

# comfort

MY PEOPLE



MEDITATIONS ON ISAIAH 40

comfort

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**In circumstances when it's difficult to find something to hold on to, the words of Isaiah chapter 40 bring us comfort and hope.**

In the preceding chapters of Isaiah, the people are accused of rebellion against God and are warned of coming judgement in the shape of the fall of the kingdom of Israel to Babylon, followed by exile to that far off land.

But chapter 40 begins a new section of the book and speaks God's words of hope and comfort to a time 200 years later, when Isaiah's predictions had been proved true and the people of Israel are in exile in Babylonia.

**Perhaps at this time you are experiencing levels of sadness, fatigue, isolation and dryness. We hope this mini-series of devotional reflections will be a helpful resource to you.**

### **How to use this booklet**

Each reflection takes a small section of Isaiah 40 and encourages us to slow down and take the words to heart.

There is a suggested song as a way of staying a bit longer in the moment of reflection. If you want to and are able to, you can listen on YouTube.

While using these resources you may value time to talk or pray through issues that come up. If so, do contact a member of the pastoral team via the church office.

**T** 01444 482405 **E** [allsaints@lindfield.info](mailto:allsaints@lindfield.info)

# Life in exile

## MEDITATION 1

***Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.  
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her  
that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity  
is pardoned, that she has received from the  
LORD's hand double for all her sins.***

Isaiah 40:1-2

### **Imagine what life was like for the people of Israel.**

Their whole culture and identity were bound up in being a chosen people, with a special relationship with the one true God. Carried away into exile, their identity, their security, their hope for the future was shaken catastrophically.

These days must have been dark ones for God's people, far from home, of questioning and doubting.

Perhaps they asked questions like:

*Who are we now?*

*Does God still care?*

*Is he able to help?*

*Will he help?*

*How much longer?*

I wonder if you can relate to some of those questions and doubts? When doubts and struggles pile up, it's easy to become overwhelmed and lose sight of who God is, of his love, wisdom and power.

### **Pause to reflect**

In what ways does exile seem like a fitting description of your life at the moment?

# COMFORT, COMFORT MY PEOPLE

## **God's people were battered and reeling.**

For years they had felt God's absence and suffered being outside of his protection and favour. These words are a lifeline. In the midst of darkness, a familiar and welcome voice re-orientating them.

Picture a mother, full of compassion for her distraught and headstrong child, gathering him up, bringing him back to a safe place, grounding him in the security of her love and reassurance of forgiveness.

God's words are even more than comforting arms to make us feel better. His words flow from who he is and what he does. The rest of the chapter invites us to "behold your God" (v9) He calls us to look afresh at him and see him anew. To have our view of him enlarged and find comfort.

## **Pause to reflect**

Perhaps you'd like to imagine yourself into the picture of the mother with the distressed child being gathered up, brought to safety and reassured. Spend time asking God to help you behold him anew.



## Softly and Tenderly

Feat. Keith & Kristyn Getty

### ▶ **Softly and Tenderly**

*sung by Kristyn Getty, Vince Gill,  
Ellie Holcomb, Sierra Hull*

Here's a song you might like to listen to, that echoes the strain of needing comfort and the relief of finding it and coming home.

# In the wilderness

## MEDITATION 2

**A voice cries:**

***"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."***

Isaiah 40:3-5



We notice that the words of the prophet are addressed to a people in a spiritual wilderness and that the building of this glory-revealing highway is in the wilderness.

The wilderness is a featureless, stark, wild landscape, far from civilization and creature comforts.

Wilderness after the Exodus is the place where God's people learn to trust his leading and provision and protection, instead of their own.

The wilderness in the poetry and prophecy of the Old Testament describes dry places of sadness and grief, but is the place where springs and streams of water will break forth signaling comfort and joy.

Wilderness for Jesus was about digging deep into God for his identity and purpose, and feeding on the promises of God in a time of utmost vulnerability and temptation. It was his preparation time. Life in the wilderness may be dry, or perhaps wild and frightening. It may be a time of grieving, of repetition, of fatigue, of testing.

### **Pause to reflect**

In what ways do you relate to the imagery of wilderness at the moment?

# AND THE GLORY OF THE LORD SHALL BE REVEALED

**The wilderness is a hard place, but a place where something is happening.**

God is at work preparing, shaping, producing new beginnings.

For those in exile, God was unfolding his salvation story. The arrival of Jesus was on the horizon. Comfort was on the way.

Wilderness times feel like an intrusion into the flow and purpose of our lives. They feel fruitless, pointless, we'd sooner hurry on through to the next good bit.

To the promised comfort.

**But maybe God is working in the wilderness?**

Perhaps God is developing a character in you, changing you into his likeness so that his glory is revealed?

Perhaps God is showing you new depths of Himself?

