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# GRATITUDE AND SERMON JOURNAL

## **Second Mountain**

October 14 - November 24, 2019

## **Isaiah 40**

November 25 - December 22, 2019

## **Promises**


December 23, 2019 – January 26, 2020



Dear Church,

The purpose of this “Gratitude and Sermon Journal” is to help us connect with the Lord through daily prayer and study. Furthermore, we want to help connect others to the church. The daily readings support the Sunday sermon. The reading on Monday is the sermon text for the following Sunday. I’m pleased that some of our groups, including Adult Discipleship Communities and prayer groups, use this journal to talk about the texts and the preaching on Sunday morning.

Asbury is deeply rooted in our “ancient” traditions (Scripture and the church) while also being focused on what is happening today and will happen in the future. If we lose touch with our past, we have no guidance. If we fail to have an application, then we become “rear view mirror” people. This “Gratitude and Sermon Journal” looks back at scripture and the teaching of the church while looking forward to the Lord to discern His will for us.

Tom



Consider using this journal not only for yourself, but also as an opportunity to meet with others in a small group. The Christian faith is about making disciples of Jesus. This journal provides a mutually blessed way for you to do precisely that. Below are some questions your small group may use for discussion each week.

**Weekly Small Group Reflection Questions:**

Review the key scripture(s).

Review the key point(s) from the sermon.

- How were you encouraged?
- How were you challenged?
- What questions did it create?
- What convictions did it bring?

What was the pastor asking of you, even expecting you to do in response?

# Scripture Readings

## SECOND MOUNTAIN

### MORE THAN ONE MOUNTAIN

- 14-Oct Matthew 16:24-28
- 15-Oct Matthew 16:13-23
- 16-Oct Matthew 17:1-13
- 17-Oct Romans 14:17
- 18-Oct Romans 15:13
- 19-Oct 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10
- 20-Oct Matthew 16:24-28

### VALLEYS AND THE SECOND MOUNTAIN

- 21-Oct Exodus 3:1-12
- 22-Oct Exodus 1
- 23-Oct Exodus 2
- 24-Oct Exodus 3:13-22
- 25-Oct Exodus 34:29-35
- 26-Oct Ruth 1
- 27-Oct Exodus 3:1-12

### VOCATION

- 28-Oct 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12
- 29-Oct Genesis 2:1-14
- 30-Oct Genesis 3
- 31-Oct Nehemiah 2
- 1-Nov Luke 10:25-37
- 2-Nov Ephesians 4:28
- 3-Nov 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

### MARRIAGE

- 4-Nov Genesis 2:15-25
- 5-Nov Song of Solomon 1:8-15
- 6-Nov Ruth 4
- 7-Nov 1 Corinthians 7:1-10
- 8-Nov Ephesians 5:22-33
- 9-Nov 1 Peter 3:1-12
- 10-Nov Genesis 2:15-25

### FAITH

- 11-Nov Acts 2:29-41
- 12-Nov Acts 9:1-9
- 13-Nov Romans 1:16-17
- 14-Nov Romans 5:1-11
- 15-Nov Philippians 3:2-11
- 16-Nov 1 Peter 1:3-9
- 17-Nov Acts 2:29-41

### COMMUNITY

- 18-Nov Acts 9:10-19
- 19-Nov Acts 4:32-37
- 20-Nov Acts 9:20-31
- 21-Nov Acts 12:1-19
- 22-Nov Ephesians 3:1-21
- 23-Nov Colossians 1:3-29
- 24-Nov Acts 9:10-19

# Scripture Readings

## ISAIAH 40

### COMFORT MY PEOPLE

- 25-Nov Isaiah 40:1-5
- 26-Nov John 14:15-24
- 27-Nov John 14:25-31
- 28-Nov John 16:1-15
- 29-Nov John 16:16-24
- 30-Nov John 16:25-33
- 1-Dec Isaiah 40:1-5

### GOD'S WORD AND A MIGHTY SAVIOR

- 2-Dec Isaiah 40:6-11
- 3-Dec John 1:1-18
- 4-Dec John 1:29-34
- 5-Dec John 10:1-9
- 6-Dec John 10:10-21
- 7-Dec John 10:22-42
- 8-Dec Isaiah 40:6-11

