

Isaiah 40:18-20, 27-31 (New International Version, ©2011)

18 To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?

19 An idol! A craftsman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and casts for it silver chains.

20 He who is too impoverished for an offering
chooses wood that will not rot;
he seeks out a skillful craftsman
to set up an idol that will not move.

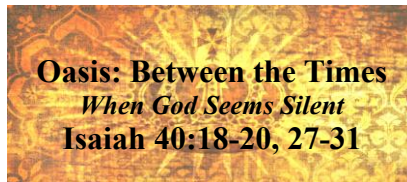
27 Why do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God”?

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.

29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;

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



Preface: Welcome to our 10th LC Bible study in our sermon series “Living God’s Story.” This year we are working our way through the Bible, from Genesis through Revelation. So fasten your seat belt—it is quite a ride! These LC studies will complement the sermons, often using the same biblical texts, and will help your LC go deeper in personal understanding and application. These italicized portions are meant to resource and help you in leading.

***Study’s BIG idea:** When it seems like nothing is happening, God is preparing the way for the next chapter in His Story and ours.*

Possible starter question (3 min.): There are times in all of our lives where we seem to “go through the motions.” What are some factors or situations that cause people to “go through the motions”? What would you say to a friend who is in a “going through the motions” time in life?

Transitional comment: In today’s passage, we hear the words to the prophet Isaiah reminding a nation of people that they are stuck - going through the motions. He encourages them not to turn from the Lord who has already done so much for them. God’s work in their lives is not over...he is ready to help them get “unstuck.”

(If you haven’t already prayed, pray for the Holy Spirit to lead your study, opening our eyes and hearts.)

Let’s listen as our passage/story is read: Read Isaiah 40:18-20 and 40:27-31

Personal time to re-read and ponder: Take several moments to read this again on your own. Think about what Isaiah is saying in verses 27-31 in light of what he says in verses 18-20.

Section I - Background Information—Is. 40:18-20

O What can we infer about the people of Judah from these verses?

I What is Judah’s posture towards God?

(n.b. Isaiah is a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah starting around 740 BC (before the exile in Babylon). King Ahaz, who ruled the southern kingdom from 735-715 BC, frequently worshipped idols (2 Kgs 16:3-4). Elsewhere in Isaiah, we learn the people have become blind and deaf, like the idols they are making (2:8; 10:11; 42:17). Throughout the OT we see the people of Israel turning from God to worship idols. Isaiah is pleading with them to remember that there is only one, true God.)

O What is the nature of the idols the people of Judah are worshipping?

I Why do you think the people of Judah would worship idols instead of the one, true God?

(n.b. Many times you would make an idol, bow before it and say, “Deliver me, for you are my god.” The intent is not to follow the idol, but to make the idol do what you want such as bring fertility to your wife or your crops.)

O In Isaiah 6 the people of Judah are described as blind and deaf, like their idols. How does Isaiah contrast these idols with the one, true God?

A What are some ways our culture participates in idol worship? What are some ways you personally participate in idol worship?

Section II - God will never give up! Re-read Isaiah 40:27-31

O What attitude of Judah is Isaiah pointing out in v. 27?

O Which characteristics of God does Isaiah choose to highlight? Why?

O Who is God resourcing in vs. 29-31? To whom does God promise to give strength?

O How does Isaiah challenge the situation of the people of Judah in v. 31?

(the paragraph below gives insight in to the situation of the people of Judah)

It has been nearly 700 years since the exodus from Egypt. The people living in Isaiah's time were not there to experience the grace and power of the Lord. These people did not live during the reign of David, who was arguably the only good king of Israel or Judah. They have not experienced the Lord the way generations before them had. In a time of a divided kingdom, evil kings, and civil war, the people of Judah did not have much to hope for. They must have felt as if they were not moving forward, they must have felt as if God had given up on them.

A In what ways do you find yourself in the same situation as the Israelites?

A Is there a time in your life when you felt that God didn't care, or that he had given up on you? How were you able to step back and gain perspective on your greater story? How were you reminded of God's undying love for you?

Unfortunately for us, we do not always have the strength to help ourselves out of these situations. However, what is fortunate is that when it comes to dealing with God, we don't have to have the strength! As Isaiah reminds us in verses 29-30, "He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even the youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength."

I How do you think Isaiah is preparing the people of Judah for the next chapter in their story?

A How do the words of Isaiah help prepare you for the next chapter in your story?

Conclusion:

A How have the words of Isaiah 40:27-31 challenged, stretched, or encouraged you tonight?

A This week, if you were to encounter a friend who was struggling with the feeling that God had given up on them, how would you encourage and assure him/her that God had, in fact, not given up on them?

A Do pray for one another—that you will be alert to and aware of God's presence in your everyday living.

Text notes (you can access biblical texts via www.Biblegateway.com)

- a. KEY: O = Observation; I = Interpretation; A = Application (or C = Challenge)

Advice to study leaders:

- a. Complement OIA questions with "process questions" (what else? what more? what do others think?).
- b. Remember that people learn best when they discover insights for themselves.
- c. Determine the core questions you'll ask (know which ones to skip if pressed for time).
- d. Always reword questions in words that are comfortable for you (and, if the question doesn't make sense to you, then discard it.) You want to "own" each question.
- e. When you ask questions, give people ample time to think and respond. Wait. Take your time; don't rush people but encourage their participation. And avoid answering your own questions!
- f. Timing/pacing: allocate your time and move forward gently, with a steady pace.
- g. Application: Pace the study to conclude with "difference making" application.
- h. Secondary texts—use other texts sparingly, even if they are relevant. Such texts will push you into "teaching," rather than facilitating. It can cause people to feel distracted or de-powered.
- i. I recommend the 1 vol. New Bible Commentary, Revised (21st Century ed, IVP). Well worth \$35.