

KORI DE LEON



UPHELD

MEETING OUR TRUSTWORTHY
GOD THROUGH ISAIAH

A **6-WEEK** BIBLE
STUDY EXPERIENCE



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WELCOME

Dear friend,

I am thrilled that you've decided to join me on the transformative journey of encountering the trustworthy God of Isaiah!

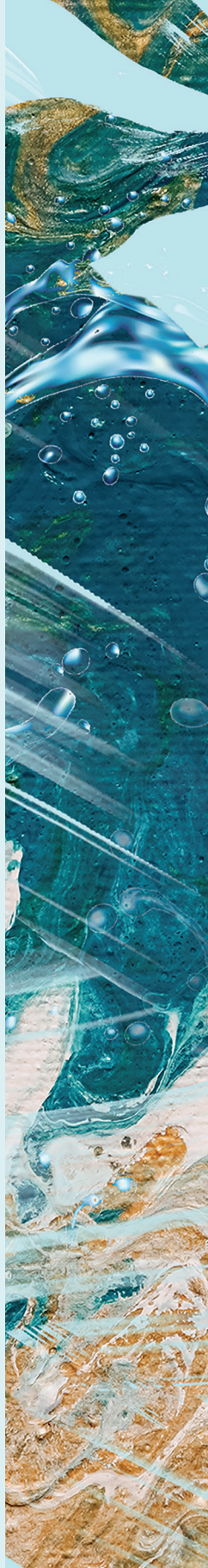
I believe we can identify with the Israelites who were walking through difficult days, yearning for assurance and the comforting words of God: "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

In these challenging times, we find ourselves surrounded by confusion and anxiety amid political unrest, a global pandemic, inflation, and a world that is drifting further away from a Christian worldview. Perhaps you were drawn to this Bible study because you are in an overwhelming season of life. Or maybe you are simply seeking relief from the weight of your daily concerns by discovering how to walk more in the burden-bearing grace of God. My heart is with you, as I can relate to both!

It is easy to fall into subtle, dark thoughts that we are all alone and without help in this world. As a result, we may develop habits of trying to manage everything in our own strength or anxiously looking around us for help. However, as time passes, the weight of fear wears us down, leaving us restless throughout the night, draining our energy, and leaving us feeling weary and faint.

In my early twenties, when I encountered the gospel and began my relationship with Jesus Christ, his Word spoke to my anxious heart and began unraveling this chain reaction of wrong thoughts. It became clear to me that we were all once separated from God and left without hope in the world. However, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have entered into a covenant relationship with God (Ephesians 2:12-13). The Lord has a special love and care for his people, which is revealed in Isaiah 40-48, where he assures us that we are not alone in this world. The Lord will be with us when we walk through the overwhelming waters of life. He will strengthen us to be his witnesses in a dark era. And he will bring us safely home. Why? He is faithful to his people, who are precious to him!

Knowing and trusting God is our new reality, and each of us is on a journey of learning how to walk in the comfort and confidence of Christ each day. The challenges we face are diverse and complex. We seek strength to nurture our young children and care for aging parents, wisdom to navigate the tumultuous middle



school and teenage years, and support as we walk through seasons of singleness. When battling sin, temptation, and the worry that God will forget us, we need hope and perseverance. We long for healing in fractured relationships, deliverance from the adversaries who oppose us, and so much more.

I've discovered that Isaiah 40–48 is a treasure trove for developing the habit of calling out to God and walking confidently in the help he provides. In these pages, God intimately enters into the hardships of his people, revealing his stunning character. And he presents us with a comprehensive catalog of comforts that address the various struggles we encounter in this fallen world. In other words, God does not simply say, “Do not fear; I will help you.” He graciously showcases a gallery of specific ways he will uphold us. And are you ready for this? The Lord beautifully envelops his promises in poetic words, painting vivid images like stars and eagles for us to behold with our eyes as we go about our day. As we picture and ponder God’s promises, we will find comfort and strength for our souls.

Each week’s study begins with a group session, including a video where I share key concepts; then the group will explore the Scripture together. Five individual studies follow.