### THE GREATNESS OF GOD

- 9-Dec Isaiah 40:12-26
- 10-Dec Psalm 25
- 11-Dec Lamentations 3:25-37
- 12-Dec Isaiah 44:9-23
- 13-Dec Romans 8:18-25
- 14-Dec 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10
- 15-Dec Isaiah 40:12-26

### EVERLASTING GOD

- 16-Dec Isaiah 40:27-31
- 17-Dec Galatians 6:6-10
- 18-Dec 2 Corinthians 1:3-11
- 19-Dec 2 Corinthians 4:7-18
- 20-Dec 2 Timothy 4
- 21-Dec 1 John 5:1-15
- 22-Dec Isaiah 40:27-31

# Scripture Readings

## PROMISES

### YES!

- 23-Dec John 3:16-21
- 24-Dec 2 Corinthians 1:18-24
- 25-Dec 1 John 2:24-25

### THE HOLY SPIRIT

- 26-Dec Luke 24:44-53
- 27-Dec Acts 2:37-41
- 28-Dec Acts 10:34-48
- 29-Dec Luke 24:44-53

### A NEW IDENTITY

- 30-Dec 2 Corinthians 5:16-21
- 31-Dec Ephesians 1:1-14
- 1-Jan Ephesians 2:1-10
- 2-Jan Ephesians 2:11-22
- 3-Jan Colossians 3:1-17
- 4-Jan Revelation 21:1-6
- 5-Jan 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

### REST

- 6-Jan Matthew 11:25-30
- 7-Jan Matthew 22:34-40
- 8-Jan Luke 5:33-39
- 9-Jan Luke 22:14-23
- 10-Jan Hebrews 4:1-13
- 11-Jan Hebrews 4:14-16
- 12-Jan Matthew 11:25-30

### GUIDANCE

- 13-Jan 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22
- 14-Jan Proverbs 3:1-12
- 15-Jan Matthew 7:7-11
- 16-Jan John 16:12-15
- 17-Jan James 1:2-8
- 18-Jan James 4:13-17
- 19-Jan 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

### ENDURANCE

- 20-Jan 2 Corinthians 12:7-10
- 21-Jan 2 Corinthians 11:16-33
- 22-Jan Romans 5:12-17
- 23-Jan Psalm 118
- 24-Jan 1 Corinthians 13:4-7
- 25-Jan 1 Timothy 1:12-17
- 26-Jan 2 Corinthians 12:7-10



# **SECOND MOUNTAIN**

October 14 - November 24, 2019

## Second Mountain

David Brooks' "The Second Mountain" is one of the best books I've read. Beginning with the perspective of a secular Jew being drawn to following Jesus, he makes some astute observations. He understands the gospel and knows Christianity ultimately rises and falls on the resurrection of Jesus. I hope you will read his book. I will refer to it frequently during this six-week study.

Brooks describes the first mountain as "success." There is nothing wrong with having a good family, earning a decent wage, driving a nice car, living in a safe neighborhood, enjoying good food and taking fine vacations. However, Brooks argues from personal experience that there is more to life than the pursuit of happiness.

Brooks, who was rich and famous, experienced a personal crisis in his divorce. His previous first mountain of success was inadequate to help him overcome his loss. His emotional valley led him to discover there is a second mountain. He calls the second mountain "significance." We often stumble into this reality when we fall from the mountain of success and tumble into a valley. If we live long enough, we get there. No one can live on the mountaintop of success forever. We all have valley experiences. This is a great surprise to many. Psalm 23:4 says it well, "*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...*" Kings and queens all become valley girls and boys at one time.

This sermon series focuses on these two mountains and the valley experience between them. I repeat, I am not trashing success. As the old quote goes, "*I've been rich, and I've been poor and rich is better.*" However, there is more to life than winning and the accumulation of stuff.

The book is broken into five parts: The Two Mountains (Success and Significance) and the Four Commitments (Vocation, Marriage, Philosophy and Faith, and Community). Join me on this road less traveled.

