

Message: Everlasting God
Sermon Series: Isaiah 40
By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison
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Isaiah 40:27-31

This text begins in despair. Israel is feeling overlooked by God. We can relate to periods of exile and captivity like Israel was experiencing. However, the shift from our problems to God's solution is evident. There is a God. This God is not like us. He does not quit. He does not grow tired. He does not faint or become exhausted. This God is strong. This is an eternal God. Verse 31 contains the key word: "*Wait.*" God will supply our need. God, who is rich in mercy and grace, will come to our rescue.

Paul described his feelings of struggle (2 Corinthians 1:8-11 and 2 Corinthians 4:7-18). He was no superhero. He was weak and vulnerable. He needed his friends to pray for him. He also offered some good words to the church in Romans 12:12-13, "*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.*" Paul had confidence that when he died, he would go to heaven. He described this confidence in the very last recorded words we have from him in 2 Timothy 4.

APPLICATION: Have you ever felt your way was "hidden" or "disregarded by God?" As always, we have a response to make. "Waiting upon the Lord" doesn't mean being passive, it means drawing strength from the One whose strength is never limited or exhausted. How do you think God will renew your strength? It's critically important not to lose hope in times of waiting. As the "Serenity Prayer" says: *God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*"

Isaiah 40:27-31

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.

v 27 is a **complaint** – "Why am I having such a difficult time? If we are God's people, why does God allow us to suffer?" Suffering, which is part of every life, seems unfair. We don't feel like we deserve this kind of treatment. We often question God's character and goodness. This continual complaint is obvious in the Bible: The children of Israel were always complaining/grumbling when things didn't go right for them. There are books of complaint: Job, the Psalms and there' even a book in the Bible called "Lamentations." These complaints are made because it seems like either God doesn't care what happens to people OR He can't help people. Suffering causes a lot of people to quit on God or in life.

This is just as common a complaint today as it was then. We went through a series called “The 2nd Mountain.” David Brooks describes going through a “**Valley.**” “**Wound**” would be another word to describe this suffering. Isaiah looks into the Jewish people’s future and foresees an **EXILE**. God’s people (Jacob/Israel) feel abandoned, doubting, hopeless and awaiting justice. Ecclesiastes was right, there’s nothing new under the sun. Suffering is part of the human condition.

Many people today live with feelings of exile:

Children (unsettled home life; trouble in school – saw a story about a young man who was a Haitian immigrant to Boca Raton, FL when he was in 1st grade and he was totally alone in school – the worst part was when he went to school and ate alone in the cafeteria – started something in HS called “No One Eats Alone.”

Parents – worried about so many things with their kids. Bullying, Addiction, college, drugs, sexual issues peer pressure, materialism. I did a memorial service yesterday for a wonderful man, Bob Spears, who had a great life up until 93. He outlived two wives. Present at the graveside service was a 70-year-old man who has been very successful in life – whose adult children were all killed in a plane crash 3 yrs ago. Yesterday was the first time he’d been to a cemetery since his children were killed. This is the Valley David Brooks describes

Adults – jobs, health, relationships – divorce – death. **Sr. Adults** – health. Isolation. **Spiritual** – where is God in all of this?

Victor Frankl endured imprisonment in Auschwitz + 3 other concentration camps from 1942 - 1945. He saw what made the difference between the survivors and those who died. It wasn’t a matter of physical health and strength. The difference between the living and the dead = HOPE – something to live for beyond the barbed wire, something to look forward to, something to go home to after the war.

He wrote it in “**Man’s search for meaning:**” *The prisoner who lost faith in his future was doomed. With his loss of belief in the future, he also lost his spiritual hold; he let himself decline & became subject to mental & physical decay. Usually this happened quite suddenly, in the form of a crisis, the symptoms of which were familiar to the experienced camp inmate. Usually it began with a prisoner refusing one morning to get dressed & wash or to go out on the parade grounds. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. He just lay there, hardly moving. If this crisis was brought about by an illness, he refused to be taken to the sick pay or to do anything to help himself. He simply gave up. There he remained, & nothing bothered him anymore.* The human response to exile is often a period of **hopelessness**. It’s the feeling of being locked into a concentration camp with nothing beyond the barbed wire of life. People just give up and die there. The lights go out. It’s a common condition called “**despair.**” 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”?* Who will turn the light on? Isaiah says its beyond human ability. There’s only one who can turn the lights on:

We need something beyond the barbed wire. A word group that is used 7x here: “faint” or “grow weary.” Weak, faded, dim, feeble, hazy, distant, muffled, diminished, wobbly, collapse, pass out, lose consciousness. Fainting = when things go dark. People grow weary and struggle. Our faith wanes and is weak. We are not courageous. We feel like quitting. Human strength at its best, in its prime, inevitably fails. Even the greatest of young men will fail. Darkness can be good = it’s hard to sleep when it’s bright but living in darkness is not good. It means ignorance at best, and evil at worse.