Through this study, we will learn a practical approach to putting off old habits of fear and seeking help from inadequate substitutes for God. And we learn how to walk in new patterns of calling out to God and waiting with humble expectation for the help he provides.

More importantly, Isaiah leads us beyond the hand of the helper to a deep love and adoration of his heart. The prophet showcases one of God’s unique features: “From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for him” (Isaiah 64:4). Did you catch that? Unlike false religions that demand human efforts to please their gods, our God finds delight in working on behalf of those who place their trust in him! God calls us to let go of self-reliance and the exhausting efforts of striving in our own strength, and instead to look to him as our provider, protector, and source of joy. When we call to God for help and wait with patient faith, we will see his wondrous works in our lives, becoming witnesses who share our stories of his glory, leading others to trust and adore him as well. And at our study’s end, we will sing with Isaiah, “Who is like the Lord? There is no God like him!”

Eager to grow on this journey with you, *Kori*

HOW TO STUDY YOUR BIBLE


*Great are the works of the LORD,
studied by all who delight in them.
Full of splendor and majesty is his work,
and his righteousness endures forever.
He has caused his wondrous
works to be remembered.*


PSALM 111:2-4


I am so excited to study the great works of God with you! Studying God's Word should not be a dry endeavor whereby we accumulate knowledge in the folders of our minds. When done rightly, it is the worshipful journey of beholding the person and works of Jesus Christ and becoming more like him each day (2 Corinthians 3:18). But a question people often ask me is, "How can I grow in studying the Bible?" I would like to introduce you to some steps we will take each day to equip you to study God's Word while we study Isaiah together.

Let's read and observe God's Word.

One way to begin reading and observing a passage from the Bible is to ask the 5Ws and H: who, what, when, where, why, and how.


 **Let's look at the backstory.** God revealed himself to specific people in specific situations at specific times. Understanding the backstory of our passage will give us a richer understanding of God's message.

 **Let's look through the lens of literature.** God speaks to us in the Bible through different types of literature, such as narrative, poetry, proverbs, letters, visionary literature, and more. Isaiah 40–48 is almost entirely written in poetry, utilizing rich imagery to touch our emotions, imaginations, and intellects resulting in a transformative experience with God's Word.

 **Let's draw out the Author's intended meaning for our lives.** We want to understand God's message rather than create the meaning ourselves. Therefore, we will contemplate everything drawn out of the passage and identify what it meant to God's original audience. We are not exiles in Babylon, but God's character and our human nature do not change. Therefore, we can draw out timeless principles to apply to our lives today!

Let's see how this passage points to Jesus Christ and the gospel of grace!

In Luke 24:44-48, Jesus teaches that all the Scriptures point to him! Both the Old and New Testaments point to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this, of course, is the *gospel*. The New Testament quotes Isaiah more than any other Old Testament prophet. Therefore, at the end of each week, we will reflect on how Isaiah's message ultimately points forward to the person and work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

 **Let's be transformed by putting off the old and putting on the new.** Let's not stay the same. Let's grow together by participating in God's transforming work. We will do this by putting off our old sinful life patterns, like taking off yesterday's clothes. And we will put on the new attitudes and actions that reflect the character of Christ!



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Whether you are engaging in this study with a large group, a small group, in a coffee shop with a friend, or by yourself in your favorite chair, here are some helpful suggestions.

FOR THE GROUP SESSION

Set aside a designated day and time for a weekly gathering—in person or virtually—for the next six weeks. The content (video and discussion) will take about an hour, but I recommend allowing some additional time for a check-in or to share prayer requests.

The videos are accessed through the QR code in the book. These videos were created with a group in mind—that you would watch the video together and then immediately engage in the content that follows. But it also means that individuals still have access, which is nice if someone has to miss a group gathering.

A FEW TIPS ON ENGAGING IN A GROUP DISCUSSION

- Be willing to participate in the discussion. The leader of your group will moderate the conversation, and it helps them to have willing participants.
- Be careful not to dominate the discussion. We are sometimes so eager to express our thoughts that we leave too little opportunity for others to respond. By all means participate, but also make space for the insight of others.
- Be sensitive to the other members of the group. Listen attentively—you might be surprised by their insights!
- When possible, link what you say to the comments of others. This will encourage some of the more hesitant members of the group to participate.
- Stick to the topic being discussed and try to avoid “rabbit trails.”