MORE THAN ONE MOUNTAIN

Monday, October 14, 2019

Matthew 16:24-28

Following Jesus over His three-year ministry must have been the most exciting period in human history. Can you imagine the experience of His disciples? They saw Jesus turn water into wine, feed multitudes and walk on water. They watched in stunned amazement and joy as He healed the blind, the lame, the leprous and cast out evil spirits. He welcomed saints and sinners alike. He spoke to Gentiles, Samaritans and a wide variety of Jewish people. His sermons and teachings were unprecedented. Can you imagine what it was like when those men (and don't forget the women who followed, too) were invited to be part of His ministry? Why live on the "First Mountain" of just making a lot of money as a tax collector or a fisherman when you could live with significance on the "Second Mountain" by helping others follow Jesus? Peter's "Great Confession" in Matthew 16:16 was Peter's exclamation, "*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" Lest Peter try to take too much credit for his discovery, Jesus explained this truth was God's revelation. He also explained they would have to endure a difficult valley (His suffering and death) before they would be able to truly experience the "Second Mountain" of the Resurrection, the outpouring of His Holy Spirit, the birth of the church and our mission to make disciples of all nations.

Pay close attention to Matthew 16:26a, "*For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?*" Jesus is speaking about the emptiness of living on "The First Mountain" exclusively. It is a kingdom of self and "grab all the gusto you can" worldview. Jesus speaks about the kingdom of God as having a far greater significance—eternal significance. The kingdom of God is not about mere happiness, it is about moral joy.

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**APPLICATION:** Meditate on Matthew 16:26. What does "*gaining the whole world but losing your soul*" mean? How would you describe the difference between success and significance? Does this concept speak to you about a struggle you are having? How does following Jesus help you apply second mountain significance to first mountain dreams?















## SECOND MOUNTAIN

Monday, October 21, 2019

Exodus 3:1-12

The late evangelist, Billy Graham, had this quote: *"Mountaintops are for views and inspiration, but fruit is grown in the valleys."* Every person in the Bible had difficult times. Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Hannah, David, Solomon, Elijah, Job, Esther, Daniel, Nehemiah, Joseph and Mary, Peter, Paul and Jesus all suffered. Yet, their stories point to the fact that our adversity can make us strong and resilient.

In the chapter on "The Valley" in "The Second Mountain" (p. 26-37), Brooks explains how these struggles can move us beyond ourselves. Suffering can separate the trivial and insignificant from what is ultimately important. A proper response to suffering can teach us gratitude, generosity and compassion.

The chapter on "The Wilderness" (p. 38-43) is about Moses. He illustrates someone who lived on "The First Mountain" of success, was kicked to the curb and found himself in the valley (wilderness). Then he found the second mountain of significance. He, like Jonah, was a reluctant missionary.

The chapter on "The Committed Life" (p. 52-59) reminds us of one of the most amazing promises in the Bible – Ruth's commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). I think the core of "The Second Mountain" is found in chapter 8 (p. 60-82). We can have hopes, dreams and ideas, but nothing happens until we make a commitment to live in a different way. Like the saying goes: *You can't get 100% results with a 50% commitment.*

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**APPLICATION:** Where are you in life? Are you on the first mountain, in a valley, on the second mountain, somewhere in between or a combination of both or all three? What have you learned from your experiences? How can awareness and understanding of life's mountains and valleys help you live with wisdom no matter which place you are currently in? What commitments do you need to make now? How can you merge your commitments into a coherent, focused and joyful life?















## VOCATION

Monday, October 28, 2019  
2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

God is at work in Genesis 2. Even before sin entered the world, God gave Adam the assignment to work the ground. God's call upon human beings is we have the privilege to work. When sin entered the world in Genesis 3, the nature of work changed. What had been joyful became hard. Nevertheless, Nehemiah is a great example of a person called by God to go to work (repairing the walls of Jerusalem). The Good Samaritan modeled a great work ethic. The story of Martha complaining to Jesus about her idle sister, Mary, follows. The Apostle Paul stressed work and not idleness. When inspired in our work, great things are accomplished. The story is told of a reporter watching Mother Teresa of Calcutta as she cleaned the maggot-infested wound of a homeless man, only to say, "I wouldn't do what you do for a million dollars." As the story goes, she replied with a wry smile, "I wouldn't either." She felt God called her to her role.