Our need: We cry out for someone to turn the lights on. Who? Some believe in “Science, technology and government.” Undoubtedly, these are tremendous resources but what Victor Frankl experienced was when a Fascist government used science, technology and economy to wage war. Hitler, Lenin, Stalin and so many evil people have moral values, but they were evil and led to the Holocaust and Gulag. We have more material things than any people in the history of the world – are we happier? Are we better? Or are we full of complaint about this or that? I’d say, “We’re normal.”

The Everlasting GOD = focuses on God’s Majesty/greatness. *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the heaven and the earth.”* vs. 26 told us: *“Lift up your eyes and see who created these.”* This begins another series of comparison and contrast: God is the opposite of us: He is Eternal; He is the Creator of all, He is always at work, He is always wise. Even our youngest, strongest and best disappoint. Human strength fails. God doesn’t. God created the heavens and the earth! He is everlasting! God is the only One who can meet our needs throughout eternity.

Cultivate 2 Responses:

1.) Gratitude/Generosity (Scrooge/the Grinch were neither grateful or generous) Despair shrunk their hearts - all they could think about was “ME.” “Exile” is not only being separated from my home, it’s also about turning inward. When we try to find the light within ourselves, we depress. One of the best things we can do while we wait is to HELP OTHERS FOLLOW JESUS. Find/build community. Witness. Prayer. Don’t isolate. Don’t wait alone. We feel so much better when we get out of our own world and do something for someone else. Mr. Rogers asked good questions, listened and cared. If you want to make an impact – be like Mr. Rogers, who modeled his life after Jesus.

2.) Patience. (Poem): Desperately, helplessly, longingly, I cried; Quietly, patiently, lovingly God replied. I pled & I wept for a clue to my fate... and the Master so gently said, " Wait." "Wait? You say wait?" my indignant reply. "Lord, I need answers, I need to know why!" Is your hand shortened? Or have you not heard? By faith I have asked, and I'm claiming your Word. My future and all to which I relate, hangs in the balance, and you tell me to wait? I'm needing a ' yes' a ' go-ahead' sign. Or even a ' no' to which I'll resign. You promised that if we believe, we need to but ask, and we shall receive. Lord, I've been asking, and this is my cry: I'm weary of asking! I need a reply. Then quietly, softly, I learned of my fate, as my Master replied again, "Wait." So, I slumped in my chair, defeated and taut, and grumbled to God, " So I'm waiting... for what?" He seemed then to kneel, and His eyes met with mine... and He tenderly said "I could give you a sign. I could shake the heavens and darken the sun. I could raise the dead and cause the mountains to run. I could give you all you seek and pleased you would be. You'd have what you want, but you wouldn't know Me. You'd not know the depth of my love for each saint.

You'd not know the power that I give to the faint. You'd not learn to see through the clouds of despair; You'd not learn to trust just by knowing I'm there. You'd not know the joy of resting in Me, when darkness and silence are all you can see. You'd never experience the fullness of love, When the peace of my spirit descends like a dove. You would know that I give, and I save, for a start, but you'd not know the depth of the beat of my heart. The glow of My comfort late into the night, the faith that I give when you walk without sight. The depth that's beyond just getting what you ask, from an infinite God who makes what you have last. You'd never know should your pain quickly flee, wait it means that My grace is sufficient for thee. Yes, your dearest dreams overnight would come true, but oh, what a loss, if I lost what I'm doing in you. So, be silent, my child, and in time you will see, that the greatest of gifts is to truly know me... and though oft My answers seem terribly late, my most precious answer of all is still WAIT"

Part of the answer = to "WAIT." But that's not all it says....Wait...**For the Lord**. This is more than killing time. It is living in confident suspense. Many people in the Bible had to wait. It took **Abraham/Sarah** a long time before the birth of Isaac; **Moses** had to wait for 40 years, twice. The **exiles** will wait for 70 years. Jesus told the **Disciples** to wait for the Promise of the Father – the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Paul had to go to seminary after his conversion to learn about the faith before beginning his missionary career. There is a long-term understanding of waiting before fulfillment. But we don't have to wait for a generation before we begin. It's less about WHAT we are waiting on and more about **WHO** we are waiting on. Don't seek hope in the wrong places. God is great enough to help us – He is near enough to WANT to help us. This is best found in Jesus. This waiting is about putting our trust in Him, here and now....and He will give us the strength to endure.