God’s Good Plans to Revive Us

Second in the series: Lessons for Troubling Times

# Scripture: Isaiah 57:13b-21

# Key Thought: Despite troubling times and our failures, God has good plans to renew the lives of those who turn to him.

# Intro:

Last week we talked about how in troubling times, one of the things God may be doing is removing our false securities. He is knocking out the crutches that we thought would support us but will not prove to be reliable in our times of need. He is reminding us that abundant possessions, superficial faith, blended religion, and rituals without heart will ultimately all disappoint us when life gets really rough. This morning we continue our quest to discover what God is seeking to do in our lives during troubling and difficult times.

# God desires to revive

As I wrestled with this message, I discovered that the heart of the passage is God’s intention to revive his people!

For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy:
I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.
 Isa 57:15 NRSV

So as I preach this morning, the outline will not quite follow the one in your bulletin. I’m going to start with the main point—God’s desire to revive and renew us. Then we’ll look briefly to the other three points as the means and methods God is using to renew and revive us.

## Word revive in OT

The root idea of the word revive is simply to make something live again.

This word that Isaiah uses that is translated to revive is used also in the account in 2 Ki. 8:5 where the Prophet Elisha’s servant Gehazi is telling King Joram of Northern Israel about how Elisha had raised the widow’s son back to life.

It is also used in 2 Ki. 20:7 in the account of Hezekiah’s recovery from a deadly illness after Isaiah prayed for him.

In a different but revealing usage, the same word “revive” is used when the Israelites under Nehemiah rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem that had been destroyed (Neh. 4:2). They brought renewal to the defenses of the city of Jerusalem.

This concept is found in other places in the OT as well, however, synonyms are used.

A synonym is used In Ruth 4;15 as the Bible tells the story of how God brought new hope into the lives of Naomi and Ruth and Boaz through the birth of a new baby named Obed. Naomi had been the Mom of two sons who were happily married but had no children. Both of them had died and Naomi had returned to her home country accompanied by her faithful daughter-in-law, Ruth. Now God had provided a new husband for Ruth who could provide for them both and had given Ruth a son. Their family could begin again. Of course, we know the end of the story, this little boy Obed turned out to be the grandfather of King David.

This same synonym and another are used in Psalm 51:10, 12 where David is praying to God for spiritual renewal after his terrible sin of adultery. He prays that God would renew in him a faithful spirit that desires to keep God’s law and he prays that God would restore or revive his joy. The idea behind the word is to restore something that has been lost.

We see this concept again in Isaiah 40:31

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. Isa 40:31

And again in Psalm 19

“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.” Ps 19:7

## NT promises of renewal

The NT also gives us promises of God’s desire to renew and revive us.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Cor. 4:16

Paul spoke of the renewal that God is doing in our mind and character to make us more like Jesus day by day.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Col 3:9-10 NIV

So how is God working to renew our lives during difficult times, according to Isaiah? What are his means and methods?

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# God desires to remove obstacles. What kind of obstacles does God want to remove?

## One obstacle is our questions and doubts.

Now, questions and doubts have their place. We grow through them. God always wants us to be honest in our dealings with him. I hate the kind of a religious approach that encourages people to squelch their questions and pretend they have no doubts. That is neither honest nor helpful. In fact, here in Isaiah 57, the prophet seems to be saying that there were a couple questions that the people should have been asking that would have pointed them in a better direction, but they were not (Isaiah 57:1, 10). But if we stay in the place of questioning and doubt, it likely will undermine our faith rather than build it. What needs to happen is to have our questions answered, and because of that, our doubts diminished. That is what God wants to do. The book of Habakkuk is the best example. The prophet comes to God with deep and difficult questions. God does not reject his questions, but leads him through them to greater faith.

## The biggest obstacle was their sinful ways

Here in Isaiah, the prophet describes Israel as in need of reviving and in danger of fainting (57:15, 16). Yet, God’s position is a delicate one. For Israel at that time was seeking God while continuing in their sins (58:3,4). Their seeking of God was a surface thing. While God desired to encourage them, he could not until the main obstacle was removed, their sinful ways.

This is ultimately the biggest obstacle that God desires to remove from our lives too, our sinful ways. His aim for holiness is a lifelong process that continues to mold us and transform us into the likeness of his son Jesus Christ. His Holy Spirit convicts us when we fall short and encourages us to confess our sins, forsake them, and move on in new ways that follow Jesus.

I am constantly prodded forward in my own life by Paul’s admonition,

All these promises are made to us, my dear friends. So then, let us purify ourselves from everything that makes body or soul unclean, and let us be completely holy by living in awe of God. 2 Cor 7:1 TEV

And he’s not talking about physical dirt, but about spiritual contamination. He refers to body because often the way we use our body affects our spirit as well. In the case of the Corinthians, they were involved in sexual immorality, something that affected both body and soul. Giving in to our other appetites does the same. When we do so we fail in the spiritual matter of exercising discipline while also adversely affecting our body.

