

Greenhouse Retreats



Hope In the Lord

Isaiah 40:21-31

Release Date: May 7, 2026

Volume 4, Issue 7

Alex Kirk

greenhouseretreats@substack.com

www.greenhouseretreats.substack.com

To make time to be with the Lord is to step onto the path of wisdom—welcome! I pray that this time bears good fruit in your life.

There's no pressure on you to have an ecstatic experience or to finish this material. You might not get past the opening prayer exercise. Linger where you feel met. Skip prompts if you want, but don't rush.

And naps are one of the holiest things you can do. Feel free to take one at any point. :)

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen

Opening Prayer Exercise

Take a few minutes to settle in and to be present to the Lord. Breath prayer can be helpful. As you breathe, pray each phrase silently.

Try this prayer:

1. Breathe in: "The earth is the Lord's" [Pause and hold for a few seconds]
2. Breathe out: "And everyone and everything in it"

Repeat that "in and out" prayer 5-10 times.

Then pray the Lord's prayer (either silently or out loud) to open your time.

You're likely coming into this morning with any number of burdens or distractions that could hinder your time with God today, or maybe you're just tired. List those things here as specifically and simply as you can.

Pray a prayer of surrender over each item without getting too wrapped up in it. If it helps, take a picture of your list with your phone and text it to a trusted friend. Ask them to pray for and carry those things for you so that you might attend to Jesus today.

A more active alternative: grab a handful of small rocks and go for a short walk. With each rock name something that you're carrying into today, pray a prayer of surrender, and then drop (or throw carefully!) that rock.

Soaking in Scripture

I remember a conversation I had with a woman who had a close friend who was so beat-down by life that "she's really given up hope." And my friend described the consequences in that woman's heart: a life-less existence.

When we stop hoping, we stop living. Even if it's just hope working out in the smallest of ways. Hope is an energy-source, as if God's future is somehow pulling us toward itself. Hope is about change, about things becoming different, in my circumstances, in my soul. What if we are the sort of creatures for whom the present cannot be enough?

But our hopes aren't always well-founded. Sometimes we hope in or for the wrong things. Sometimes our hopes need to be tempered by sober and hard realities. Sometimes we've experienced so many disappointments it's hard to conjure up hope for much of anything.

On the other side of Easter, the early Christians elevated "hope" as a cardinal virtue—a stunning development. And a virtue that needs to be cultivated and practiced. The resurrection secured a "living hope" (1 Peter 1:3) and in Christ "hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." (Romans 5:5).

But the foundation for Christian hope was laid in the Old Testament Scriptures in the character of God.

Today, we're going to re-anchor ourselves in God's character and in the hope he provides.

Read the passage three times slowly. The final time, read it out loud if you're in a place where you can do so. Underline or highlight anything that stands out to you or make comments in the margins.

Isaiah 40

21 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
Has it not been told you from the beginning?
Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

22 He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.
He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

23 He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

24 No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

25 “To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

27 Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?

28 Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

29 He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

30 Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

31 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.

Do You Not Know?

1. Start with noting what words or phrases stood out to you and pray those back to the Lord as an offering of thanksgiving.

- A. That word or phrase is a gift to you today. Sit with it for just a beat and ask the Lord if there's a specific application or response he's inviting you into or if it's merely a gift to be received with gladness. Write down what you sense the Lord speaking to you here.

2. Let's start with Isaiah's opening (rhetorical) question:: *"Do you not know? Have you not heard?....He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth."*

Of course, for most of Isaiah's original audience, like most of us, they *have* known and they *have* heard. But it's easy to get caught up in the swirl of life and world events and forget that God sits enthroned over all of it.

So Isaiah reminds them and us. What does it mean that God "sits enthroned above the circle of the earth"--i.e. God is enthroned over everything?

- A. Why does that matter?

- B. Look back over the recent past in whatever increment makes sense to you--the past few months, the past year, or more. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to see and remember where the sovereign power and goodness of God were at work. You might want to be quiet for a few seconds to allow the Spirit to bring things to mind.

Briefly jot down a couple-word summary of as many experiences or examples as you can think of. Take your time with this. Use the back if necessary.

-
-
-

-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-
-

- C. Step back and look at your above list. Write out or just speak whatever response of thanksgiving and worship seems appropriate.

If it would be helpful, use this formula for each bullet point: “Lord God, you are enthroned above the circle of the earth, and _____ is a demonstration of that reality. I bless you and praise you.”

- D. On the other hand, part of why it’s easy to forget that the Lord God is enthroned over everything is there are plenty of places—both in our personal lives and around the world—where it sure doesn’t look like it. What are your (perhaps un-stated) expectations about what it *should* look like if God reigned over everything?

- E. Thinking over what you know of the biblical stories, especially the life of Jesus, how well do your expectations match pitch with what those stories demonstrate about what it means that God is enthroned over the earth?

- F. Given that our expectations aren't always met, what does it mean to rest in the truth that God is enthroned over everything? In other words, how do we find shelter in his sovereignty, even as that might not always mean that we get outcomes we might like? What does it look like for you to live faithfully (maybe wrestling) in the space where you're trusting that God is sovereign and good, even as things are not as you would like for them to be—in many cases, in fact, not as you know God himself would want them to be?