I feel called by God to ministry as vocation. My brother, on the other hand, is a Christian in the workplace who is not called to pastoral ministry. His call is every bit as legitimate as mine. Christians in the workplace are to live out good values. However, those who pay our salaries don't pay us to be good people – they pay us to get the job done. Good attitudes/behavior + productivity is a package deal. I like the quote in "The Second Mountain" (p. 127): "Work is the way we make ourselves useful to our fellows. 'There may be no better way to love your neighbor,' Tim Keller put it, 'whether you are writing parking tickets or software or books, than to simply do your work. But only skillful, competent work will do.'"

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**APPLICATION:** Look up the definition for "work" and for "vocation." What is your vocation? How does your "calling" apply to where you are today? Would you say your vocation brings meaning to your work? Why or why not? Who has been your mentor? Who are you mentoring? On page 139, Brooks wrote, "The best advice I've heard for people in search of a vocation is to say 'yes' to everything." What should you say "Yes!" to?













## SECOND MOUNTAIN

Monday, November 4, 2019

Genesis 2:15-25

Most everything worthwhile is hard. Most every couple who has been married for a long time say that while it's been good, it's also been challenging. Some have a more challenging time than others. Marriage, like life, is full of ups and downs. In his book, "The Second Mountain," David Brooks explains how he fell off his first mountain of success and ended up in the valley of despair when he went through his divorce. Yet, by losing, he found there was more to life than just fame, fortune and family. He found a second mountain of significance.

Tim Keller's book, "The Meaning of Marriage," is the book I give to engaged couples. It has great insight. One of its central ideas is that our identity must come from someone greater than our spouse – we belong to Jesus Christ. Our only source of love and meaning cannot revolve around another human being. That is idolatry. We must love the One who has the Name above every other name. When we know that identity, we live with abundance in our other relationships. We have something to offer and to give to others.

Christian marriage unites two very different and imperfect people into a covenant knowing the greater purpose of their union is not merely for their own blessing, but for the blessing of the world. The wonderful story of Ruth concludes with her legacy. She blessed the world by her commitment during a very difficult period in her life. Her great-grandson was David. Ruth is part of the genealogy of Jesus.

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**APPLICATION:** Why is intimacy so challenging? What can be done to strengthen marriages? In "The Second Mountain" (p. 181), Brooks writes: "*Marriage, like all commitments, isn't there to make you happy; it is there to make you grow.*" Regardless of marital status, what are you doing to promote growth in your life?















## FAITH

Monday, November 11, 2019

Acts 2:29-41

In "The Second Mountain," David Brooks explains the strengths of his secular Jewish background. I've seen those strengths with my Jewish friends, too. He points out the power of ritual, community and Shabbat (p. 225-6). It is also rooted in action (p. 227). After his divorce, he began to investigate the Christian faith. Certain Christians have an offensive tenor and tone that makes it very difficult for people to be interested in hearing about Jesus. This often happens when Christians link following Jesus with a political agenda.

My favorite chapter in his book is 21, "A Most Unexpected Turn of Events." PLEASE read this chapter! Brooks tells of speaking with the late John Stott, an Anglican priest and scholar. I quote Brooks: "*Stott's voice...is friendly, courteous and natural. It is humble and self-critical, but also confident, joyful and optimistic. Stott's mission is to pierce through all the encrustations and share direct contact with Jesus. Stott says that the central message of the Gospel is not the teachings of Jesus, but Jesus himself, the human/divine figure. He is always bringing people back to the concrete reality of Jesus' life and sacrifice. It's about putting on the mind of Christ.*" (p. 227) He also quotes Stott: "*It is your sin I am bearing, your curse I am suffering, your debt I am paying, your death I am dying. Nothing in history or in the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness, until we visit a place called Calvary. It is there, at the foot of the cross, that we shrink to our true size.*" (p. 228)

Brooks understands being a Christian is all about a relationship with Jesus. Christianity rises and falls on the resurrection of Jesus. The Apostle Paul had "a most unexpected turn of events, too." The story is not about us. That is why our mission is "Helping Others Follow Jesus." HE is our story.