The problem for the people of Isaiah’s time was that they wanted to continue in their sin and also continue their spiritual practices, looking good on the surface in their use of Jewish liturgies, observance of holidays, etc. Many people today want to do the same – continue with their sins while looking good in their religious practices. During difficult times, God was pointing out to them that they could not have their cake and eat it too, so to speak. If they wanted to follow God it needed to be from the heart. If they wanted to follow God, they needed to show their devotion by forsaking those practices that God had forbidden. Then they could find renewal. Then God would give them new strength and new beginnings.

During times of prosperity, there is no opportunity for this lesson. When we have all that we need, when things are going good, there are no crises that force us to examine the hidden contradictions in our lives. The overflow of blessings during times of prosperity hides the ugly obstacles to the real growth of our spiritual life. This is just as God warned his people through the prophet Moses.

Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. 12 Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, 13 and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, 14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Deut 8:11-14 NIV

# God desires to heal

According to Isaiah 57:18, another way that God wants to renew us and revive us is by bringing healing to us. Despite our failings, god’s desire is to bring wholeness to us.

I have seen their ways, but I will heal them; Isa 57:18 NRSV

God wants to heal our whole selves, our souls, our emotions, our minds, and our bodies.

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jer 29:11

In this verse, ESV translation uses the word “wholeness” to express God’s intentions.

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Jer 29:11 ESV

He heals our minds and bodies Isa. 57:18

The Hebrew word in Isaiah 57:18 means to mend, to cure, to restore, to make whole. It is the same Hebrew root that is used in the name of God “Jehovah Rophe – The Lord your healer in Exodus 15:26.

He said, “If you listen carefully to the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.” Ex 15:26

Notice that in that prophecy of Moses also, the healing that God promises is conditional upon us removing the obstacle of our sinful practices.

“By his wounds we are healed. Isa 53:5

Healed first of our departing from God’s ways, and then from many of the emotional and physical results of going our own ways.

"Return, faithless people; I will cure you of backsliding." Jer 3:22

"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely.” Hos 14:4

For example, take the relation between anxiety in our lives and stomach problems.

<http://www.calmclinic.com/anxiety/symptoms/stomach-problems>. Now, not all stomach problems are anxiety related, but many of them can be as being anxious affects our neurotransmitters, adrenaline and stomach acid production. But the Scripture encourages us to “not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God” (Phil. 4:6). So the more we can obey that admonition, the fewer stomach problems we are likely to have.

Another example might be the relationship between the sin of gluttony and weight-related high blood pressure. As we learn to discipline our eating, our blood pressure improves.

A third example is the relationship between depression and guilt. Depression has many causes. In my experience, one of them often is unresolved guilt. When we come to God for forgiveness and inner peace, he gives us joy in the place of our depression.

# God desires to give peace

Finally, in Isaiah 57:19 God promises that part of the healing that he desires to bring is to give us peace. The Hebrew word is “Shalom.” It has a much wider meaning than just lack of conflict. Its meaning includes also wellness, happiness, welfare and even prosperity. A good modern-day English equivalent might be the phrase “well-being.”

This word, “peace” carries so much meaning for us in the New Testament. Beginning with the Christmas announcement on the occasion of Jesus’ birth.

 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Luke 2:14

Look at the promises given by Jesus himself in his last few hours with his disciples before his death.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. John 14:27 NRSV

Then move to the list of the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s work in us;

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, and self-control. Gal 5:22-23 NRSV

The ministry of Jesus in our lives is closely associated with God’s gift of peace, wholeness, and well-being for our souls as well as our minds and emotions and bodies.

When I was growing up, in 4-H clubs, we summarized the wholeness of our humanity with the four words; head, heart, hands, and health. God wants to give peace and purpose and purity to all four – the thoughts of our head (renewed minds - Rom. 12:2), the affections of our hearts (purify your hearts – James 4:8), the works of our hands (eager to do good works – Titus 2:14), and the health of our body (3 John 2). As he does so, he renews our lives.

“God does not speak our fears out of existence. He does not lie about terrorists or diseases or meteors that hide in the dark corners of our world. He promises simply that all of these will have to get past him if they are to get to us. And he tells us to close our eyes for the night and rest, not because there is no danger, but because we can trust the Father.” Steve DeNeff in “More Than Forgiveness”

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# Conclusion:

Concluding story God With Us p. 30 – Laura Marino “Why Am I Not Dead?”

God renewed Laura’s life. A crisis, the auto accident, played a part in catalyzing the renewal of Laura’s life, but it was only a small part of it. Many people where used of God to help. The Holy Spirit gave Laura new confidence, new insights and new assurances along the way. She discovered that she had a new gift- photography. The result was a blossoming ministry to young women.

God wants to renew your life too. This morning’s message is a part of his work in reviving you, bringing you better health, restoring something that needs to be restored, building up something that needs to be built up in you, helping you to find a purpose in life that you will find fulfilling and that will be a ministry to others too.

Let us not keep on in our willful ways as the Israelites did (57:17) but submit our hearts to God and trust him to guide us in the paths of righteousness each day. AMEN.