

HOW TO DEAL WITH DESPONDENCY:

ISAIAH 40:31

“Popular Promises of Scripture Commonly Misunderstood ©

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Introduction: In some of the darkest times in our lives, when we've been hit really hard, perhaps repeatedly by some emotional or physical event that was either sudden or seasonal, we find ourselves exhausted & empty. We tried to recover but there are just too many reminders. The wounds seem never to heal & when we think they have healed, “*something happens*” & they break open once again.

For some of us, the wounds could be a marriage that did not live up to expectations. You *always* find yourself at odds with the person you committed yourself to love. Or perhaps the wounds involve your children. You watch them make terrible & costly decisions and with each decision made, you feel the dagger twist once again deep in your heart. For others it is a dream you know will never be realized. You use to dream, but like the clouds you used to watch lying on the grass as a kid, your dreams have moved beyond your range of vision. Then there are those of who feel the great loss when the people we love & know are snatched from us.

What should we do as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ when we feel the blows hit us hard and perhaps repeatedly? Do we give up, fall into the black swamp of despair, & allow ourselves seek to the bottom? How are we to go on after the sudden white squall or monsoon season devastated us? Perhaps you have found solace in the popular passage in Isaiah: 40:31:

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

How is this passage applicable to us when we have been hit hard by loss, pain, turmoil, & trauma? In order to appropriately apply this passage, we must step back into time and examine both the history & the theological truths which this application was given.

Isaiah 40:1-31: In an age when Hezekiah was King and Isaiah was his prophet, God miraculously delivered Judah from the Assyrian army. Unfortunately, because of this unbelievable miraculous victory & because of the healing Hezekiah received in view of a personal illness, the king

become prideful. And on an ill-fated day, envoys arrived from the King of Babylon bearing letters and a gift. In an effort to persuade Hezekiah to ally Israel against the King of Assyria, the representatives of Babylon flattered King Hezekiah. Feeding off the flattery & his own pride, Hezekiah made a costly mistake. Hezekiah took the envoys on a tour of all his treasures. As a result of such pride, Isaiah confronts Hezekiah over his prideful act & predicted that the Babylonians would invade & carry off all the treasure. Perhaps more tragic, this mistake would cost his descendants for one day in the future his descendants & his people will be taken captive by Babylonians & the best of what and who they are will be taken into bondage and find themselves serving a pagan king, a pagan empire, in a pagan land far from home. Interestingly, Hezekiah was content with the message because it would not occur in his lifetime. What does that say about him?

Isaiah's predictive prophecy came to pass. Approximately a century later, Judah became captive to Babylon. This prophecy was so certain that Isaiah, beginning in chapter 40, wrote to those who were held in captivity. In these very chapters God makes it clear that He is the one giving predictive prophecy so that those in captivity would be reminded that once again, He is their God & they are His people. So, when you look at chapter 40, know this: these words are written by Isaiah to those who will be in captivity to the Babylonians.

Seven Comforting Truths: What does God want His people know, to count on, when they are uprooted from Jerusalem, placed in bondage, and moved to live in a pagan & idolatrous empire? What comforting truths does God want His people in captivity to know (Isaiah 40:1)? They are at least seven I have observed. Once we understand these seven truths, then we will be in a better position to appropriately understand and apply verse 31:

1. Israel will be physically delivered (vs. 2);
2. Israel will be spiritually delivered (vs. 2);
3. Israel will be ultimately delivered (vs. 2);
4. Prepare the way of the Lord; nothing will stand in the way of their return (vv. 3-5);
5. God's Word Endures Forever (vv. 6-8);
6. God is the conquering, rewarding, and tender Shepherd-King (vv. 9-28);
7. God gives power to those who have none and gives power to those who are weak (vv. 29-30).

What truths to a nation in bondage because of their sin against God! What truths to know that their sin will be paid for as prophesied in detail in Isaiah 52:13-Isaiah 53:13! What truths to know that Israel will receive her promised kingdom blessings! Here is a nation whose people have been pillaged, destroyed, & scattered. Now Isaiah takes the characteristics of God and brings it to bear on their acute problem of despondency. Just imagine the scene: their nation has been destroyed. Their homes are gone! The open market where they bought food, the fields they worked, & the places where they gathered are pillaged. Their beloved place of worship has been destroyed. Their neighbors are dead or scattered. Children and parents have been divided if not displaced. Now, within the Babylonian kingdom, the Israelites are experiencing strange customs, seeing strange food, idolatrous worship, & strange celebrations. Everything the Israelites once cherished, loved, & took for granted has been taken from them & now they are in a foreign land experiencing both loss & new trials. I suspect the Babylonians did not necessarily treat them as equals but as conquered enemies.

So, verse 31 is the “so what” of these 7 truths. Here’s what you do Israel... You wait on the Lord! If you will wait on the Lord, then your strength will be renewed (vs. 31). With no effort at all, the eagle mounts, that is goes up, high into the sky. Likewise, the people of God will effortlessly climb from the depths of their despondency. They will not stumble nor fall to the earth because they have no strength. Instead, with the ease of the eagle, those who trust in God will soar on high. Moreover, those who wait on the Lord will not only fly, they will also run. When one runs every muscle is used. But in this case, whenever they run, they will never become physically exhausted. When they walk, they will never faint.