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**APPLICATION:** Do you ever get so caught up in Bible verses that you miss the Bible's stories? How are you at relating to Jesus, not just as Savior but as a companion and friend? What do the Gospel stories tell you about who Jesus really is? What about Jesus is so compelling that you want to help others follow Him, too?















## SECOND MOUNTAIN

Monday, November 18, 2019

Acts 9:10-19

In "The Second Mountain," David Brooks' introduction describes how American culture has become hyper-individualized. For more than 50 years, we have focused on the mountain of individual success. The result has been a drastic loss in community, identity and service. People bury their faces in their screens. Robert Putnam's book, "Bowling Alone," describes how people are still bowling, but not in leagues. We are not with others like we used to be. Civic clubs and faith communities show declines in participation. Brooks quotes from a book called "Lost Connections," how mental health challenges are ". . . at least as much about problems in life – protracted loneliness, loss of meaningful work, feeling pressured and stressed in the absence of community—as they are about one's neurochemistry. Protracted loneliness causes you to shut down socially, and to be more suspicious of any social contact . . . You become hypervigilant. You start to be more likely to take offense where none was intended, and to be afraid of strangers. You start to be afraid of the very thing you need most." (p.269) Brooks adds this line: "This sounds like a pretty good summary of American politics today..." I think loneliness is the biggest problem Americans are facing.

The first time "not good" is found in the Bible regards being alone (Genesis 2:18). We do not have to be married to find community. I think the church, even with all our faults, is still the best place to find community. I love Ananias' courage as he prayed for the healing of Saul. Our readings this week show the moral joy of the early church.

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**APPLICATION:** Where are you finding community? What prevents you from being in community? Are you actively seeking to engage with others? Don't wait for perfection; just begin. Say "yes" somewhere. Asbury offers a variety of classes so we can learn together and provides opportunities for us to have meaningful experiences in service and witness.















# **ISAIAH 40**

November 25 - December 22, 2019

## Isaiah 40

“Isaiah” means “God is salvation.” The salvation of God is the focus of this beloved Old Testament book. Some have called the book of Isaiah the “Fifth Gospel” because it gives the most prophetic picture of Jesus in the Old Testament. Chapters 1-39 deal with the struggles of the Israelites as their enemies, the Babylonians, overwhelm them.

Throughout his book, Isaiah keeps pounding away that there is no one like God. We do not need to be afraid! (41:10) God was not defeated, even though Israel was defeated, and its leaders carted into exile by the Babylonians. The Babylonian gods are nothing in comparison with the Almighty God. Isaiah wants people to know that though they have sinned; their sin has not separated them from God forever. God is not defeated by the Babylonian gods nor by the sin of the Israelites.

Isaiah recounts the sins of the people of God. They lived in rebellion. They turned their backs on the Lord. If people treat the Lord with contempt, it should be no surprise the same disrespect is shown toward others whom God has made in His image. However, Isaiah also describes the coming of the Messiah (40:3-5), His virgin birth (7:14), His proclamation of good news (61), His sacrificial death (52:13 - 53:12), and His return to claim His own (60). This is what Advent is about. We recall how the Israelites waited for the Messiah to come and how we now wait for Him to come again.

Chapter 40 is our Advent focus. It can be divided into three parts:

Verses 1-11 – has God rejected His people?

Verses 12-26 – the folly of other gods

Verses 27-31 – a beautiful application

Salvation is a gift from God. However, we must receive it, believe it and trust in God. God initiates – we respond.

COMFORT MY PEOPLE

Monday, November 25, 2019

Isaiah 40:1-5

Sometimes we experience brokenness in life, and we need tender expressions of encouragement. Life has a way of beating us up. Sickness, suffering and death are crushing companions. Our sin and the sins of others compound. We need comfort in times of sadness. Ecclesiastes 4:1 describes the pain: *“Again, I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.”*

Conversely, Psalm 23:4 says: *“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”* In other words, we yearn for comfort. We need a powerful one who can overshadow our enemies, and overcome our greatest adversary, death. We take comfort in knowing that God came and dwelt among us and He will come again.

