**What to Say When it Can’t Be Fixed**

*Helping People in Shattering Circumstances*

# Isaiah 40

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**Background –**

Leading up to chapter 40 there’ve been a string of horrible kings who’ve been ruling in Israel.

* King Ahazwas so wicked he began sacrificing children in the fire
* And instead of following God’s Word he even tried to re-shape the faith of God’s people to make it fit with the cultural trends of the day
* King Ahaz made a trip to Assyria to check out their cities and to see how they worshipped. And he was so taken with their worship and their ways that he even took measurements of one of their pagan altars so that he could make an exact replica of it to use in the temple of God in Jerusalem.
* And this went on for 16 years, until God gave them a good king – King Hezekiah
* But even the best leaders are faced with some of the toughest problems.
* As soon as King Hezekiah was in office he faced 3 great problemsthat are described in the chapters leading up to Isaiah 40:

#1 – He faced an overwhelming enemy in the North – Assyria

#2 – King Hezekiah himself became deathly ill during his reign, and the word of the Lord actually assured him that he was going to die

#3 – The king of Babylon – who was at that time not a very significant power in the area – heard about Hezekiah’s illness and sent messengers with letters and a gift, and Hezekiah foolishly showed them all the treasures of Jerusalem and everything in his palace.

* God sends the prophet Isaiah to tell Hezekiah, ‘You’ve made a desperate mistake because this nation you think is your friend is actually the one that’s going to plunder you, and carry everything you have to Babylon, including some of your very own descendants.
* In other words, this insignificant nation called Babylon is going to rise up and completely destroy you, bring an end to Jerusalem, and do it in a way that’s going to impact your descendants for generations to come!
* Can you imagine hearing all this for the first time?

So this great chapter of the Bible that so many of us love and know so well was actually written to a group of people who had just received some of the most devastating news that the future was not what they had hoped for.

Your future can change dramatically with one piece of devastating news that you didn’t see coming, and have not power to change.

* What do you say when there is no ‘fix’ and your counselee is living under a burden that God has allowed them to carry, that they may have to carry for years?
1. **Help Your Counselees to Know Who God is in the Midst of Their Shattering Circumstances**

4x in this chapter he calls us to ‘Behold’ something about God (v. 9, 10, 15), and then in v. 26 he says ‘Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created this universe.

The best way to persevere in hard circumstances is to make sure you’re always seeing more than just your circumstances. You have to do everything you can to help them see that ‘Who God Is’ intersects with their circumstances or they will lose heart.

* **2x** he uses the word ‘know’ in **v. 21** and **28**: ‘Have you not known? Have you not heard?’
* Hebrew word that refers to an experiential side that is beyond just cognitive knowledge – where a person enters into an intimate relationship with the object they are knowing so that they can rest and trust in that person.
* Hebrew word ‘Heard’ is also a word that means to hear in such a way to understand or comprehend the meaning of something, so that you grasp it in a way that makes a difference.
1. **Show Them How God’s Power and Authority are Never Frustrated by the Decisions of Earthly Rulers**

**v. 15-17** “15Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, And are counted as the small dust on the scales; Look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing. 16And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, Nor its beasts sufficient for a burnt offering. 17All nations before Him are as nothing, And they are counted by Him less than nothing and worthless.”

**v. 22-24** “22It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, And its inhabitants are like

grasshoppers, Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, And spreads them out like a

tent to dwell in. 23He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth

useless. 24Scarcely shall they be planted, Scarcely shall they be sown, Scarcely shall their

stock take root in the earth, When He will also blow on them, And they will wither, And

the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.”

1. **Show Them How God’s Love for His People is Never Diminished even in the Worst of Circumstances**

In the context of very grim circumstances, look at the tenderness of God.

**v. 10b-11** “Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. 11He will feed His

flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His

bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”

* We are His reward. He’s not talking about bringing us a reward. He’s talking about the fact that we are His reward, His precious people that He will tenderly care for in the very midst of shattering circumstances.
* This chapter shows both the power and personal tenderness of our sovereign God! You see the transcendence as well as the immanence of God!
1. **Help Your Counselees to Depend on God’s Word**
2. **Show Them How God’s Word is Set in Contrast to the Frailty of Human Beings in v.6-8**

**Isaiah 40:6** “… All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.”

1. **Get Them to Look Back – By Showing Them How God’s Word has Already Been Fulfilled in the Past in a Way that is so Very Encouraging for the Present**

**v. 3-4** Are promising and predicting the first arrival of the Messiah – Jesus Christ – and are talking about John the Baptist preparing the way 700 years before He was born.

1. **Get Them to Look Ahead – By Showing Them How God’s Word Points Us to the Future in the Midst of Shattering Present Circumstances**

**v. 5** Is talking about something even greater than the first arrival of Jesus Christ on this earth, because it says the ‘glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together.’

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18** “16Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

**Titus 2:13** “Looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ”

**Romans 8:18** “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

**Hebrews 12:2** “Looking unto Jesus (*NASB* Fixing our eyes on Jesus), the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

It changes how you live now when you have an eye for what is coming!

1. **Show Them How God’s Word Feeds Their Ability to Persevere and Take Baby Steps Forward**

**v. 31** “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.”

This chapter is all about God but v. 31 is about us, and the effect this chapter should have on us, because the intent of God’s Word is always bigger than information. It should lead to a transformation of how we live in the face of shattering circumstances.

* **Show Them How They Qualify for God’s Power**

**v. 29** “He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.”

**2 Corinthians 12: 9-10** “9And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

* **Help Them to Understand What Biblical ‘Waiting’ Looks Like**
* Hebrew word ‘Wait’ is not an empty, idle word, but is pregnant with meaning in the Bible.
* The root word means to look with eager expectation and steadfastness so that you can persevere as an expression of your faith.
* This word is an active, energetic word that requires faith. That means there’s no way to keep this biblical waiting alive without a steady intake of God’s Word!
* **Help Them to Appreciate Just Taking the ‘Next Step’**
* Look at the sequence of v. 31, because on a human level it almost seems anticlimatic: ‘… they shall mount up like eagles… they shall run… they shall walk.’
* God understands something we don’t: Steady walking, even if it’s baby-steps, is what the Christian life is mostly comprised of. Perseverance is what it’s all about. Slow and steady not flashy.

“I can plod. That is my only genius…To this I owe everything. The greatest heroes of the faith are NOT always those who are soaring but those who are simply taking the next step.” *William Carey*

**Ask your counselee:**

* What can you do to lean into really ‘knowing’ God experientially instead of just knowing \*about\* God?
* What can you do to feed your faith so that you can biblically ‘wait’ on the Lord?
* What’s the next step for you? Stop waiting to soar and just take the next step!