- Expect God to teach you through the content being discussed and through the other members of the group.
- Pray that you will have an enjoyable and profitable time together, but also that as a result of the study you will find ways to respond individually or even as a group.
- Remember that anything said in the group is considered confidential and should not be discussed outside the group unless specific permission is given to do so.

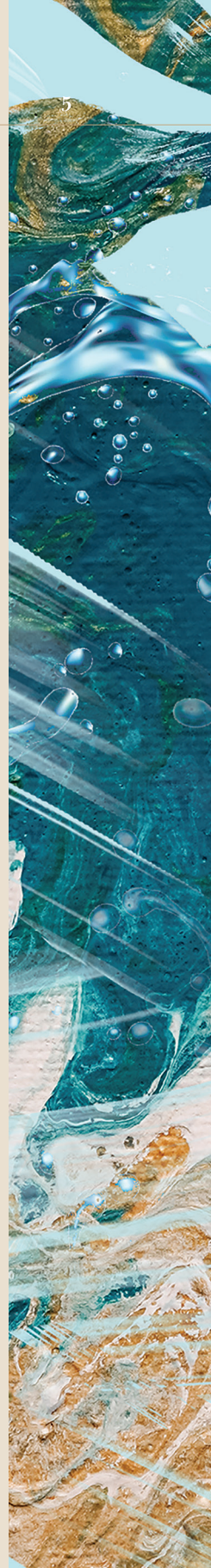
If you have time, a good check-in question might be to name a highlight from the last week of study—either from the group session or individual days. This study was designed so that you could still participate in the group session even if you haven't done all the homework, but—of course—I think you'll still want to engage with everything!

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL DAYS

Following the group session are five days of content for you to engage with during the week between group gatherings. I wrote this study with you in mind—so the content is meaningful but not overwhelming, and it's designed to fit into your normal, everyday life.

A FEW TIPS FOR ENGAGING IN INDIVIDUAL STUDY AND REFLECTION

- As you begin each day, invite God to speak to you through his Word.
- Write your answers to the questions in the spaces provided or in a journal. Writing can bring clarity and deeper understanding.
- Keep your Bible handy—you'll be using it to look up passages. Sometimes I find it's helpful to look up a passage in another translation, and most often I use an app on my phone for that.
- It might also be good to have a Bible dictionary handy to look up any unfamiliar words, names, or places.
- At the end of each day, thank God for what you have learned and pray about any applications that have come to mind.





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 40:31

WEEK ONE | TURN TO GOD FOR COMFORT

Group Session

If you were at my house, we would be seated in my living room, sipping coffee and enjoying God’s rich design for relationships. What begins with curious introductions can blossom into kind acquaintances and deep soul connections in time. Though I am not with you in person, I am grateful to be able to join you through the video. And I pray for fruitful fellowship as you journey through this study together! In our group



session, I will guide you through short readings with one another, followed by discussion.

View the week one video to begin this group session.



READ TOGETHER

The Book of Comfort. *Where can we find comfort and hope on difficult days? How can we exchange our anxieties and concerns for confidence in the help God provides?* Isaiah 40–48 answers these questions, growing us into worshippers of God who live confidently with him.

In the book of Isaiah, God’s people were walking through tough times. They were no longer living in the glory days under Solomon’s reign, but rather they were the rubble of a nation in decline due to sin. Like many today, people were faint of strength. They lived in an insecure world, and the faith of some flickered like a flame that could easily be extinguished.

Though God refined his sinful people through the fires of affliction in the Babylonian exile, he did not forsake them. His faithfulness shone through his special love and care for his people. And he entered into their hardship, awakening humble expectations for the help he would provide.

In Isaiah 40–48, God gave his people a catalog of comforts to carry them through the diverse difficulties they would face on their journey from captivity to restoration. Each form of comfort points to a greater help coming for believers in Jesus Christ, giving us powerful principles and

promises to apply to our lives as we walk through this fallen world to our eternal homeland!