3. In verses 23-25 Isaiah immediately contrasts the sovereignty of God with the fragile and passing nature of human authorities. Specifically, God acts against them and they wilt. Why might it be important for us to be reminded about God's power over and against human authorities?

- A. For an alarming number of people in our culture, politics has become an all-consuming religious exercise—with the predictable fruit of anger, anxiety, and resentment to show for it. How have you or those around you been affected by this idolatrous relationship with politics?

- B. How might these verses help to right-size and right-place human authorities and how much mental and emotional space politics consumes?

4. In v. 26, Isaiah instructs his hearers to look up at the heavens and consider the stars.

It's likely daytime when you're doing this and perhaps you're indoors somewhere, but let's take Isaiah up on his instructions to consider what nature might teach us about God.

As we head into a break, go outside and take a short walk and consider the natural world—that all of this is here and in place by the Lord's command and power. When you return, write down below anything about the character or nature of God that your consideration of nature teaches you or reminds you of.

Break: (15-ish minutes)

Take a break but stay in a quiet heart space. Do not check email, make a work call, do social media, or do anything that would pull you out of a reflective, listening, receptive posture. Go for a short walk. Get a cup of coffee. Grab a snack. Do some stretching. Listen to some worship music.

Those Who Hope in the Lord

5. Re-read the passage one more time—anything new stand out to you this time around? If so, write it down here and reflect on it a bit.

6. In verse 27, Isaiah turns to addressing the people of Israel who are complaining that “*My way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God*”

In other words, they're complaining that God's forgotten or abandoned them. Isaiah is critical of their complaining, but this isn't always a bad thing to think, say, or pray. David has plenty of Psalms where he asks the Lord why he's forsaken or abandoned him.

Is there a place in your own life where you feel as though God has forgotten or left you? If so, write it down here as simply as you can.

- A. David's cries to God are spiritually fruitful and generative. It would seem that the people of Israel's complaining about God is not. How do we distinguish between "mere complaining" and "honest praying?"

7. In v. 28, Isaiah repeats his rhetorical question, inviting his hearers once again to lean in: "*Do you not know? Have you not heard?*"

And this time, he launches into a different description of the nature of God: everlasting, creator of the ends of the earth, never weary, his understanding is beyond comprehension.

Let's meditate on each of these descriptions.

- A. What does it mean that God is *everlasting*? Write out synonyms, reflections, or a prayer of praise that emphasizes the everlasting nature of God.

- B. What does it mean that God is the *creator of the ends of the earth*? Write out synonyms, reflections, or a prayer of praise that emphasizes that God is the creator of all the earth.

- C. What does it mean that God is the one being who *does not grow tired or weary*? Write out synonyms, reflections, or a prayer of praise that emphasizes God's endless strength.

- D. What does it mean that *his understanding no one can fathom*? Write out synonyms, reflections, or a prayer of praise that emphasizes the unsearchable wisdom of God.

8. All of that is true about God and good news about God's character. But then Isaiah makes the turn that makes it even better: God's goodness moves towards us.

Notice in v. 29-31, it's all about strength, power, energy—needing it, not having it, receiving it. Which image from those verses most stands out to you?

- A. To start with, the only conditions around getting God's power and strength are the Three W's: weary, weak, and waiting hopefully. Hoping and waiting are very often co-joined in our experience of them. But these "Three W's" are conditions most of us work hard to avoid. Are there any places in your life where you're feeling weary, weak, and waiting? List those briefly below.

- B. Pray through what you wrote down above very simply. In a posture of prayer, with palms up, read it or say it out loud, and then be silent for just a few seconds in a place of surrender, waiting, and allowing the rest of God to fill you. Write down anything from your experience below.

- C. In v. 31 we get another description of those who receive the gift-strength of God: *those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength*.

Think about the various things you hope in or hope for: a big day ahead, something to go a certain way, a person, a medical treatment. What does it mean for you to hope for or in something?

- D. That's not always bad. But what does it mean to ultimately put your hope in the Lord?
- E. This is a promise that you can claim: put your hope in the Lord, he will renew your strength. That strength empowers us to live faithfully in the brokenness of the present, even as you hope that things will change. Hoping in the Lord's future directs us back to the things at hand now. Sometimes to give us direction or guidance about what to do next. How can learning to hope in the Lord strengthen us to do the next right thing, even if doing so doesn't necessarily change the circumstances immediately?
- F. Spend a few minutes praying or writing out a prayer of putting your hope in the Lord and asking him to renew your strength as he promises to do.

Praying Through Your Cares

By this point in your retreat you're perhaps ready (and needing!) to engage with some of the things you laid down at the beginning. Spend some time praying through those things now. How might the passage we're looking at today shape those prayers?

Wrapping Up and Next Steps

1. Look back over the prayer exercises and how you've answered all of the above questions. What themes or threads stand out to you?
2. There are a number of prayers that you might need to continue to pray or areas that you'll need to continue to explore. Any of those that you want to carry with you from today?
3. Any other thoughts from this time?

Close out your retreat with a prayer of gratitude for how the Lord has met you and commitment for next steps.