How we fly high, run, and walk is by “waiting” on the Lord. But what does “waiting” mean? To be sure, the word “waiting” is not used to mean:

- (1) Do nothing expecting something to happen. “Waiting” does not mean to stay in one place or do nothing for a period of time until something happens.
- (2) So many times we use this verse to mean to wait for God’s timing on a particular issue. But this is the wrong application.
- (3) This verse is not emphasizing “*hope for, wait for, look for, i.e., look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial, often with a focus of anticipation in a future event.*”

Instead, if you take the seven truths we just uncovered and bring it bear on this verse, the word waiting is used to mean, “*hope in.*” Some of your translations actually have that particular translation. The idea is, “*Put your hope in the Lord,*” that is, put your confidence, your trust in God.

What will happen if you will put their confidence in God? Those who put their trust in God will gain new strength. In his exegetical study of this phrase, “*shall renew their strength,*” Dr. E. J. Young offers a very helpful analysis of “*renew.*” He writes:

The verb used to describe those who wait on the Lord may be rendered they shall change or exchange. In this context the thought is of changing the strength one has for a better strength, hence the common rendering, they shall renew strength. Implied is a condition of weakness or lack of strength. What strength is possessed by those who wait upon the Lord will be exchanged for strength that is real indeed [*The Book of Isaiah*, 3:68-69].

While this future message from Isaiah is specifically given to the Israelites in captivity, this is a timeless truth for all believers in any age.

How Should We Then Live?

1. Put your confidence, your trust, your hope in God who is all-powerful, all-sovereign, all-knowing, and all-good.
2. If you will put your trust in God, no matter how dark your circumstances become, then God will sustain you with His strength!

Perhaps the best example of what this timeless truth of trusting in God looks like when applied is also found in Scripture. It was applied by a man who was also imprisoned. Down deep in a Roman dungeon the apostle Paul, who is jailed & chained, asserts in Philippians 4:10-13 that he has learned contentment no matter his circumstance. What is Paul’s secret? He declares in Phil. 4:13: “*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!*”

What are “road signs” that you are actually trusting God? Let’s explore this question negatively, then positively. To be sure, these roads are not absolute statements. Rather, these “road signs” point to this direction. For example:

You are perhaps not trusting in God when you are...

- a. Discouraged, extremely unhappy, or panicky;
- b. Spiritually tired & exhausted;
- c. Day-dreaming of a better life;
- d. Cannot get seem to get victory over your trials & temptations;
- e. Don't possess joy, that is, an overriding confidence in God's sovereignty;
- e. Manipulating situations to bring about what you deem is best;
- f. Losing precious time worrying about a certain issue.
- g. Serving God without knowing Him.

You are trusting in God when you...

- a. Do what God says even when it is hard to do so.
- b. Experience God's contentment no matter the context;
- c. Do not allow your circumstances to dictate your spirituality;
- d. Are able to be joyful...regardless;
- e. Face your problems and your fears with God-given trust;
- f. Worship God no matter how difficult your circumstances become;
- g. Trust God to work things out according to His timing.

How do you deal with Despondency?

Those dark moments can be overwhelming, long-staying, & quite treacherous. In those dark moments when you find yourself slipping into despondency, feeling as if you are held captive by a particular situation, problem, or dilemma. So, what do you do when your circumstances are striving to capture your heart & mind, rob the best parts of your life, and take everything you hold dear? You put your trust in God in view of who He is & what He has done for all those who have put their faith in Him.

1. If you doubt, then the look to your own history. In those moments when you had put your trust in Him, counting His promises to be true, He either delivered you or walked you through those pressing situations with His hand in yours.
2. If you doubt your own history, then look to the biblical record. You will discover that God used the most unlikely people to do His will, to walk in triumph, & He can do the same for you if you are willing to place your confidence in Him.

3. Or consider the wisdom of Oswald Chambers. In *My Utmost for His Highest* (October 3), Chambers states:

When you are brought face to face with a difficult situation and nothing happens externally, you can still know that freedom and release will be given because of your continued concentration on Jesus Christ. Your duty in service and ministry is to see that there is nothing between Jesus and yourself. Is there anything between you and Jesus even now? If there is, you must get through it, not by ignoring it as an irritation, or by going up and over it, but by facing it and getting through into the presence of Jesus Christ. Then that very problem itself, and all that you have been through in connection with it, will glorify Jesus Christ in a way that you will never know until you see Him face to face.

Therefore, if you have placed your faith in Jesus Christ, believing that He is God, who died on the cross for your sins & rose again, then you know who this God is! Face your circumstances as they are really are in the light of the reality of Jesus Christ! When you do that, you will soar like an eagle, you will run & not grow weary, you will walk & not faint, & you will know contentment no matter how dark & overwhelming your 'imprisonment' seems.

Final Thought:

Meditate upon Hebrews 4:16:

“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”