

# Isaiah 40 - Strength for Your Life

by Mariano Di Gangi

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*God can renew our strength, giving us the power to overcome challenges and run the race of life with patience and perseverance.*

**Duration:** 29:01

**Scripture:** Isaiah 40:28, Isaiah 40:31, Hebrews 12:1

**Topics:** "Strength"

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## Description

The sermon transcript discusses the challenges of facing the same routine day after day and how it can drain our energy and creativity. It highlights the apostle Peter's experience of going from a sensational and spectacular moment of converting 3,000 people to the mundane routine of ministry. The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a realistic view of God and engaging in lively debate and complaint with Him. It concludes by stating that if our strength is renewed by God, we will be able to soar like eagles and continue to serve Him even in the daily drudgery of routine.

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## Transcript

Reading from God's written word, the concluding section of the 40th chapter of Isaiah. Beginning to read at verse 18. To whom then will you compare God? What image will you compare him to? As for an idol, a craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and fashions silver chains for it.

A man too poor to present such an offering selects wood that will not rot. He looks for a skilled craftsman to set up an idol that will not topple. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood since the earth was founded? He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its peoples are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy. He spreads them out like a tent to live in. He brings princes to naught, and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

No sooner are they planted, no sooner are they sown, no sooner do they take root in the ground than he blows on them and they wither, and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff. To whom will you compare me, or who is my equal, says the Holy One? Lift your eyes and look to the heavens. Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls them each by name.

Because of his great power and mighty strength, and not one of them is missing. Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall, 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.

These are the words that bring to a stirring conclusion the magnificent 40th chapter of the prophecy of Isaiah. And it's interesting that this concluding passage should begin with a word of complaint. The Bible is not a cunningly devised fable for men and women of low intellect who populate Never-Never Land.

The Bible is nothing if not an intensely realistic book, and more times than we'd like to admit. When you look through the pages of the Bible, you find men and women engaging God in lively debate, men and women arguing with God, men and women pouring out their complaints and misgivings to God, men and women coming to grips with God, wrestling with him, wanting an answer. Much of the book of Job is like that.

Much of the book of the prophet Habakkuk is like that. Many of the experiences of the Apostle Paul would of that sort. And so is the initial section of the concluding portion of the 40th chapter of Isaiah.

Jacob says, and Israel complains, my way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God. It's not fair.

That's what the people are saying. And so our consideration of the text begins with the bitter acerbic note of complaint. The people complain that they have been bypassed by God.

The people complain that they are being ignored by God. Picture their situation and you can see why they had been deported and uprooted from their homeland and put into an alien pagan culture that was oppressive. They had been turned into exile and suffered from homesickness.

They were surrounded by alien ideologies, by a multiplicity of idols, by scales of values, which were contradictory to their own. They felt uprooted, exiled, homesick, out of place, oppressed. And to compound it all, they came to the nagging conviction that God had either too much else on his agenda to be preoccupied with the likes of them, or that God was going to let them continue to twist in the wind without any concern at all.

When we experience sickness, or are shattered by accident, or have prolonged periods of unemployment, or we suffer bereavement, or we feel ourselves caving in under the load of responsibility, more times than we like to admit, we join Israel and we echo the words of Jacob, why has God bypassed me? Why is it that God ignores me? Is it that he doesn't know about my situation? He's supposed to be omniscient. Is it that he doesn't care about my predicament? He's supposed to be loving. Is it that he would like to help, but he simply can't? Then why do we call him omnipotent? Is it that he knows and that he won't help? In which case, we have nowhere else to turn.

This was the experience of one of the greatest preachers the world has ever known, John the Baptist. And what happened with John the Baptist was that he had expressed himself forthrightly, he had defended the truth, he had dared to finger the most culpable person in the kingdom, namely the king himself. And for

this, he was rewarded by being thrown into prison.

And he heard the glowing reports of how Jesus made the lame to walk and the blind to see, how he unstopped the tongue of the dumb, and how he unblocked the ears of the deaf, and how he raised the dead and fed the hungry. Why then doesn't he come and spring me out of prison? Why does he let me suffer an imprisonment which is unjustly inflicted upon me? My way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

He rescued Daniel out of the lion's den. Why am I still in prison? He took Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and protected them in the burning fiery furnace. Why is it that I'm getting singed and will be burned to a crisp in the time of my affliction? Christians, under Nero, Domitian, Diocletian, and all that galaxy of men of might in military terms, but who were morally destitute and persecuted the church.

