

A SHEPHERD FOR TURBULENT TIMES

by Doug Goins

I was flying back to San Francisco from Phoenix, Arizona two weeks ago last Friday. About thirty minutes into the flight we had settled back and leveled off at thirty-three thousand feet. I was thoroughly enjoying the "sumptuous" snack the airline served us of a little plastic cup of Coke and about a sixteenth of an ounce of peanuts, when it felt like the airplane was gripped by the most severe air turbulence that I had ever been in. I have done a lot of flying around the world in big planes and little planes, but this was very, very scary. You could see it in people's faces. My coke was sloshing and my peanuts were rolling, and the stewards and stewardesses rushed up and down the aisles to calm people and make sure they were okay. You begin to think strange things at those moments, even if you have flown a lot. You wonder if the wings are going to snap off as you're looking out the window to make sure that the engines are still there and not plummeting to earth. And you wonder if the plane is going to spin out of control, and if you'll ever see your wife and kids again. You know that probably nothing will happen, but when air turbulence is so sudden and severe, your thoughts go in that direction.

When the flight smoothed out and the turbulence was over, it became for me a metaphor of the emotional turbulence in my own personal life in the last four months. It had begun the last week that Candy and the children and I were in the Philippines. We had gone there in August to minister for a month with Wycliffe. I was struck with dengue fever, and it was completely debilitating. I spent the last seven days of that month totally unavailable for ministry. It was tremendously frustrating for me, and I had to battle a great sense of resentment at being kept from the ministry I had been invited to perform.

There was more turbulence when we arrived back in San Francisco and were told by the Freglys, who picked us up at the airport, that Bob Smith had died in August and his memorial service was already past. I was overwhelmed by a great sense of loss and also a sense of isolation at missing his memorial service. When I had first come to Peninsula Bible Church (PBC) almost fifteen years ago, Bob and I had offices right next to each other. In my early years here he was a mentor to me, a trusted counselor in work issues. Even after Bob had retired from ministry and they had moved to The Villages in south San Jose, I would often drive down to meet with Bob, because he was so good at bringing biblical perspective on issues.

The choppy air has continued for me as I've had to work through my grief and pain at Ray Stedman's death. From a human perspective, Ray is the single biggest reason I am here at PBC. He came to Los Angeles and personally convinced me to join the staff fifteen years ago. Along with many of you, I've struggled to accept and adjust to the fact that Ray's influence on this place is now a part of our history.

The week after Ray's memorial service I got a call from my mom and dad in Arizona telling me that my dad had cancer and would need surgery very quickly. My dad had faithfully served the Lord in pastoral ministry for over forty years, and much of what I knew about how to shepherd a congregation I had learned from watching him and from counseling with him. So that emotional turbulence never seemed to let up!

I confess that in these last four months I experienced a growing sense of discouragement and weariness in response to the cumulative effect of these turbulent circumstances. My wife Candy suggested a few weeks ago that there was a low-grade depression at work in me. I have argued with God. I have accused him of poor personnel management, of being unfair to the good guys. I have complained to him that maybe he has lost perspective on the needs of my family and the needs of our church community in these months.

My cries to the Lord in response to the turbulence in my life have been similar to the cries of the nation Israel, specifically a cry of dereliction in the prophecy of Isaiah. In chapter 40 verse 27 the prophet is quoting the nation's cries to the Lord from exile in Babylon:

Why do you say, O Jacob,

and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hid from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?

The Good News Bible paraphrases that verse this way: "Israel, why then do you complain that the Lord doesn't know your troubles or care if you suffer injustice?" We get the feeling that our way, or our life course if you will-our circumstances, our troubles-are somehow hidden from God, that he doesn't seem to notice the unfairness at work in things around us that seem out of control.

To take you back to that jetliner (I was coming back from spending four days with my mom and dad in Arizona through the cancer surgery I mentioned a moment ago), in the midst of all the violent turbulence a voice came over the PA system: "This is your captain speaking. We're experiencing a little bit of turbulence. Don't be alarmed. Tighten your seat belts. We are climbing up to get above the rough air. Please stay in your seats. We will do our best to make the flight as comfortable as possible." That was the voice of the captain, the one at the controls. It was a voice of calm reassurance, a message of comfort delivered with a quiet, confident authority.