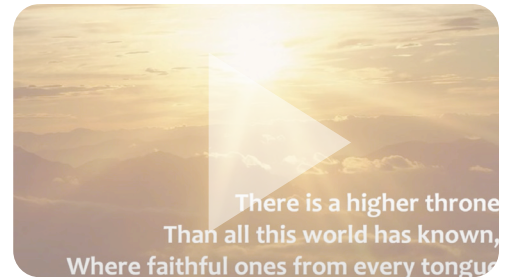
Perhaps you're drawn deeper into the scars of Jesus' suffering and his compassion?

Perhaps you understand more of your utter dependence on God. As you know him more deeply, you reflect that to others?

Maybe God is at work around you?

Are there people whose hearts God is preparing and wants to reveal his glory to?

Are there works of justice and care for the vulnerable that prepare the way for God, by revealing who he is and drawing people to him?



## ► **There is a Higher Throne**

*Keith and Kristyn Getty*

You might enjoy listening to this song, reminding us of the higher throne that will one day be revealed as we stand before God face to face.

### **Pause to reflect**

Ask God to show you what he is doing in your wilderness.

Ask God to reveal to you more of his glory, and take some time to worship him.



# The grass withers,

## MEDITATION 3

***A voice says, "Cry!" And I said,  
"What shall I cry?" All flesh is grass,  
and all its beauty is like the flower  
of the field. The grass withers, the  
flower fades when the breath of  
the LORD blows on it; surely the  
people are grass. The grass withers,  
the flower fades, but the word of  
our God will stand for ever.***

***Behold, the nations are like a drop  
from a bucket, and are accounted  
as the dust on the scales; behold,  
he takes up the coastlands like  
fine dust. Do you not know? Do you  
not hear? Has it not been told you  
from the beginning? Have you not  
understood from the foundations  
of the earth? It 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 like a  
tent to dwell in.***

Isaiah 40:6-8,15, 21-22

**I wonder how you respond to reading these verses?**

That the beauty around us is so fleeting, the grandeur around us so small. We so easily live and think as if the world was revolving around us at the center.

We can tend to resist thoughts of our own fragility. It makes us feel afraid or uncomfortable and threatens our sense of control over life.

God's words give us his perspective in the same way as photos of Earth taken from space. Often times of crisis bring heightened awareness of the briefness of life and our frailty.

### **Pause to reflect**

Allow God to bring to mind any thoughts and attitudes which need gently humbling in the light of your own frailty and his eternity.





# the flowers fade,

BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD  
WILL STAND FOR EVER

**Without the prophet's message of comfort and hope we might feel insignificant, alone and afraid, at the mercy of a far-off God, fighting for a sense of control.**

But Psalm 103:13,17 reminds us, that despite our fragility, we are loved. These are words often used at a graveside.

*As a father shows compassion to his children,  
so, the LORD shows compassion to those  
who fear him. For he knows our frame;  
He remembers that we are dust.*

But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him.

When we come poor in spirit, acknowledging our own frailty and our utter dependence on God, we have nothing to fear.

We have an infinite and eternal God who truly knows our frame, because he not only made us, but also took on human flesh to identify with us in our frailty.

I'm reminded of words from an old chorus:

*"LORD of infinity, stooping so tenderly,  
lifts our humanity to the heights of his throne."*

## Pause to reflect

Let your thoughts and imagination lead you to worship the God who sits above the circle of the earth.

Enjoy a few minutes of being aware of your breathing and resting in his unchanging, eternal love. Simply be still and know He is God and you are not.

From this place of resting, ask God to give you his perspective on some of the stresses and strains of your life.

Maybe there is someone you would like to pray for who doesn't know God, that they would confront their need of a Saviour.



## ► Consider the stars

*Keith and Kristyn Getty*

This gentle song might help you rest in the arms of Creator God who considers your worth to be greater than the stars.

# Who has measured the waters?

## MEDITATION 4

*Who has measured the waters  
in the hollow of his hand and  
marked off the heavens with  
a span, enclosed the dust of  
the earth in a measure and  
weighed the mountains in  
scales and the hills in  
a balance?*

*Who has measured the Spirit  
of the LORD, or what man  
shows him his counsel?*

*Whom did he consult, and who  
made him understand?*

*Who taught him the path  
of justice, and taught him  
knowledge, and showed him  
the way of understanding?*

Isaiah 40:13-14

**There is so much we don't understand.**

It can be uncomfortable. We often prefer neat answers and resolutions, we like the full picture and a definite time-scale, mystery troubles us.

In the pain of not understanding it can be difficult to trust.

Jesus models complete trust in the perfect wisdom of his Father, but we see that he too struggled. His human will questioning if there might be another way *"take this cup from me"* (Mark 14:36).

His human heart experiencing the silence of God.

### **Pause to reflect**

Take some time to bring before God those unanswered questions and prayers, struggles with his will and problems you don't know how to solve.

Do you need to talk to God about the times you have settled for human wisdom over the mystery of God's wisdom?

# HIS UNDERSTANDING IS UNSEARCHABLE

**God knows all things because he created all things.**

When I reach the end of my understanding,  
God's understanding stretches on. If I could  
get to the end of God's understanding,  
He would not be God.

