, and He came to lift and heal.

When Jesus read Isaiah 61:1-2 to the people in the synagogue (Luke 4:16-21), He presented Himself as the promised Messiah, whose primary purpose for coming was spiritual. He came to deliver us from the helplessness of our spiritual poverty, to release us from the shackles of our guilt, to heal our sin-caused blindness, and to set us free from sin's enslaving power.

Let us therefore trust Him and make obeying Him our highest goal. This is the path to a grateful, joyous, and hope-filled life. The answers can wait.

When trouble seeks to rob your very breath,

When tragedy hits hard and steals your days,

Recall that Christ endured the sting of death;

He gives us hope, and merits all our praise. —Gustafson

Christ came not to satisfy our curiosity but to save our souls.

Isaiah 61:3 Everything Is Beautiful

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. —Joel 2:25

The beauty of the black lacy design against the pastel purple and orange background grabbed my attention. The intricacy of the fragile pattern led me to assume that it had been created by a skilled artist. As I looked more closely at the photo, however, I saw the artist admiring his work from a corner of the photo. The "artist" was a worm, and its work of art was a partially eaten leaf.

What made the image beautiful was not the destruction of the leaf but the light glowing through the holes. As I gazed at the photo, I began thinking about lives that have been eaten by the “worms” of sin. The effects are ravaging. Sin eats away at us as we suffer the consequences of our own bad choices or those of others. We are all its victims.

But the photo also reminded me of the hope we have in God. Through the prophet Joel, God said to Israel, “I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten” (Joel 2:25). And from Isaiah we learn that the Lord appointed him to “console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes” (Isa. 61:3).

Satan does everything he can to make us ugly, but the Light of the World can make us beautiful—despite Satan’s best efforts.

Sin ravages a fruitful life

When it is not addressed;

But God restores and makes us right

Once sin has been confessed. —Sper

God doesn’t remove all of our imperfections,

but He makes us beautiful by shining through them.

Isaiah 61:10 Buyer’s Remorse

Read: Genesis 3:1-8

He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness. —Isaiah 61:10

Have you ever experienced buyer’s remorse? I have. Just prior to making a purchase, I feel the surge of excitement that comes with getting something new. After buying the item, however, a wave of remorse sometimes crashes over me. Did I really need this? Should I have spent the money?

In Genesis 3, we find the first record of a buyer’s remorse. The whole thing began with the crafty serpent and his sales pitch. He persuaded Eve to doubt God’s Word (Ge 3:1). He then capitalized on her uncertainty by casting doubt on God’s character (Ge 3:4-5). He promised that her eyes would “be opened” and she would become “like God” (Ge 3:5).

So Eve ate. Adam ate. And sin entered the world. But the first man and woman got more than they bargained for. Their eyes were opened all right, but they didn’t become like God. In fact, their first act was to hide from God (Ge 3:7-8).

Sin has dire consequences. It always keeps us from God’s best. But God in His mercy and grace clothed Adam and Eve in garments made from animal skins (Ge 3:21)—foreshadowing what Jesus Christ would do for us by dying on the cross for our sins. His blood was shed so that we might be clothed with His righteousness—with no remorse!

Then will I set my heart to find

Inward adornings of the mind:

Knowledge and virtue, truth and grace,

These are the robes of richest dress. —Watts

The cross, which reveals the righteousness of God, provides that righteousness for mankind.

Isaiah 61:10-11 Frog And Toad

As the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord God will cause righteousness ... to spring forth. —Isaiah 61:11

One of my favorite children’s books is Frog And Toad Together by Arnold Lobel. Frog had a garden that Toad admired, and he wanted one too. So Frog told him: “It is very nice, but it was hard work.” When he gave Toad some flower seeds, Toad quickly ran home and planted them.

“Now seeds,” said Toad, “start growing.” He tried very hard to make his garden grow. He shouted at the seeds, read them long stories, and sang songs to them—but they didn’t grow.

“What shall I do?” cried Toad. “Leave them alone,” Frog said. “Let the sun shine on them, let the rain fall on them. Soon your seeds

will start to grow.” Then one day, little green plants appeared. “At last,” shouted Toad, “my seeds have stopped being afraid to grow! But you were right, Frog. It was very hard work.”

So many people think it’s very hard work to grow in righteousness. We must spend time reading the Word, praying, and cultivating our faith by being with other believers. But our progress in holiness is still dependent on God. As He shines His face upon us and rains His love into our lives, we will grow. Then righteousness will begin to “spring forth” (Isaiah 61:11). Don’t be discouraged if growth comes slowly. Soon you will have a garden.

Within the seed lies God’s creative power—

He’s given us the joy to see it grow;

And when He puts new life within our heart,

His wonder-working power we can know. —Hess

Spiritual growth depends on the water of God’s Word and the sunshine of His love.