Just as the hearts of the passengers in that airliner were calmed by the airline captain's word of comfort, the heart of the nation Israel was quieted by a similar word of confident authority from God himself. The opening verse of chapter 40 says:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

He is speaking this word of comfort to a nation held captive in Babylon, a nation whose personal circumstances are being controlled by pagan leaders.

Let's pause for a moment and look at the context of this passage. We're going to spend four weeks with the prophet Isaiah beginning here in chapter 40. Isaiah began preaching to the northern half of the divided kingdom, Israel, some eighteen years before it fell to Assyria. Throughout his eighteen years of ministry he warned the kings of the north that if they didn't submit to God's judgment and learn to trust Yahweh God for their care and provision, they would be carried away into exile by the Assyrians. The first thirty-five chapters record this ministry of Isaiah. But they didn't listen, and the Assyrians carried the northern kingdom away.

There is a short historical section in the middle of Isaiah, chapters 36 through 39. It relates Isaiah's ministry with King Hezekiah, who was the king in Judah to the south; the historical events at the end of the northern kingdom; and what happened in the south just after the fall of the north. Beginning with chapter 40, God gives Isaiah a prophetic word for both kingdoms, Israel and Judah. The southern kingdom is going to fall as well as the northern kingdom, and they are both going to be exiled in Babylon. The Babylonian empire is going to engulf the Assyrian empire, the Egyptian empire, and in the process this little country of Judah. It is going to carry away all the residents of the south to the city of Babylon just as the residents of the north were carried away to Assyria. Chapters 40 through 66, the last section of Isaiah's prophecy, were written to the next generation of Jews who were going to be living in Babylon some one hundred twenty years after Isaiah's time.

Isaiah 40 through 66 is often called the book of comfort, because it begins with this keynote of comfort and repeats that theme over and over. God allows Isaiah to see into the future so he can offer hope to the nation in exile. There will be deliverance, even though it will not take place for seventy years. Isaiah even sees farther down the corridors of time and history in this last section of these prophecies. He predicts the deliverance from bondage to sin that Jesus Christ is going to bring to every individual in humanity who responds to his life and death and resurrection. And Isaiah sees farther yet into what is still future even for us, when Jesus Christ will return to draw human history to a close and inaugurate what Isaiah calls "the day of the Lord," [13:6,9] when he will create "a new heaven and a new earth" ; [65:17].

Why was this word of comfort so important to the exiles in Babylon? What was the severe turbulence they were experiencing? Under the Babylonian oppression they had endured a six-hundred-mile forced march across the desert. There had been rape in the streets; cannibalism; bestiality; and the taunting of their Babylonian captors, who enjoyed prosperity, security, comfort, and complete control of them. Babylon was oppressively religious. Its religion was one of power and privilege. There were impressive temples built to the Babylonian pantheon as far as the eye could see.

Our day is essentially the same. We experience the turbulence of increasing violence in our own society and increasing fear in response. Everywhere there is immorality, materialism, injustice, and poverty. The nuclear family has been invaded by incest, spousal abuse, and child sexual abuse. We live in times that are just as violent and frightening as those of the exiles in Babylon. We're confronted on this peninsula with powerful "religions" of technology, sex, commercial enterprise, and higher education. And elaborate temples built to all these religions fill our skyline as well. Just as the captive Jews in Babylon did, we cry out for a word of hope and confidence.

The first eleven verses of Isaiah 40 tell us four sources of comfort to be found even in severe turbulence. Look at the first two verses. They talk about the comfort in receiving forgiveness from God:

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that her warfare is ended [or her troubles are over],
that her iniquity is pardoned,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

This first word of comfort is spoken tenderly, literally "to the heart." God doesn't thunder at them; he speaks a gentle word of encouragement. The good news is that they-and we "exiles" in our time as well-have been freed from the bondage of sin.

For the exiles in Babylon, this was based on an event yet to happen in their history. For us, that event has already occurred in past history. Forgiveness for sin from the beginning until now has been based on the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. That event stands outside history; it is eternal. Jesus is defined as the lamb slain before the foundation of the world.