Jesus said it was to our advantage for Him to go away because He would be sending another “Comforter” (King James version, but other versions call the Holy Spirit, the “Helper”). Isaiah 40:5 tells the most comforting news of all: *“And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.”* We live with the hope of God’s will being fully revealed. We may not see it, but it is coming. Good news comforts us. Our comfort ultimately comes from God’s glory, not human achievement. This is not merely good news – this is the best news. Ever.

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**APPLICATION:** Make it part of your Advent to give time and attention to those around you. Look for special ways to connect with strangers, too. Everyone needs encouragement and comfort. As we receive it, we can also give it (2 Corinthians 1:3-6). If this is a difficult season for you, Asbury’s Stephen Ministers are trained to listen, not lecture. Each Stephen Minister has only one person they connect with at a time, so they are not too busy. Consider calling 918.392.1183 to have a Stephen Minister assigned to you.













COMFORT MY PEOPLE

Sunday, December 1, 2019

Isaiah 40:1-5

**Sermon Notes:**

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Ironically, the Advent season can create hardship for us. Christmas is the one time of year we want things to go well. We feel shortchanged when we encounter pain. We remember our disappointments and grieve. We have a “Service of Remembrance” in the Chapel at 5 pm tonight. It is a time to remember loved ones who have passed and a time to pray. As David’s music comforted King Saul, so Rick Fraley’s peaceful, Christmas piano music comforts many of us, too. Join us in the Sanctuary tonight at 6 pm.

Monday, December 2, 2019  
Isaiah 40:6-11

The first two verses of our passage illustrate the contrast between God and us. I think of family and friends who have preceded me in death. We daily read the accounts of others who are like the beautiful flower of today that is gone tomorrow. The contrast between human flesh and the word of God is stark. That was true of the Israelites and their captors, the Babylonians.

God does not want us to live in perpetual fear, anxiety or depression about our mortality. God has offered us a plan. The Bible reveals that plan in a sweeping narrative. We find guidance, comfort and peace from the Scriptures. We have a message to share with the world. We want to proclaim the good news that our Savior comes to us in a mighty way. God is transcendent. Yet, God is near. God is like a good shepherd with strength to defeat the enemy and tenderness to protect His flock. Jesus is the Good Shepherd. He is both God and human at the same time. God has come to us in Jesus in both strength and humility. Jesus is both “the Lion of Judah” and the “Lamb of God.”

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said he was “a man of one book” (the Bible). It was his authority and guide. When the Scripture is not our guide, we are our own authority. The written word points us to our need for a savior.

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**APPLICATION:** We learn best in community with others. Asbury offers many Bible studies. We help one another. Pastors Dick Read and James Lambert are eager to help. Our pastors can connect you to places for spiritual growth. Biblical study and community have always been vitally important to Methodist people.















THE GREATNESS OF GOD

Monday, December 9, 2019

Isaiah 40:12-26

With whom can we compare God? There is none. Only God is great. God is the creator and the ruler of all nations. Look at the stars. Who created these? God isn't some material substance (water, mountains, gold) but rules over all things. He transcends. Other gods, nations and powerful rulers mean nothing compared to Him. Yet, this poses a problem. If God is Almighty, how did He let His people (the Israelites), be defeated by the Babylonians? It seems like their gods were stronger. The answer to this question is very important to understand. God is good. But we sin. That creates problems. When an entire nation (i.e. Israel) departs from the Lord, bad things happen. Yet, the good news is that God redeems because God is also good.

Why would anyone worship anyone or anything other than God Almighty? It is unwise to worship idols made with human hands. Isaiah made the contrast between God and us when he said people are like flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow. Yet in our hubris (exceeding pride), we fail to understand there is no comparison, only contrast, between humans and God. I could play "Chopsticks" on the piano but listening to a concert pianist play Bach or Beethoven is far more impressive. Our text today shows God is Creator, Counselor, immense, and the Holy One. He is also active and watchful.