Isaiah 63

Isaiah 63:3 Vengeance Is Mine

Read: Romans 12:17-21

Repay no one evil for evil. —Romans 12:17

The infamous 19th-century feud between the Hatfields and the McCoys started with a fight over a razorback hog. It turned into a vendetta that continued unabated for several decades. Members of both clans committed brutal murders, and their fighting brought heartache to every family in the valley of the Tug Fork River, along the border of Kentucky and West Virginia.

The men who started this bitter and destructive violence, William Hatfield and Randolph McCoy, were responsible for scores of deaths, but they were never brought to justice in a court of law. Although they both lived long lives, they had to watch the suffering and death of their loved ones.

Our vengeance—no matter how right our cause may seem to us—always goes wrong. Only God has the wisdom and patience needed to punish evildoers properly and to bring them to justice. He treads the winepress of His wrath alone (Isaiah 63:3), and He doesn’t need any help from us.

The world tells us, “Don’t get mad, get even!” But Paul gave us this instruction: “Repay no one evil for evil... Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord” (Romans 12:17-19). —DHR

Whenever life becomes unfair

And human judgments fail,

Remember, God will right all wrongs—

His justice will prevail. —Sper

We can endure life’s wrongs because we know God will make things right.

Isaiah 63:9 His Pain

Read: Judges 10:6-16

They put away the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel. —Judges 10:16

The Old Testament book of Judges is a somewhat depressing account of God’s people locked in a recurring cycle of rebellion, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. After every divine intervention, the process was repeated. It was always their pain that caused God’s people to call on Him: “The children of Israel said to the Lord, ‘We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray’” (Judges 10:15).

Six times in Judges they cried out to God, and each time He came to their rescue. But the Lord Himself was also in pain. In a remarkable statement, the Bible says of Almighty God, “His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel” (Jdg 10:16).

The misery we suffer because of our spiritual rebellion will always cause pain to the Lord. As the prophet Isaiah wrote: “In all their affliction He was afflicted” (Isaiah 63:9).

God’s suffering reached its zenith when His Son Jesus Christ went to the cross to die for our sin. We will never fully understand what it meant for the intimacy of the Father and the Son to be broken (Matthew 27:46-50).

It’s good to ponder the pain of God even as we praise Him for the marvel of our salvation.

Your love, O God, would spare no pain

To conquer death and win;

You sent Your only Son to die

To rescue us from sin. —D. De Haan

Sin brings pain—to us, and to God.

Isaiah 64

Isaiah 64 Bad Sinners Made Good

Read: Isaiah 64:1-12

All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. —Isaiah 64:6

Pastor Harry Ironside asked a man if he was sure he was going to heaven. “No, I can’t say that I am,” the man answered, “but I would like to be.”

“And just why do you want to be saved?” Ironside responded. “Do you realize that you’re a sinner?”

“Yes,” the man replied, “but I’m not what you would call a bad sinner. In fact, I’d have to say I’m a rather good one.”

Think of it—a good sinner! That’s a contradiction in terms! Sin is sin, and any transgression is bad enough to separate us from a holy and righteous God for all eternity (Ro 3:23).

Isaiah 64:6 states, “All our righteousnesses are like filthy rags.” We all stand in need of the saving grace of God. It makes no difference how few sins we may have committed, or how respectable we may be in the eyes of others. Until we are willing to admit our guilt, we are just as lost as anyone else, no matter how good we may appear to be.

Friend, if you’re not sure you’re going to heaven, admit your “lostness.” Place your trust in Christ, who died on the cross for your sins. You can know complete forgiveness and deliverance through faith in Him (Ro 3:21-28).

Actually, we’re all bad sinners. But through faith in Christ, we can be made truly good!

Tears unavailing, no merit had I,

Mercy had saved me or else I must die;

Sin had alarmed me, fearing God’s face—

But now I’m a sinner saved by grace! —Gray

No one is too good or too bad to qualify for salvation.

Isaiah 64 New Clothes

We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags. —Isaiah 64:6

Two men were talking not long after they had become Christians. One was a poor man from a godless background; the other was from an affluent religious environment. After each man told of his conversion, the man with the religious background asked the other, “Why do you suppose you responded the first time you heard the gospel, while so many years passed before I did?”

The poor man answered, "That's easy. Suppose someone came along and offered to give each of us a brand-new suit. I'd jump at the offer. My clothes are old and worn. But your closet is no doubt filled with the finest of suits. That's the way it is with salvation. You were probably satisfied with all your goodness, so it took you a long time to see the need for God's garment of righteousness offered to you through Christ. But I was deeply aware of my sinful condition, and I was eager to receive forgiveness and cleansing."

