

September 12, 2021

Isaiah 40:31

Imagine eagles soaring and circling high in the sky. Or the California condor swooping and gliding. Or the pride of Grayslake - the turkey buzzard standing watch high in the trees, wings wide open, and then off they go to soar and circle high in the sky. But to say “they will soar on wings like turkey buzzards” just doesn’t sound very elegant or majestic, does it?

Whatever kind of bird we’re supposed to imagine - eagle, vulture, buzzard - imagine them soaring high in the sky. Soaring and swooping, soaring and circling - they make flying and climbing look easy. Wouldn’t it be great to be so full of life, so full of strength, that whatever you do, you make life look easy? ... to be so full of life that you never get tired? So full of strength that you could just go and go and never need to stop?

That’s the picture, the promise that Isaiah has for you: **“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.”**

Sounds good, doesn’t it? Or, does it sound too good to be true? Or maybe both? **“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.”** New strength, strength to soar, strength to go and live life with all its challenges without getting tired and worn out - that promise sounds so good. So good, it almost sounds too good to be true.

What do you say to people who say that this promise is too good to be true?

Why? I get tired and I grow weary. I get tired of COVID and even the talk of COVID. I get tired of masks and the talk of masks. I get tired of being careful so I don’t get sick so I don’t get others sick. I get tired of people getting bent out of shape because the world isn’t doing things their way. I get tired of people not doing what they’re supposed to do, not doing what they say they’re going to do; I get tired of me not doing what I’m

supposed to, not doing what I say I'm going to do. I get tired of the world judging and demanding; I get tired of me judging and demanding. Oh, I could go on ... I get tired of not eating right, not exercising right, not sleeping right. And on some more ... I get tired of the world pulling me away from God. I get tired of Satan twisting me inside out. I get tired of feeling guilty, tired of feeling stressed, tired of feeling tired. And I read our lesson - **"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"** - and some days I'm not sure whether it sounds so good to be true, or if it sounds too good to be true.

What makes the people in your life tired?

Why? Part of my problem is this: when I hear the promise **"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 I hear that promise, somehow I think Isaiah is promising life with God will be easy, soaring-eagle easy, energizer-bunny easy. It's so easy to get mixed up like that, isn't it? Instead of hoping in the Lord, we hope for the easy life. Instead of waiting for the Lord to do his thing, we expect God to do our thing and make life easier. And when he doesn't, then what? Blame him for not doing what he's supposed to do. But God doesn't promise us an easy life this side of heaven, does he? This side of heaven, he says "Expect life to be hard and exhausting."

Why might someone decide to wallow in their tiredness?

What are some other reasons people might think this promise "too good to be true"?

Why? I could say: "Life is hard and exhausting because we live in a world hell-bent against God and his ways, hell-bent against God and his people. Life is hard and tiring because we live in a world where Satan is out twisting truth to twist and turn us against God and each other." And that

would be true. But if I stopped there, I would be too busy pointing my finger, blaming others. Why is life so hard, so full of hurt and heart-ache, so tiring? Not just because of they and them and what they've done, but because of me and what I've done, what I've done against God; what I've done against others. The hurt and heartache we go through in this life is just a taste of the hell that we deserve. A taste that God gives us, not because he is against us, but to help us understand what we're doing to ourselves and to each other when we put my way and my strength in place of his ways and his strength. In other words, life is hard and tiring so we get tired of doing things our way instead of his way.

When we get tired enough of living life our way, what does God promise? **“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.”** Let me tell you what changed this verse for me, what changed this verse from “too good to be true” to “so good to be true.” That word “renew” doesn't just have the idea of “recharge” or “refuel.” God isn't promising just to recharge or refuel my strength. I need more than a recharging or refueling of my strength. That word “renew” has the idea of a switch. We get to switch out our strength for his strength. We get to switch out our deadness for his vitality. We get to switch out our tapped-out-tiredness for his never-tiring power.

The EHV reads: “Those who wait for the LORD will receive new strength.” How might that translation help us to understand “renew their strength”?

What does that mean? I think of the Apostle Paul. He had a pain in his life tormenting him; he called it a thorn in his flesh, a messenger of Satan. He prayed and prayed and prayed that God would take it away. Instead God answered: **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”** When Paul heard that, he realized he was falling into the trap of trying to live by his strength, and that God had a better power for him. With that better power, Paul responded: **“Therefore I will boast all the gladly about my weaknesses, for when I am weak, then I am strong!”** That didn't come easy for Paul. He learned it the hard way with a hard life.

But by hoping in the Lord, by waiting for the Lord, instead of just going through life cycling from trouble and more trouble to tired and more tired, over and over, Paul kept his eyes open, his heart and his head open to see what God was doing. Hoping in the Lord, waiting for the Lord, keeping his eyes open, keeping his heart and his head open to what the Lord could be doing, what did Paul learn? **“I am strong for all things through him, through Christ, who gives me strength.”**

Our NIV reads: “Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.”

Our EHV reads: “Those who wait for the LORD will receive new strength.”

What difference do you see between “hope” and “wait”?

What disadvantages and advantages do each of the words have for our understanding?

“I am strong for all things through him who gives me strength.”
“Those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles....” Sounds good, doesn’t it? But both Paul and Isaiah knew there is something more important than being strengthened with the strength of God. And that is being loved with the love of God. Carrying guilt, guilt inside, guilt before God, is hard and heavy. Living under law - “you better get it right, or else” - is hard and heavy. Living a life of fear, worry, stress is hard and heavy. Living a life with no hope, no better days to look forward to, no light at the end of the tunnel is hard and heavy. Hard, heavy, hopeless, and tiring.

But we don’t have to live that life! Jesus doesn’t just make us strong just to live and die a hard, heavy, hopeless, and tiring life. No, Jesus came to give us a new life. With Jesus and his cross, we don’t have to live a life of guilt, we get to live and soar as forgiven, sin and guilt gone, judged right by God. With Jesus and his perfect life, we don’t have to live a life wondering where we stand with God, trying to get in good with God, with Jesus we get to live and soar with God’s approval picking us up: **“You are my son, my**

daughter, whom I love, with you I am well-pleased.” With Jesus, instead of living weighed down by fear, worry, and stress, we get to soar - we have Jesus to help us, carry us, bless us. And that means, no matter how dark a day might look, we get to soar - we know a better day is coming - we have the best days of heaven coming! And in heaven it will be most true ...

“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.” Sounds so good to be true, doesn't it? Amen.

Think of a friend or family member who is tired.

What is keeping them from soaring?

What has Jesus done for them so that they can soar?

Is pointing to fulfillment in heaven a cop-out, importing something into Isaiah that Isaiah didn't have in mind?