It was the sins of Judah and Israel that drove them into exile, but Isaiah says here, "Your sins have already been forgiven." Our guilt can be assuaged as well; we have been forgiven the debt of sin just as the captives in Babylon were. All we have to do is accept it. John, in chapter 3 of his gospel, says that Jesus Christ did not come into the world to judge the world-it had already been judged-but to forgive and to save the world. The only sin that God ever holds against us is the sin of unbelief, of rejecting this remedy of salvation that Christ offers.

Are you living under a burden of guilt today? Maybe you're a believer who has a guilty conscience over a broken relationship or a word of violence or condemnation you spoke. All you have to do is accept the forgiveness that's promised here in order to have your debt paid and your burden lifted. If you do not have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you can, in an instant, on the basis of the work of Jesus on the cross. If you accept Christ's work on your behalf, you can experience his forgiveness and cleansing and the freedom it will bring you from guilt and condemnation. You can know this word of comfort for yourself.

The second word of comfort is in verses 3 through 5. We can know comfort, even in difficult circumstances, if we are willing to let Jesus be the Lord of our life.

A voice cries:
"In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,

make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plain.
And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
and all flesh shall see it together,
for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.

All three of the synoptic gospel writers (Matthew, Mark and Luke) use these words to refer to John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the voice crying, and the Lord whose way was to be prepared was Jesus himself, the Messiah who was to come. Isaiah and the gospel writers are saying that we are to make way for this Messiah, to let him gain access to our lives. We are to clean everything out of the way, make the entrance clear, and let him have plenty of room. When that is accomplished, he will enter into us, and Isaiah says he will display his glory. His glory is his beauty, the things about him that we want to have in our own lives. We can display that glory even in the most desperate circumstances of exile. Whatever our own personal helplessness or captivity or victimization, whatever the turbulent or distressing environment we find ourselves in, if we let Jesus the Messiah be the absolute Sovereign of our lives, he will display his glory through us. We can count on it because it is spoken by the mouth of the Lord himself. We can trust his word.

This introduces the third source of comfort, our willingness to believe that word of God. Look at verses 6-8:

A voice says, "Cry!"
And I said, "What shall I cry?"
All flesh is grass,
and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
surely the people is grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades;
but the word of our God will stand for ever.

What word of our God is Isaiah talking about in verse 8? It is the word that has just been spoken in verses 1 through 5: The trouble between us and the Lord is ended and our sins are forgiven; and whenever we give the Lord Jesus full access to our hearts, his glory will be seen in us. That word is certain; it stands forever. So no matter how difficult our circumstances, when our relationship with God is restored and Jesus is the Lord of our lives, we experience comfort. The eternity of this word of God stands in exact opposition or contrast to the power and might of Babylon, the things the exiles are frightened of. In our own lives, God's word stands in opposition to the oppressors, victimizers, or others who frighten us. Babylon was the ruler of the world. The city of Babylon itself took great pride in the fact that its position was unassailable; nothing could bring down Babylon. And Babylon represented evil. But less than fifty years after the exiles heard these words, that evil empire fell, and Cyrus, the Persian king who took the city of Babylon, allowed the exiles to return home.

Do you know what God is saying in these verses? Repressive evil cannot stand before his breath, which will blow it away effortlessly. And no matter how severe our own personal emotional turbulence may be, God's eternal word brings objectivity, stability, and clear thinking. His word never changes. No matter how seductively beautiful and powerful the evil which threatens us may be, the promise of God's word assures us that he will protect and ultimately deliver each one of us. So in verses 6 through 8 there are two things we can be sure of: a specific word of salvation spoken to each one of us individually, and his breath of deliverance, which will ultimately destroy evil just like dry grass.

The fourth source of comfort in this opening section is interesting. It comes from a willingness to tell the truth about who Jesus is, to not just think it but speak it out loud. Look at verses 9 through 11:

Get you up to a high mountain,
O Zion, herald of good tidings;
lift up your voice with strength,
O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
lift it up, fear not;
say to the cities of Judah,
"Behold your God!"
Behold, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
behold, his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd,
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.

