



Thanks for checking out our sermon-based Study Guides! If you've never used our Study Guides before, you'll find some basic instructions beginning at the bottom of page 2.

SERMON-BASED STUDY GUIDE
for the sermon preached on January 9, 2022
“The Power, and Problem, of a Promise”—Isaiah 40



We're all living in an in-between time right now—as families, as a nation, as a church. We're in-between a pre- and post-pandemic world. The life we used to know isn't coming back, but the new reality hasn't arrived yet—and we don't know when it will. This winter, we're looking back to another in-between time for God's people—the Babylonian exile—and remembering God's promises to them and to us through the prophet Isaiah. In a teaching series called Promiseland, we'll learn that God's promises can not only see us through this in-between time, but prepare the way for better times to come.

Group Discussion Questions

Q – Pastor Bryan began by asking us to think about a time when we were in between two things—in between jobs, in between houses or apartments, in between relationships.

- Invite a couple of people to share with the group a little bit about what that experience was like. What feelings do you remember from that time?

Q – As we begin to explore the promises God gave His people through the prophet Isaiah, let's take a few minutes to talk about promises—what they are, why they matter, and how we have experienced them.

- How would you define the word *promise*?
- When have you experienced another person keeping their promise to you, or when have you kept a promise that you have made to someone else?
- Why are promises important? Why do you think God makes promises to us?

Q – Invite a member of the group to read Isaiah 40:1-2 out loud:

“Comfort, comfort my people,
 says your God.
 Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
 and proclaim to her
 that her hard service has been completed,
 that her sin has been paid for,
 that she has received from the Lord’s hand
 double for all her sins.”

- What word, phrase, or image struck you from these two verses?

Now invite a second member of the group to read the passage again.

- What promises is God giving the people here? How do you think these words would have sounded to people living far from home, people suffering displacement and humiliation because of their stubbornness and rebellion?

Q – Ask someone to read Isaiah 40:4-5 for the group:

“Every valley shall be raised up,
 every mountain and hill made low;
 the rough ground shall become level,
 the rugged places a plain.
 And the glory of the Lord will be revealed,
 and all people will see it together.
 For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

- What is God promising the people in exile in this passage?
- What additional layer of meaning can we see in this promise after the birth of Christ?

Q – Pastor Bryan ended the sermon by talking about how, along with comfort, forgiveness, and rescue, God promises us *strength* for this in-between time. He noted that “Promises are about the future, but they change the present.” Invite someone to read Isaiah 40:29-31 aloud:

“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.”

- When in the past have you found comfort and strength in holding onto God’s promises?
- In what area of your life do you most need strength right now?
- In what ways can you lean in to draw strength from remembering God’s promises and trusting in his faithfulness?

How to Use These Study Guides:

- Consider sending out the Scripture passage to your group members ahead of time.

- Begin each meeting with a short time of checking in with one another.
- You may want to begin the discussion by reading the Scripture passage together out loud, or by summarizing the passage if everyone has read it ahead of time.
- Don't feel like you need to discuss every question included in the Study Guide. Pick one or two to start with, and see how the conversation flows.
- If your group meets over Zoom:
 - You may need to do more overt facilitating over Zoom than you would in person. Feel free to call on people to invite them to share.
 - Try to be sensitive to attention spans over Zoom—keep the meetings shorter than they would be in person.
- Be sure to set aside time for sharing prayer requests and praying together.

Group Leader Support: Please reach out to your Campus Pastor or your Coach if you have any questions about leading your group or concerns about your group dynamic. If you have questions about or feedback on the Study Guides, please reach out to Pastor Tim or Pastor Rachel from the Group Life team.