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**APPLICATION:** Isaiah describes idolatry in his day. In your opinion, what are the idols of today? What idols do you struggle with? Consider reading Timothy Keller's book, "Counterfeit Gods." What are His attributes and character traits you most love and admire? What about the Lord makes you the most grateful? Write your words of praise to God today. Your written praise could take the form of a song (a psalm), a love letter or a thank you note.















ISAIAH 40

Monday, December 16, 2019  
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.

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**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."















# **PROMISES**

December 23, 2019 - January 26, 2020

## Promises

Many things come and go in life, but we have one constant – God's promises stand forever. We change but *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever"* (Hebrews 13:8). The following verse in Hebrews is also instructional, *"Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings, for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace..."*

As we celebrate *Christmas* and begin a new year, we want to strengthen and encourage our hearts by God's grace. Of God's many promises (and there are many), we will focus on six:

- Eternal Life (Yes!)
- The Holy Spirit
- A New Identity
- Rest
- Guidance
- Endurance

*"For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory."* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

YES!

Monday, December 23, 2019

John 3:16-21

When Thomas Jefferson and a group of men were about to ford a swollen river, a man who needed a lift to the other side flagged the travelers down. The hitchhiker could have asked any of the men for a ride across the river but chose Jefferson. After they crossed over, one of the travelers asked the man, *“Why did you ask him? Do you know who he is?”* The man had no clue it was Jefferson. He simply observed, *“I saw all of your faces. He is the one among you who had a ‘Yes’ face.”* It is helpful to think of God as having a “Yes” face. Unfortunately, far too many people think that there is a “No Vacancy” sign hung around God’s heart. Christmas, God becoming a human being, turns that completely upside down. Jesus Christ is the most YES FACE who has ever lived. He invites, welcomes, calls and desires us to be saddled to Him. Without Him in our lives, we are stuck and unable to cross over to the other side. Christmas is the message that God has shown up in Jesus Christ and has prepared a place for us. We have an invitation to climb aboard. All we have to do is say yes to the offer—to say yes to Jesus. Then we climb aboard and trust Him to carry us across.

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**APPLICATION:** When you think of God, do you think of a “Yes” or a “No” face?” Do you see the Lord as your friend and companion who wants to help or as one who is angered, indifferent or annoyed by you? Are you drawing closer to the Lord? How does Jesus’ incarnation, life, death, resurrection and continued presence help us understand that Jesus is God’s “Yes” to us? Have you said “yes” to Him? Do you have a “yes face” toward Jesus? Toward others?















PROMISES

Monday, December 30, 2019  
2 Corinthians 5:16-21

This is the first Sunday of the New Year. Our good news is if we are in Christ, the old has gone and the new has come. Because of our new identity in Christ we are forgiven and empowered. We don't have to be defined by our past or stay stuck in our present circumstances. When we become new, our status changes.

Because the old has gone and the new identity has come, we also have a new mission in life. Change happens best when we see things differently. That's why we need the church. We can lean into the wisdom and friendship of people who've "been there and done that." Young people need mentors to share experiences. Older people need young people to maintain enthusiasm and creativity. We need each other. If I didn't believe people can and do change, I'd not be in the ministry.

We can all learn, grow, change, develop, improve, expand, recover and progress. Let's explore what new things God has in store for us as He is making ALL THINGS new. This year, 2020, is a wonderful opportunity for us to sow good seed and produce a good crop.

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**APPLICATION:** Since we have been reconciled to God through Christ, our purpose in life shifts from being self-centered to Helping Others Follow Jesus. We live from a place of confident humility when we know who we are in Christ. As you go through our readings this week, record all the things the scripture says about who you are. This year, how can you help others find their identity in Jesus?















REST

Monday, January 6, 2020  
Matthew 11:25-30

God is always doing new things. Jesus said no one puts new wine into old wineskins because they would burst (Luke 5:33-39). Just as Jesus never performed a miracle in the same way, so He took old traditions and created something fresh and alive in innovative ways.