Telling the truth all the time will bring comfort both to us and to other people. We are to herald good tidings or good news. In the New Testament this good news is called the gospel, which is the liberating truth of Jesus. In the lives of the exiles the good news was that God would deliver them from Babylon, and he did; as a shepherd he brought them back to the green hills of the homeland they so longed for.

Isaiah is saying that there is one coming we must understand and know and be willing to talk about. He is defined in two ways in verses 10 and 11: He is the Lord God coming with power and strength, but he is also like a shepherd. This is a rich blending of these images of strength and shepherding care and tenderness. Jesus uses verse 11 to define his own ministry in John 10. In Jesus Christ was all the awesome strength and shepherding heart of Yahweh God, which he demonstrated in his life and ministry on earth. Robert Cray, a rhythm and blues artist, has a song entitled *Strong Persuader*. Jesus came with strength, but he made a gentle, persuasive appeal in his life and ministry. He came to be a tender shepherd. The strength that Jesus exhibited came out of meekness, humility, and submission to the cross. He was the shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (see John 10). That is how our salvation was accomplished.

Following the command to tell the good news about our strong shepherd is another command in verse 9: "Fear not." Isaiah doesn't say you don't have to be afraid, which is true. But he commands, "Do not be afraid." And there is nothing more to fear because the Lord God comes with might (verse 10). That phrase, "the Lord God comes," has the same linguistic root as the name that Isaiah gave to the Messiah in chapter 7, "Immanuel", which means God with us, present, imminent. He is coming to be with us, to live in us, to give his strength to us.

Finally, verse 11 describes the concerns of this strong shepherd. He feeds his flock; he is a nurturer. He gathers the weak, vulnerable lambs, the little ones, the spiritually young ones who haven't yet learned to walk and defend themselves and understand reality. He has a special concern for nursing mothers, those who are vulnerable because they are caring for little ones and can't defend themselves. And he doesn't drive the sheep; he is not a manipulator or a dictator. He draws the sheep to himself and leads them along through encouragement. Jesus said that his sheep would know his voice; that is, they would recognize his calm, reassuring tone and also the stabilizing truth of the message he would speak.

In the next major section of this chapter, verses 12 through 28, there's a powerful poetic exclamation from Isaiah. It speaks to the credentials or the qualifications of this strong Shepherd King and explains how we can know that we can trust him to come through when we need him to bring us comfort and strengthen us. We won't read all of it, but we'll touch on some of the highlights.

There are two rhetorical questions asked in this section. Look at verse 18: "To whom then will you liken God?" And verse 25: "To whom then will you compare me?" Why do we need to compare and contrast? Don't we know enough already about God's character, his power, and his activity in history? But what Isaiah does in these verses is essentially summarize God's incredible, incomparable activity as the Creator of the universe. He even says in this section that God asks the question, "Have I ever had to consult with anybody about setting the world into motion? I'm the one who weighed and measured it. Or have I ever had to ask for advice

about how to run the universe? If I can run the universe perfectly, then I can also run every little detail of your life."

He says, "You get intimidated by the powerful political figures throughout human history-the conquering generals, the presidents, the kings, and others you're fearful of. But every one of those people who walks onto the stage of human history represents nothing in contrast to who I am." And again he uses the picture of his breath blowing them away. There is a comment in verse 15:

Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket,
and are accounted as the dust on the scales;
behold, he takes up the isles like fine dust.

The North American landmass that we live on is one of the isles that is just like a speck of dust from God's perspective. The USA and our two hundred and some years on this planet don't mean anything in comparison to God's absolute sovereign control over human history.

There is a subsection that warns about idolatry, the temptation when you're scared to death to wrap your arms around something besides the Lord that can give you worth and significance and a sense of security. Look at verses 18-20:

To whom then will you liken God,
or what likeness compare with him?
The idol! a workman casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold,
and casts for it silver chains.
He who is impoverished chooses for an offering
wood that will not rot;
he seeks out a skilful craftsman
to set up an image that will not move.

