Leader’s Guide

This guide is designed to aid in preparing and leading your group in discussion.

QUICK REVIEW
Looking back at your notes from this week’s teaching, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged or confused you?

Summary
The answer to all of our fears is found in the extraordinary promise of the Gospel to all in Christ: you belong to God and He’ll never abandon you. Just as God’s people in the Old Testament looked upon the greatness and power of their enemies and had reason to fear, so God’s people today tend to fear as we look upon our enemies. God’s words to God’s people today, however, are similar to those He spoke to His people in Isaiah 41:10: “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

As New Testament Christians, we now have clearer visibility into exactly what God meant when he said “I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” God’s most helpful act was the coming, dying, and rising of Jesus Christ because it brought righteousness forever by God’s righteous right hand to all who trust in Jesus. “Fear not…be not dismayed” for God has strengthened, helped, and upheld us in Jesus…and He always will!

Read Isaiah 41:8-10
NOTE: Here is a great, general paragraph from Oswalt’s commentary:

The first section, 41:1-20, aims chiefly at reassuring fearful Israel. Following on the themes introduced in ch. 40, it makes two points: (1) Israel need not fear the nations, who will be terrified by what God will do in their history (vv. 1-7, 21-29). (2) God has not rejected his people but will in fact use them to accomplish his purposes in the world (vv. 8-20). The purpose here is one of motivation. How can a condemned and fallen people ever become the Servant of God in the world? How can they begin to exercise the trust taught in chs. 13-39? The answer is unmerited grace: grace to defeat their enemies and grace that declares them not forsaken. Obedience that is motivated by fear is minimal obedience; but obedience that is a response to wholly undeserved deliverance is of a sort that does not ask about requirements. It asks if there is not more that needs doing.¹

NOTE: Below is a historical overview of the book of Isaiah from biblestudytools.com:

Isaiah wrote during the stormy period marking the expansion of the Assyrian

Sermon Series: Let Nothing You Dismay
Pastor Alan Wright
Message 1: Let Nothing You Dismay
Text: Isaiah 41:8-10
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empire and the decline of Israel. Under King Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) the Assyrians swept westward into Aram (Syria) and Canaan. About 733 BC the kings of Aram and Israel tried to pressure Ahaz king of Judah into joining a coalition against Assyria. Ahaz chose instead to ask Tiglath-Pileser for help, a decision condemned by Isaiah (see 7:1). Assyria did assist Judah and conquered the northern kingdom in 722-721 BC. This made Judah even more vulnerable, and in 701 BC King Sennacherib of Assyria threatened Jerusalem itself (see 36:1). The godly King Hezekiah prayed earnestly, and Isaiah predicted that God would force the Assyrians to withdraw from the city (37:6-7).

Nevertheless Isaiah warned Judah that her sin would bring captivity at the hands of Babylon. The visit of the Babylonian king’s envoys to Hezekiah set the stage for this prediction (see 39:1, 6). Although the fall of Jerusalem would not take place until 586 BC, Isaiah assumes the destruction of Judah and proceeds to predict the restoration of the people from captivity (see 40:2-3). God would redeem his people from Babylon just as he rescued them from Egypt (see 35:9; 41:14). Isaiah predicts the rise of Cyrus the Persian, who would unite the Medes and Persians and conquer Babylon in 539 BC (see 41:2). The decree of Cyrus would allow the Jews to return home in 538/537 BC, a deliverance that prefigured the greater salvation from sin through Christ (see 52:7).

8 But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; 9 you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, “You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off”; 10 fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Getting to Know Each Other

1. Of what animal are you most afraid? Why? How do you protect yourself from this animal?

The point of this question is to recognize a (hopefully) lighthearted fear and how folks combat it. This will be helpful as we endeavor in this Community Group to recognize our spiritual fears and how God’s presence in Jesus allows us to overcome them…or, said another way, allows us to “let nothing you dismay.”

Getting into the Bible

2. Consider Isaiah 41:8-10.
   ▶ Passage Observations:
      □ Who is Israel? Jacob?

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2 http://www.biblestudytools.com/isaiah/
Israel and Jacob are the same person. Jacob was the son of Isaac and Rebekah and the twin brother of Esau. God renamed him Israel and he fathered the twelve tribes of Israel. Thus, Israel/Jacob is shorthand for the people of God.

- Who is Abraham? Why is he important as we think about God’s choosing (verses 8 and 9)?
  God called Abraham in Genesis 12 as the start to God’s people. Abraham obeyed God and fathered Isaac by way of his wife, Sarah, in their old age. In so doing, God made him the father of many nations as his grandson Jacob fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.

It is important that the writer mentions Abraham in the same breath as God’s choosing because Abraham is the prototype for God’s choosing. God chose him while he was minding his own business in his homeland, told him to go to a new land, promised to be his God and make him the father of many nations. All this was God’s doing by God’s choosing.

- What words appear multiple times within this passage? Why are they important?
  - Chosen (2x): God wants to remind the people that he chose them and therefore he will not cast them off.
  - Servant (2x): God’s people are God’s servant meaning they are close to him and have special access. Oswalt notes that they are “under the special protection of the Lord because they are his servant.”

- Why does God tell the people not to fear or be dismayed?
  God tells the people not to fear because God is the people’s God. He is over and against the worthless false gods of the other nations. Further, God says he will strengthen, help, and uphold his people. God is able to do this because he is the only true God.

- What do you think it means when God calls the offspring of Abraham “my friend” in verse 8?
  Oswalt says in his commentary: “‘My friend’ (literally “my lover” or “my beloved”) suggests that election is not an austere, judicial act

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but is rooted and grounded in love, both the love of God for the chosen and the love of the chosen for God. Thus, as those particularly chosen to serve God, offspring of his unique friend (Abraham), they have nothing to fear.”

Passage Interpretation:

- What did this passage mean to the original hearers?
  See the background information above. In a tumultuous time in God’s people’s history, they are not to fear the power and strength of their enemies because God’s presence is with them. He is the only true God and will put to shame all the worthless gods of the other nations.

- What does it mean to us today after the coming of Christ?
  The New Testament is clear that Christians’ struggle is not with flesh and blood but rather with spiritual forces, which include Satan, demons, sin, and our own fleshly desires. The message is the same for us today: we can withstand and overcome these enemies by the strength and power of God who is with us and will never forsake us in Christ. He’s given us his Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing this truth.

Advent Application:

- How are all God’s promises in this passage fulfilled in the coming of Christ? How should this affect your life?
  In the coming of Christ, God defeated Satan, sin, and death. When we trust in Christ we have Christ for all time, thus, God will “not cast [us] off (verse 9), “is our God (verse 10),” and has strengthened, helped, and upheld [us] with [His] righteous hand (verse 10).”

Application

3. What are your spiritual fears? How does the Gospel of Jesus empower you to overcome these fears? How can you appropriate the Gospel in times of fear?
   Jesus often tells his followers not to be afraid. While scary foes exist, Jesus wants his followers to have the power to overcome them by his power. We do this by recognizing again and again that God is our God and we have him finally and for all time in Christ…no foe can take Him away! If this is true, we can say to our foes, “Do what you will. My God is God and he will ultimately and finally defeat you. In him I cannot lose and therefore you don’t scare me. I will be not dismayed.”

4 Ibid.