All people desperately need to be saved. Isaiah said that "all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Those who recognize their spiritual poverty and accept the priceless gift of salvation that comes through faith in Christ are given "new clothes" of righteousness.

What are you wearing?

No one can say he doesn't need

Forgiveness for his sin;

We all must come to Christ by faith

To have new life within. —Branon

No one is good enough to save himself; no one is so bad that God cannot save him.

Isaiah 65

Isaiah 65:17-66:2 Learning from the Redwoods

As the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people. —Isaiah 65:22

North America's Pacific Coast Redwoods are some of the biggest trees in the world. The tallest on record, Hyperion, soars 379 feet into the air.

During a visit to California's Muir Woods National Park, I was surprised and overwhelmed by the enormity of those redwoods. Trees as tall as a 30 story building seemed to press me into the forest floor while drawing my thoughts upward.

The memory of what I felt at the base of some of the tallest and oldest trees in the world has left me with lingering thoughts about their origin. Those redwoods, like the family tree of our own humanity, are rooted in a Creator who is infinitely and eternally greater than His creation.

The prophet Isaiah caught a glimpse of this God. In a vision that mingled the wonders of a Messianic kingdom with the promise of a new heaven and earth, he describes One who makes the skies His throne and the earth His footstool (Isa. 66:1).

Yet Isaiah saw something even more overwhelming. He saw a great God who wants His people to "be glad and rejoice forever in what I create" (Isaiah 65:18). In response, let's bow before Him in humble adoration (Isaiah 66:2).

How glorious to think ahead
Of blessings yet to be,
Of help from God while life shall last—
Then joys eternally! —Branon

God's work of creating is done; our work of praising has only begun.

Isaiah 66

Isaiah 66:7-13 Learning To Trust

Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. —Psalm 37:3

When I stuck my camera into the bush to take a picture of the baby robins, they opened their mouths without opening their eyes.

They were so used to having mama robin feed them whenever the branches moved that they didn't even look to see who (or what) was causing the disturbance.

That is the kind of trust that loving mothers instill in their children. That is the kind of mom I am blessed to have. Growing up, I could eat whatever food she put on the table without fear that it would harm me. Although she made me eat things I didn't like, I knew she did so because they were good for me. If she cared only about what was easy for her, she would have let me eat junk food. No matter what Mom told me to do, or not to do, I knew she had my best interest in mind. She wasn't trying to keep me from having fun; she was trying to protect me from being hurt.

That is the kind of relationship we have with God, who compared Himself to a mother: "As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you" (Isa. 66:13). As His children, we have no reason to fear what happens to us nor to envy what happens to others: "Do not ... be envious of the workers of iniquity" (Ps. 37:1). When we trust His goodness, we are fed by His faithfulness.

Lord, we're thankful for this example of motherhood.

But even more, we're grateful for Your faithful
"mothering" of us displayed in Your compassion
day by day. Help us to find rest in You. Amen.
God's care surrounds us.

Isaiah 66:5-13 Safe in His Arms

As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you. Isaiah 66:13

I sat next to my daughter's bed in a recovery room after she had undergone surgery. When her eyes fluttered open, she realized she was uncomfortable and started to cry. I tried to reassure her by stroking her arm, but she only became more upset. With help from a nurse, I moved her from the bed and onto my lap. I brushed tears from her cheeks and reminded her that she would eventually feel better.

Through Isaiah, God told the Israelites, "As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you" (Isa. 66:13). God promised to give His children peace and to carry them the way a mother totes a child around on her side. This tender message was for the people who had a reverence for God—those who "tremble at his word" (Isaiah 66:5).

We can depend on God's love to support us when we suffer.

God's ability and desire to comfort His people appears again in Paul's letter to the Corinthian believers. Paul said the Lord is the one "who comforts us in all our troubles" (2 Cor. 1:3-4). God is gentle and sympathetic with us when we are in trouble.

One day all suffering will end. Our tears will dry up permanently, and we will be safe in God's arms forever (Rev. 21:4). Until then, we can depend on God's love to support us when we suffer.

Dear God, help me to remember that nothing can separate me from Your love. Please assure me of Your care through the power of the Holy Spirit.

God comforts His people.

INSIGHT: Having warned of exile in Babylon (Isa. 39:6-7), Isaiah now comforts the Israelites with the promise that God will bring them back to Judea and bless them (Isaiah 40-66). This restoration is so certain and swift that it is likened to a woman giving birth to a child before she even experiences labor pains (Isaiah 39:7-8). What God promises, He fulfills (Isaiah 39:9). God will love His people like a mother loves her child (Isaiah 39:13)

[Our Daily Bread. Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. — Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#)