Psalm 139 reminds me that God's knowledge  
and wisdom are also intimate: he knows all  
my thoughts; all my words before I speak  
them; all my days are counted; His thoughts  
of me are constant.

Charles Spurgeon, reflecting on the Creator's  
wisdom in these verses, says that *"To trust  
anywhere else needs a great deal of justification,  
but to trust in God needs no apology. He well  
deserves it. O my soul, trust thou in him."*

## Pause to reflect

Take some time to  
worship God for his  
unfathomable wisdom  
and ask him to make  
that a place of safety  
instead of fear.



## ▶ The perfect wisdom of our God

*Keith and Kristyn Getty*

This song reminds us that in  
God's tapestry of grace, each  
strand of sorrow has its place.



# He will tend his flock

## MEDITATION 5

*He will tend his flock like a shepherd;  
he will gather the lambs in his arms;  
he will carry them in his bosom, and  
gently lead those that are with young.*

Isaiah 40:11

The picture of God as the Shepherd of his flock is one to teach to your soul over and over. It's a promise to run to.

## HE TENDS...

**The Shepherd is ever attentive, recognising my need for leading, for protection, for pasture.**

Jesus tells me that he is the Good Shepherd who calls me by name, leads me by his voice, lays down his life for me, and brings me to pasture where I have fullness of life.

*You might like to read John 10:1-18*

### Pause to reflect

What am I like at bringing my needs to my Shepherd and letting him tend to them?

Pay attention for a moment to the response of your heart to the Good Shepherd who calls you by name and lays down his life for you. Turn that response into worship.



# HE GATHERS & CARRIES...

What might this look like to me?

Perhaps a sense of love so strong that it helps me to endure.

Perhaps a simple faith trusting that, even in the midst of struggles, I am indeed carried.

## Pause to reflect

You might like to picture the strong arms that are carrying you, or the single track of footprints looking back over your journey, God's footprints, that are the sign that you are carried and not alone.

## ...IN HIS BOSOM

There isn't anywhere nearer to God that I could be than next to his heart. His heart is the place of compassion, that feels all my joys and sorrows. It's where he wants me to be, in that place of intimacy. Yet how unaware and inattentive we can be to his heartbeat.

**King David was called a "man after God's heart."**

Perhaps his time tending sheep, when he would carry lambs, shaped his own way of relating to God as his Shepherd. In the highs and the lows of his life he learnt trust and closeness, openness and responsiveness.



## ▶ The Lord's my Shepherd *Stuart Townend*

You may like to listen to this song, reminding us that the Shepherd is leading us home.

## Pause to reflect

Is there something I can do which will help me be more attentive and responsive to the tenderness of being held next to God's heart?

# He does not faint

## MEDITATION 6

***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. He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength. Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; 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.***

Isaiah 40:28-31

### **Are you weary and weak, stumbling and falling?**

We all have different kinds of strength to different degrees, but all human strength is exhaustible.

Like a man-made cistern of water,  
with no deep spring to fill it up,  
we will run dry and empty.

There is a magnificent promise here, that those who wait for the LORD will renew their strength. But do I perhaps first need to acknowledge my weakness, my emptiness, my need, my dependence on him? How often do I slip into self-reliance?

### **Pause to reflect**

Take some time to tell God about the parts of you  
that are weary and fainting.

Are there ways that you have been frantically striving?  
Or keeping on keeping on in your own strength?

Listen to God's voice calling, challenging you to turn to him:

*"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."*



# THEY WHO WAIT FOR THE LORD

**The promise of God to renew strength is for those who wait for him.**

Waiting involves patience. God's timings are not my timings.

I can be impatient, hurrying God along to come through for me.

Waiting involves being expectant.

My expectations can be too small, I forget that nothing is impossible with God.

I forget that everything he has promised he has done in Jesus.

Am I waiting for him above all else, or has my hope taken on the shape of other things?

# HE GIVES POWER TO THE FAINT

God delights to give good gifts to his children. He can keep on giving and giving and never be diminished in any way. His strength will never run out. And he promises his strength to those who wait for him.

An eagle soaring looks effortless. As it catches the thermals it rises without seeming to fly. In the same way God loves to show his own power and glory by helping his weak children who wait for him.

*But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

2 Corinthians 12:9

## Pause to reflect

I ask God to increase my expectancy and my desire for his renewal, as well as my patience in waiting.

## Pause to reflect

Will you let God serve you in this way?

What do you need to do to position yourself to receive his gift?





▶ **Those who hope in the Lord**  
*Ellie Holcomb*

You might enjoy listening to this song while you hold onto God's promise.

**A prayer you might like  
to make your own**

Generous, loving Father God,  
I ask you to help me realise my own  
weakness and depend more  
and more on you.

I ask you to lead me deeper into  
experience of your power and grace.

Renew my strength and cause me  
to mount up on wings like eagles.

**Amen.**