DISCUSS TOGETHER

I am eager to show you how God uses vivid imagery to uplift our hearts and showcase different forms of help that he delights to give his people.

1. Take a moment to read the list “Images in Isaiah” found in the back of this study. How do these pictures reflect God’s unwavering faithfulness in helping his people?

2. Which pictures stand out to you as being helpful for people in our world today? Why?

READ AND DISCUSS TOGETHER

Recurring themes. Recurring themes surface in Isaiah 40–48, emphasizing the main points God wants to impress on our hearts. Let’s discuss three messages we will continue to see throughout our study.

Turning to the God of all comfort. “Comfort” is a keyword and theme in Isaiah 40–48. God teaches us to find our help, strength, and comfort in him. He is trustworthy, and we can bring all our fears, heartaches, and needs to him. The apostle Paul echoes this message in the New Testament, saying God is the God of all Comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so we can comfort others. Let’s look at a few examples together.

ISAIAH 40:1-2 | ISAIAH 41:10

6. How is God's comfort different from the world's forms of comfort (Isaiah 43:2-4)? How does remembering God's care for his people change our mindset when we need help?

Knowing the incomparable God. We seek what we think will satisfy us. And we end up in captivity when we think someone or something *other than* God will ultimately make us happy and flourish. Judah was in a miserable condition because they exchanged the Lord for substitutes for him (Jeremiah 2:11). But through Isaiah 40–48, God fights for the hearts of his people using poetic devices like dramatic irony and sarcasm to mock idols that cannot profit. Isaiah also juxtaposes God's uniqueness with the worthlessness of idols to show how God alone can help his people.

ISAIAH 40:25-26 | ISAIAH 46:3-7

7. In what ways do both of these verses reveal the uniqueness of God? Why should this lead us to worship him?

8. In what ways are we prone to seek comfort and help apart from God? How can we grow in knowing the incomparable God and seeking him?

DISCUSS TOGETHER

9. Which of the three recurring themes interests you the most? Why?
10. When can you spend time studying Isaiah each week? In what ways do you believe prioritizing the study of God’s Word can transform your current season of life?
11. What do you hope to develop in your life from studying the Bible within a community? Why is this important to you?

THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES when I would have loved an opportunity to do things differently. Like when I disrespected my parents by taking my car out—a week before I was a licensed driver. Maybe you never went driving as a fifteen-year-old, which resulted in a loss of privileges (also known as “being grounded”), but I’m guessing you’ve experienced regret. Maybe it was a careless word, a bitter response, a selfish act. Regardless, you wished you could go back. The

**HER WARFARE
HAS ENDED**
ISAIAH 40:1-8

**DAY
1**

morning of my sixteenth birthday, my dad tossed the keys to me as I stepped out the door. His gracious decision to lift my punishment deeply affected me. But far more comforting was his smile’s joy, warmth, and forgiveness—a loving kindness that drew my guilt-stricken heart back to him. I learned that day that we don’t get do-overs in life, but we can receive forgiveness. And that’s the beauty of today’s passage.

Isaiah 40 begins after the dark night of exile. The Israelites felt cast off and forgotten by God due to their sin. And there could have been no better news than hearing God speak tenderly: *your sin is pardoned*. God’s message of comfort begins by addressing our most central need—forgiveness for our sins and reconciliation with him. And from there, every other gift of comfort will flow!



As you read through Isaiah 40:1-8, what do you observe?

- List the different metaphors God uses to awaken our imaginations, touching our hearts and minds on a deep level. Which image stands out to you most?



The God of all comfort. Isaiah begins by using the poetic device of *repetition* to focus our eyes on the main message in Isaiah 40–48. The word *comfort* is repeated. And God instructed the prophet to “speak tenderly” to the hearts of the exiles.

What other words and phrases does God use to draw his people back to him (vv. 1-2)? How should this affect the way we see God?

An enthusiastic call to action. The Holy One of Israel had exercised judgment by exiling his sinful people, but he did not abandon them. Their exile was ending, and God was coming to deliver his people. Isaiah referred to a custom of some Eastern monarchs who would send a herald before them to clear the uneven ground in the wilderness that was covered by rock and sand. The representative would smooth out the roads in preparation for the coming ruler. With the voice of a herald, Isaiah called the exiles to action using *hyperbole*—an exaggeration of speech that communicated enthusiasm.