The Christians of the Roman Empire must have asked themselves the very same question and made that exact complaint. You ignore me. You've bypassed me.

Why haven't you helped the several hundred godly men and some women who were burned at the stake during the reign of Mary Tudor at the end of the 16th century? Could have voiced the exact same complaint. The millions of Christians who in this era of totalitarianism, particularly from the left, but also from the fascist right. The millions of Christians who have suffered imprisonment, torture, and execution in this century could very well express the same complaint from Russia and from China and elsewhere.

Why has God bypassed us? Why has he seemingly ignored us? And the Bible is intensely realistic. It doesn't cover this thing over. It doesn't whitewash it.

It presents a soul in agony, expostulating with the almighty. The text begins with a complaint, but the text continues with a correction. Do you not know? Have you not heard? Your view of God is distorted.

Your God is too small. Your concept of the almighty does not ring true to reality. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Have you not contemplated the character of God, the attributes of God, the nature of God, as he is revealed in his word? What God is telling Jacob, what God is saying to Israel is learn to think theologically.

Don't say, I believe in God, but I've got a problem. No say, I've got a problem, but I believe in God. And so the text moves from complaint to correction.

Remember, says the Lord, I am not a frail and fallible creature who grows weary, who becomes tired, whose strength is exhausted, whose understanding is limited. I'm not like that, says the Lord. I am the creator of the heavens and the earth.

And with my open hand, I flung the stars into space. And with my wisdom and my strength, I have maintained the universe to this very day. I am the God who has come down to this planet and expressed my loving kindness in sending you my son to be the shepherd of the flock, to gather the lambs in his arms and fold them close to his heart, to feed them in green pastures, and at the last to lay down his life for his sheep.

You have a very inadequate concept of God. If you think that he doesn't know that he doesn't care that he can't help or that he won't help. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Think again and recover a right view of God.

And in the light of that right view, then evaluate your present situation. He is a God of infinite majesty. He is a God of limitless mercy.

And so the complaint is answered by a word of correction. But beyond correction, God moves on to give people a word of consolation. For he says that it is possible for our strength to be renewed.

And that if our strength is renewed, then we will soar on wings like eagles. Then we will be able to run and not grow weary. Then we will be able to walk and not be faint.

This God of creation, this God of providence, this God of redemption, this big, wonderful God revealed in scripture is one who puts his reputation on the line. He says, I will renew your strength. I will give you the wisdom and the power that you need for the living of these days.

And that's a message that you and I exhausted with 300 plus days of 1990 need to hear as we set our faces toward the unknown future. Strength can be renewed. God doesn't say you're going to be spared from every kind of trouble.

What he does say is your strength will be renewed. My grace is sufficient for you. And my strength will be made perfect in your weakness.

I'm not going to give you lifelong perpetual immunity from problems. What I will give you is the strength that endures so that you can conquer in my name. And this is the word of consolation that our waning strength can be renewed.

When our strength is renewed, several things are bound to happen. We will be able to soar like eagles. We'll be able to run without becoming weary.

We'll be able to walk without fainting. What does it mean to soar like eagles? Think about it for a while. Picture yourself in a maze.

You're absolutely confused. You're perplexed. There seems to be no way out.

You can't find it. Every time you think you've got it, you come up against a dead end and your frustration increases and your discomfort level rises. But when you soar on eagles' wings, you get a different perspective on life.

And you're no longer living under the circumstances. You are above it all. And you are looking down and you can see the maze for what it is.

And you can see where you come in and you see where you can get out. While we are trapped within, we can't find our way out. But when God lifts us up and gives us a new perspective and we rise and soar on eagles' wings, we look at things through God's eyes from above and we begin to find the way out.

We are able to run and not grow weary. The Christian life was never meant to be a 60-yard dash. It is portrayed in Scripture not as a short sprint, but as a grueling marathon.

There is a goal that is set before us. We have to move relentlessly toward that goal in order to breast the tape and receive the award. And the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians speaks about running so as to attain.

When God renews our strength, we are able to run with unwearied pace. We are able to face a challenge and to rise and meet it. We are able to confront a crisis and overcome.

The Apostle Paul was aware of the long length of the race that the Christian must run. And at one point in his career, writing to the Philippians, he said, My dear brothers and sisters, I make no claim whatsoever to have already attained, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, lest I should become infatuated with my past successes and rest on achievements done yesterday and fail to progress today, this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and would cater to my pride, I press onward and upward to attain the goal, which is to be like Jesus Christ. It's not a sprint.