He is comparing rich people and poor people. Rich people can buy gold and silver and hire the finest artisans to make their idols. But poor people are just as idolatrous. We'll cut a tree down and try to make an attractive idol out of it. The issue isn't relative wealth but our hearts that get frightened and then think that we can provide security on our own. If we can't trust God to meet our needs for worth and significance and security, we will embrace any number of things that then become idolatrous in our lives, even good things. Activity itself can become idolatrous. Our vocation, consumerism, or our children can become idols in our lives. Coming to church and serving one another can become idolatrous. Our wife our husband, our job security, sexual indulgence, power and position, food and drink, and even friendship can become idols that we trust to give us significance in life. And the prophet thunders in these verses: They are all terrible tradeoffs compared to the majesty and the greatness and the glory of the God of the universe!

Look at verse 26, where he introduces a beautiful, overwhelming picture of the greatness of our Shepherd King. Verses 26 and 27:

Lift up your eyes on high and see;
who created these?
He who brings out their host by number,
calling them all by name;
by the greatness of his might,
and because he is strong in power
not one is missing.
Who do you say, O Jacob,
and speak, O Israel,
"My way is hid from the LORD,
and my right is disregarded by my God"?

His direction to us in these two verses is to look above our circumstances instead of focusing on the powerful controlling forces that discourage us and weary us. In my case, I need to look above dengue fever, cancer, death, the loss of godly leadership, and the unsettling transitions here at PBC. Perhaps in your case the circumstances that overwhelm you and occupy you are evil individuals or corrupt institutions that restrict you, or even oppose and persecute you. He tells us to quit looking at these things and look at the heavens. Let the one who created it all, who shepherds the stars, fill up your horizon.

Twice in verse 26 Isaiah mixes his metaphors. The word host could really be the word flock, as in a flock of sheep. And the root of the phrase, "not one is missing," is the expression that there are no sheep missing. So he is talking about star-sheep. Jesus is a star-shepherd who created this incredible flock, organized it in the constellations that we know today, and set it in motion. He gave every single star a name and he knows each star intimately. Not one of them gets lost or misplaced; he never loses interest in them. Now, if he can keep track of all that, we really can trust him with our own lives and our own difficulties!

In Jerusalem there is a memorial to the Holocaust victims called Yad Vashem. Part of it is the Children's Memorial, the design of which is based on this verse 26. When you step into the Children's Memorial, you step into a room of disorienting blackness. Everywhere you look-behind you, below you, above you-there are stars twinkling. And then as your eyes adjust you realize that they are hundreds of little white votive candles scattered all around and reflected everywhere in mirrors. The effect is that you're standing in the midst of a star field. The only sound in the room is the continuous recitation of the names of children who died in the Holocaust. Not one of them is missing. God never lost control, even in the Holocaust. (Remember, we said that the evil in the world is limited, not that it is eradicated.)

It is that confidence that no one will get lost or misplaced that provided the strength for Jose and Jennifer Espinosa to communicate with us in their notice in today's Family News. Last Sunday we prayed for critical complications in Jennifer's pregnancy. A little later their baby girl, Emily, was born prematurely in great physical distress with severe Down's Syndrome. She survived only a few minutes outside her mother's womb. But because of the certainty that nobody is missing or lost and nothing is out of God's control, Jose and Jennifer were able to write to us, "Emily went to be with her Lord Jesus in heaven very shortly after her birth, but we thank Him for the many, many beautiful answers to prayer we have seen through this time of trusting in His goodness to us." Isaiah is urging us to make a choice to trust in God's goodness to us even when we feel most frightened.

We already said that this is a strong shepherd who doesn't get tired, who doesn't lose interest, who understands perfectly our needs and our circumstances. He does respond to our feelings of oppression or guilt or inhibition, our frustration with circumstances, or our depression. When we feel that nobody else knows or cares or understands, our powerful Shepherd Messiah encircles each one of us individually with his strong arms of love. And the last section of the chapter tells us that he does more than just understand. Look at verses 29 through 31:

He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
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 understands what kind of people he's dealing with, whether it is exiles in Babylon or people like us today. We are "the faint, the weak, the weary, the exhausted." Every one of those phrases describes the debilitating effects of severe turbulence, of being worn down by loss and limitation and disappointment. The result can be a sense of hopelessness. But God's promise is strength for weak people. In verse 29 the words for power and strength are the same word in Hebrew. It's the word for bone, and it means structure or

firmness. When we feel limp, like a bowl of jelly, the promise is that he will strengthen us, toughen us, give us inner substance in the midst of our difficult circumstances. In verse 31, where it says the Lord will renew their strength, literally it means to exchange strength. We can trade our weakness for the strength of our strong Shepherd Messiah.