Every valley ***shall be lifted up.***

Every mountain and hill ***shall be made low.***

The uneven ground ***shall become level.***

- What is the prophet enthusiastically calling people to do in a spiritual sense? Why is this important?

God designed the world to be a theater for his glory. But we are inclined to take our eyes off God and focus on ourselves—sometimes in explicit ways and other times through subtle thoughts: *I will provide for myself. I will please myself. I will protect myself. I will lean on my own understanding and acknowledge myself in all my ways.*

Biblically speaking, this kind of focus on self is known as pride. Pride can take an inflated form of self-focus, as described above. But pride can also take the form of a morbid preoccupation with self: *I am not important. I am not good enough. No one cares about me. I have no help or hope in life.* God disciplined the Israelites due to the first form of pride. But many Israelites had swung to the other side of the pendulum by the end of the exile.

Some mountains of self-focus need to be laid low, and other valleys need to be leveled out through repentance. Then all eyes can be lifted to see the all-glorious God who calls us to return to a vibrant relationship with him!

I love where our six-week journey in Isaiah begins! Believers in Jesus Christ have been eternally forgiven and set free from the dominating power of sin. But we will wrestle with remnant sin in our lives until we are perfected in the age to come. And on those days, let's continue walking in the comfort of Christ by (1) drawing close to our merciful Father who has compassion for his children, (2) repenting of our sin to God and the people we have offended, and (3) finding comfort in his eternal promise to help and uphold us.



TRANSFORMING LIFE PRINCIPLE

We can release the weight of guilt and shame by turning to God who abundantly pardons our sins through Jesus Christ.

- God uses powerful metaphors to communicate forgiveness, compassion, and good news for his people (Isaiah 46:3-4; Psalm 103:13-18). How can pondering and picturing these images in your mind draw you to God instead of away from him when struggling with sin?

- Repentance removes obstacles of sin that separate us from seeing and experiencing God. What aspects of your life would change as a result of repentance?

- What influenced you the most today and why?

DAY
2
**SILENCING DOUBT
 AND DESPAIR**
 ISAIAH 40:9-24

THREE IN THE MORNING can be a difficult hour. Stress. Anxiety. Doubt. Discouragement. Navigating relationships. Financial needs. Making

parenting decisions. Caring for aging parents. For some reason, all the problems that feel manageable in the daylight can seem overwhelming to us in the night. What do we do when flooded with worry, fear, discouragement, and insecurity? Today's passage teaches us how to bring all of it—every last concern—to God.



As you read through Isaiah 40:9-24, what do you observe? Consider how this passage's words, phrases, and structure are designed to remind us of God's greatness.



God is great, and he is good! The Bible teaches that God is glorious. The Hebrew word for *glory* means “weighty.” God is weighty and significant, not light and insignificant. Have you ever wondered, *Why is God glorious?* The book of Exodus answers this question through two pinnacle revelations of God. In Exodus 3, God revealed the glory of his *greatness* through his name, “I AM.” And in Exodus 34 he revealed the glory of his *goodness* by telling us that he is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving, and just.

So why is God glorious? He is *great*, and he is *good!* Moses responded to the revelation of God's glory by asking the Lord to take Israel to be his special people (Exodus 34:9). I cannot describe the privilege of being God's people better than an unknown Puritan who once said, “God's grace shall be yours to pardon you, his power shall be yours to protect you, his wisdom shall be yours to direct you, his mercy shall be yours to supply you, and his



glory shall be yours to crown you.” In today’s passage, God teaches us to silence our weighty concerns by comparing them to the weight or glory of the One who helps his people!



God’s goodness: Carried close to his heart. It is not hard to believe that God is greater than my problems. But I can catch my heart questioning his goodness toward me. Can you relate? Isaiah addresses our faith struggles by featuring God’s goodness through a shepherding *metaphor*.

- What does the shepherd metaphor communicate about God (Isaiah 40:11)? How does this give people confidence to call out to him for help?