Jesus invites us into a relationship with Him. He doesn't ask us to obey more rules and to take on more tasks, but He invites us to "come to me." We like that invitation. However, His follow-up may be hard to understand because few of us have ever harnessed a pair of oxen together. "Take my yoke upon you" needs some explaining. In agrarian cultures, two oxen tied together can accomplish more than one. Often a strong ox is yoked to a weaker ox. Jesus is the strong ox. He does the heavy lifting and hard work. All we must do is walk with Him. The yoke won't chafe our neck if we don't try to lead the strong ox but let Him lead us. Staying yoked to Jesus results in the words He uses to describe this relationship: "rest, gentle, lowly, easy and light." These ARE needed words of comfort and assurance. When worn out and exhausted from our heavy labors, it is good to know there is a place of rest, in Jesus.

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**APPLICATION:** We have a choice to make – who will we be yoked to? We WILL be yoked to something or someone. In what areas of life do you tend to strive, toil and strain? How do you think Jesus could make that burden lighter? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you learn how to rest in His comfort—in all areas of your life.















## PROMISES

Monday, January 13, 2020

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

Many Christians ask: “*What is God’s will for my life?*” While it would be nice if detailed instructions floated down on a tablet from heaven, life doesn’t work that way. However, we can find in Scripture some basic truths about God’s will. For us to know God’s will first means we must have a relationship of trust with God (Proverbs 3:5-6). We must trust that God is good (Matthew 7:7-11). We must take steps of faith in God. We must have a proper understanding of who we are (2 Corinthians 5:17). We must maintain a measure of humility (James 4:13-17). We can also ask God for guidance (James 1:2-8).

Paul gives instructions in 1 Thessalonians regarding God’s will. Rather than describing what kind of job they should take he just says do not be idle. He doesn’t tell them which church to join because there was only one and whoever was leading it, should be respected. The will of God is for us to encourage, help, have patience, forgive, do good, rejoice, pray and be thankful. Maybe we should focus on this list and not on some other rabbit trails we tend to take. If our character lines up in the right way, the results usually work out well. If we are looking for a quick fix, we may get lucky, but we will never be the people God wants us to be.

Nobody does life perfectly. We all make mistakes along the way. Even if we’ve blown it and spent a lot of life wandering in the wilderness away from God, we believe people can still re-connect and find God’s purpose in life.

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**APPLICATION:** In what ways do you struggle with “analysis paralysis” or “fear of missing out”? How hard is it for you to make life decisions for fear of making a mistake? Do you think it’s possible there is more than one “right” or “good” choice? Why or why not? If God gave us detailed instructions about life, we probably wouldn’t have much room for growth or faith. Sometimes we must do the best we can with what we know.















## ENDURANCE

# Monday, January 20, 2020

## 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

Part of life is suffering. That is an inconvenient truth. There can be many causes of suffering. We can blame it all on Adam and Eve. After all, our first parents started the mess. We could also blame it on Satan, who is not our friend. Sometimes we know exactly where the problem lies but often, we are clueless as to the culprit.

The second Adam, Jesus, bore the consequences of the problems created by Adam in the Garden of Eden. Jesus, who is the “Yes” to all God’s promises, still suffered.

Paul, the great missionary and author, also suffered (2 Corinthians 11:16 – 12:10). One source of suffering, he called “a thorn in the flesh.” After he pleaded three times for its removal, (it must have been quite serious) he received a word from the Lord that God’s grace was enough for him even with his limitations. That led to a surprising reversal for Paul: *“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* We can endure because of God’s love and His grace.

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**APPLICATION:** What is your experience with suffering? How do you relate to Jesus in His suffering? Why is endurance so important? If you are suffering and don’t know where to turn, remember your greatest strength will always be found in the grace of Jesus Christ. He has given us His body, the church, to help us follow Him. Pastors and other Christ-followers are here to connect you to the help you need. If this is a difficult season for you, Asbury’s Stephen Ministers are trained to listen, not lecture. Each Stephen Minister has only one person they connect with at a time, so they are not too busy. Consider calling 918.392.1183 to have a Stephen Minister assigned to you.