It's a very demanding long distance race. And when God renews our strength, we can tackle it and win. And isn't that what the author of the letter to the Hebrews meant in the twelfth chapter of his letter when he said, Surrounded with a great cloud of witnesses who have run the race and now rest from their labors, rich with their reward, surrounded by men and women who have a heroic faith and show us that it can be done because they've already done it.

Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the absolutely perfect example of one who began, continued and concluded his race with absolute faithfulness. And so we learn to lay aside every weight and the sin which does so easily beset and tangle us. And we run with patience the race that is set before us when God renews our strength.

When God renews our strength, we not only soar above the maze and see the way out. We not only run with unwearied pace toward the goal, but we are able to walk and not faint. Well, you say, if I had been called to be an editor of the original version of the 40th chapter of Isaiah, I'd have used a scissors and a Scotch tape dispenser, and I would have reversed these things because the way in which the prophet puts them is altogether anti-climactic.

Soar, run, walk. Wouldn't you have rearranged them? No, an Eagle soars. The runner runs with determination, but it's the plotting 365 days a year, year after year in the same dull, unspectacular, unchallenging routine that doesn't put a great deal of adrenaline into your system.

That's what takes it out of you facing the same kind of routine day after day. Ask any mother with two or three young children. She doesn't have the challenge of the sensational and the spectacular, but the routine responsibilities that sap your energy and take away your creativity day after day after day.

It's the sameness of things that takes it out of us. Can you imagine what the apostle Peter must have felt like after he got top billing on the marquee on the day of Pentecost and was known as the man at whose sermon spirit filled 3,000 people got converted at once? What do you hear about Peter after that? Oh, he's sent to speak to a family of people who had come from Italy and were part of an army of occupation in the country, the household of Cornelius. He's not preaching to 3,000.

It's dealing with a family. Or ministering to Aeneas and to Dorcas in the time of their need, one-on-one, writing a couple of letters inspired by the Spirit, but no more the thrill of seeing thousands converted by one powerful message. How much easier to rise to a sensational, spectacular challenge, a once-in-a-lifetime thing how difficult, how demanding to plot along in the daily drudgery of routine that characterizes the lives of 110% of us.

But when the Lord renews our strength, he makes us able to do even that. So it's not anticlimactic at all. It's the most demanding of them all.

And for this, our sufficiency is from God. A complaint, a correction, a consolation. One thing more by way of postscript, a condition.

What will it take on our part to be filled with the power and the renewal of strength which God in this text offers us? What's the condition? The King James Version puts it with poetic beauty when it says, they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. Charles Wesley discovered the secret of this. When in one of his best loved hymns, he wrote, other refuge have I none, hangs my helpless soul on thee.

Leave, I'll leave me not alone, still support and comfort me. They that wait upon the Lord, they that depend on the Lord, they that rely on the Lord shall renew their strength and they alone for the work that must be done and the race that must be run. One of my favorite Puritan authors was a man by the name of John Owen, not Glenn Owen, who was also one of my favorite preachers, but John Owen.

And there's a whole shelf of 20 magnificent and weighty tomes that came from his gifted Puritan pen. And in one of those volumes, he's got an exposition of the 130th Psalm where the author, out of the depths of his distress, guilt stricken in his conscience, cries out to God and waits on the Lord. And expounding that Psalm, John Owen said some things that are applicable to the exposition of Isaiah 40.

And I want to conclude with these because they're very important for us to grasp. He says, waiting on the Lord, that's the condition of having our strength renewed. Waiting on the Lord involves quietness, diligence, and hope.

Quietness, not panic, not impatience, but a quiet waiting on God. It involves diligence. We should not expect God to fill us with strength which comes from above unless you and I are willing to be diligent in making use of the means that he has provided for our own spiritual nurture and strengthening.

It's useless to say I'm going to wait on God to give me the moral and spiritual strength I need to live out my life. And then not feed yourself on the word of God. And then not stay in touch with mission control by means of prayer.

And then forsake the assembling of ourselves together with others of like-minded faith. And then abstain from the partaking of the Lord's supper. These are all means of grace.

They are meant to nurture us and to make us strong. And to wait on the Lord means not only that we have a spirit of quietness as opposed to panic, but that we do not neglect the means he has provided to strengthen our souls. We must be diligent in our use of the means of grace.

And there must be hope, expectation, that what God has promised God will fulfill. Those who wait upon 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. Let us pray.

Lord, we have heard your word through the prophet Isaiah, and we would treasure that word in our hearts and practice it in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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