As we think about the turbulence all around us, there is a beautiful picture here of the majestic wings of an eagle that lift us above that turbulence; and we soar gracefully, beautifully. We don't trudge along with resignation, somehow just getting through it. God will give us endurance in the most difficult circumstances to display his glory without denial, emotional defeat, passivity, or paralysis.

The promises in these three verses hang on one word in verse 31. If we want that kind of renewal, we must be willing to *wait* for the Lord. I think wait is probably the hardest word to learn in the language of faith, at least for me. I'm a very impatient person; waiting does not come naturally. Now, to wait for God to work is not resignation, denial of the difficulty, or passivity. In the meaning of that word wait in Hebrew there is a wonderful sense of expectation and confidence that God will act, that he will work as our protector and defender. But it's going to take time, and we have no control over the time.

We want to control everything, don't we? But God is telling us that he is in charge. Earlier in Isaiah's ministry when he was preaching to the northern kingdom, he warned them about the temptation they were facing to trust everything else but God. They were considering economic and military alliances with Egypt and Assyria (before Assyria became an opponent). They were embracing sensual, depraved Canaanite worship in the face of this loving Shepherd God. Isaiah warned them of the danger of it and told them in chapter 30, verse 15, where salvation would be found. This is really what it means to confidently, submissively wait on the Lord:

"In returning [repentance] and rest [worship] you shall be saved;
in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

Salvation, deliverance, or resolution of the difficulties is not based on my management of circumstances, my taking control. It is based on repentance, which is where we began in chapter 40, turning from sin and accepting forgiveness. And it is based on worship of God, on quietness and trust. So our renewal comes out of quiet, prayerful waiting on Immanuel, the God who is with us, our strong Shepherd King. The apostle Peter tells us to cast all of our cares upon him because he cares for us (see 1 Peter 5:7).

This word from Isaiah in chapters 40 through 50 has really encouraged me in the last month, as I've read it over and over in different translations. I've reflected and meditated on it, and I've studied specific texts to prepare for this series. It has been life-giving truth to me. My own anxieties are being addressed, and I do have a growing sense that my own inadequate emotional strength is being exchanged for my Savior's incomparable power and might. There is good news this morning in terms of my own circumstances. The turbulence in my own life is being calmed.

I was here in the auditorium yesterday, and our janitors always do a great job of cleaning up all the bulletins and cards left around, but I picked up a stray bulletin that had slipped under the piano last Sunday. Out of it fell an anonymous prayer request card. There is an invitation on the card to make a prayer request or tell us of a special need. And it's as if this dear lady started out thinking that way, sort of horizontally: "Yes, I'm going to draw my brothers and sisters in and have them pray with me." But then there's an almost supernatural shift in her perspective. I realized, as I was thinking this sermon through for the last time yesterday afternoon, that this lady was able to lift her eyes above the circumstances to the only one who could meet her need and calm her heart. Yes, we can pray for her and support her, and that is significant. But it is really only the Shepherd King of the universe who can speak directly to her heart. Here is what she said:

"I am tired of this load I carry. Pray that I would surrender all to God and trust him in everything." Then she turned the card over and began to speak directly to the God of the universe. She confessed her fears, doubts, heartaches, depression, discouragement, and anger. She said, "I'm not sure what to do next, Lord. In spite of my husband and children and church, I'm lonely...All my faults and all the things I've listed above, I bring before you this day that I might have life." Then her final request is, "Lord, give me strength, peace, joy, guidance. Help me walk in obedience. Give me supernatural wisdom, not only in my marriage, but in all

things. Make me a fountain of life to those around me. Let the people see your love in me."

I pray that this "Strong Persuader" will grip each one of you today, that he will encourage you and strengthen you and fill you up with himself.

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Doug Goins
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