God’s greatness: He sits above the circle of the earth. *Rhetorical questions* are a literary technique often used in biblical poetry. Rhetorical questions do not ask real questions; they are an artistic use of language that makes us stop and think about the obvious answer.

You may have used a similar method of teaching in parenting. One day my daughter came home discouraged by a situation at school. She seemed overwhelmed by her need for wisdom and guidance. I smiled because my husband is our church’s family pastor and biblical

counselor. I said, “Jade, who counsels the people at our church?” She stopped and thought for a moment, “Dad.” It was precious to see her little mind click for the first time that her father’s gifts and skills could also help her!

I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

PSALM 121:1-2



- What questions does God ask his discouraged and doubting people to pause and consider? How can these questions silence concerns in our minds?

40:12

40:13

40:14

40:18

40:21

God is alive and active, eager to work on behalf of those who call and wait on him. But sadly, we often strive in our own strength to fix our situations or pursue help from our substitutes for God. The prophet-poet leads us to turn from temptation and sin by using *dramatic irony* to laugh at the ridiculous nature of idolatry. He sets the stage for us as the audience, distancing himself from the idols he is about to expose, and then allows us to watch with transformative laughter as the absurd nature of our idolatry plays out.

- What do the ridiculous characteristics portrayed in verses 19-20 teach us about idolatry?

Paraphrase God's message.



“

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- We can trade our daily concerns for comfort in God by . . .



TRANSFORMING LIFE PRINCIPLE

Let God's greatness quiet our concerns.

- Our struggles can feel like giants that tower over us. What are some concerns causing you to cower in their shadow?

- How does your perspective change when you bring your concerns into the shadow of God's glory?

- Let's imitate God using dramatic irony to "put off" temptation and sin. Identify a substitute for God that you often turn to when you need comfort and help. Put it on stage, sit back, and consider what it does for you. Compare it to God, who rules, rewards, carries, leads, counsels, and teaches (Isaiah 40:10-17). How will this shape the way you respond to temptation?

DAY
3

**LIFT YOUR EYES
TO THE STARS**
ISAIAH 40:25-26

WE ARE NOT EXILES IN BABYLON, but we certainly experience times of feeling forgotten and insignificant as we travel through this fallen world to our eternal

homeland. You may feel alone in singleness or as a young mom in the monotonous days of changing diapers. Maybe you are helping your teen who feels like an outcast. Perhaps you are lost in the middle years of life or feel forgotten as an older adult. Whatever season you are in, there are times when we struggle with feeling insignificant and forgotten by God. But in our passage today, Isaiah uses the stars as a storyboard to teach us how to put off discouragement and walk confidently in the awareness of God's love and intimate involvement in our lives.



As you read through Isaiah 40:25-26, what do you observe? Give specific attention to how the teaching about God's greatness moves into lessons about his intimate involvement with his creation.

- What verbs are used to describe God’s work in the lives of his people (e.g., God builds, he heals)? What does this teach us about God’s intimate involvement in our lives?

- How should God’s immanence affect our outlook? What can we do to be more aware of God’s presence in our lives?

Returning to Isaiah 40:25-26, the Holy One asks, Who is my equal? The psalmist and Isaiah answer emphatically that there is *NONE!* There are days when we feel like a distant star that has lost power and energy, becoming so dim that no one sees or cares for us in this vast universe. But the God who counts and calls every star by name is mindful of you. The One who upholds the vast universe by his power and understanding also upholds your precious life. He knows and understands your pain and will bind up your wounds. He has not forgotten you, nor will he fail you because he cares for you!

Paraphrase God’s message.



“

”

- When we feel forgotten and insignificant, we can find comfort in our incomparable God by remembering . . .



TRANSFORMING LIFE PRINCIPLE

From the farthest star to your deepest scars, God is intimately involved in your life. He will not forget or fail you.

- Can you relate with the discouraged exiles who felt forgotten by God? Let's imitate God's use of dialogue. Write down the thoughts that often swirl in your mind and heart when you feel insignificant.

- How can lifting your eyes to the stars and remembering this passage comfort you when you feel weak, forgotten, and insignificant?

- Why is picturing and pondering God's Word an important discipline to develop?

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