

16 FROM BROKENNESS TO WHOLENESS

John took an early morning walk along the shore of the lake. He had to sort some things out for himself. In the cold fall air, he could see his breath form a cloud and then disappear. The morning sky made the lake reflect its dull steel color. Only small waves broke the surface.

"That's like my life," John said aloud. "It just reflects the color of those around me. It's dull." The narrow road twisted through the trees along the shore. John thought about Mrs. DeMarr who said, "Why can't you be more like your sister?" He thought about how his father was pushing him to go out for wrestling. "He doesn't even listen to how I feel. All he wants is for me to be like he was in high school."

The steel-colored sky rolled overhead, threatening snow by afternoon. John looked deep into the water. "Does anyone care how I am feeling?" he asked the wind.

3 STATEMENTS

- People everywhere experience troubles in their lives.
- When troubles come, people look for someone who is greater than themselves.
- Luke wanted to tell everyone what God had done in Jesus Christ.

the

Source

HOW ARE YOU DOING?

"How are you doing?" Ha greeted Ariel that way every morning. Usually Ariel would say, "Not bad, how about you?" Then the two friends would go off to class together. But one day, the morning greeting changed.

Ha greeted Ariel, but Ariel responded by saying, "Not so well. I need to talk to someone." Ariel had tears welling up in her eyes. She looked like she had been crying all night.

"Sure, what are friends for? Let's go to the library lounge and talk. Mr. Potter will let us be late," said Ha. Then, like an avalanche, Ariel poured out her story. Ha just listened quietly.

Many young people your age start their days like Ariel, tearful, perhaps frightened of what the day will bring.

Some people say that today is the best time in all of human history to be alive. Young people in your nation are the best-fed and best-educated generation ever. The world is on the threshold of major developments in computer science, space exploration, medicine, biological technology, and communications. People have the idea that everything is going great. It is said that unlimited possibilities await those who simply reach for them. So, on the one hand, things look pretty good. On the other hand, things are not as great as they seem. *People everywhere experience troubles in their lives.*

People everywhere experience troubles in their lives.

Rank the following statements in order of the level of threat they represent for you. Let "1" represent the greatest threat and "8" represent the least threat.

- ___ problems related to nuclear power and weapons
- ___ the increasing pollution of our planet
- ___ rapid population growth in the world
- ___ the AIDS epidemic
- ___ rising levels of racially motivated violence
- ___ depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere
- ___ increases in child abuse, drug abuse, handgun killings, and gang-related crimes
- ___ other: _____

Now go back over your list and place a check mark (✓) next to the item or items that you and your class could change for the better within the next five years. How many could you change on your own?

The statements listed above were mostly of global or national concern, but personal difficulties such as strained relationships at home or school or low self-esteem also could have been listed. If you made a list of personal troubles, how many of them could you change on your own within the next year? Probably only a very few could be changed.



Jim Whitmer

WHO CAN HELP?

Although our society has a positive view of life, there are many people who experience problems in their lives. There are people who are not doing very well. Sometimes people have troubles in their lives that threaten to bring them down. Some of these problems can be worked out with some effort. For example, a difficult math problem can usually be figured out by working with a math teacher. A misunderstanding with a friend can usually be worked out by talking to each other. But you know that not all of your problems are as easily solved as math problems or misunderstandings between friends. The deep troubles people encounter are usually much bigger than they can handle on their own.

Where do you go when you encounter such deep troubles? Some popular religious ideas say that you should go to your inner self. But think about that for a moment. You are the one in trouble! How can you help you? Trying to save yourself is like a drowning woman trying to save herself. Some try to save themselves by relying on personal power, wealth, drugs, or alcohol.

When troubles come, people look for someone who is greater than themselves. People call that someone "God." For Christians, this God is the God of Israel and Jesus.

People in trouble need to hear a saving word from someone who can do something about the mess in which they have found themselves. Ariel needed to have Ha speak a caring word to her and be with her in her trouble. That is the way God saves people. God comes to us through other people—through parents, friends, pastors, teachers, and so on. These people bring to you God's word of hope and promise.

In the Old Testament unit of this course you read about the many troubles and trials of the Israelites. Although they were God's chosen people, they often cried out to the one they knew could save them. For example, God's people were in exile in Babylon and God answered their cries for help (see Session 12).

Some of the most powerful yet comforting words ever addressed to troubled people are recorded in the book of Isaiah the prophet. Read Isaiah 40:1-5 aloud once and then silently to yourself a second time.

1. How do you know the people were in trouble?

2. What colors and sounds would you use to describe the mood of the people in these verses?

3. What did God promise the people in these verses?

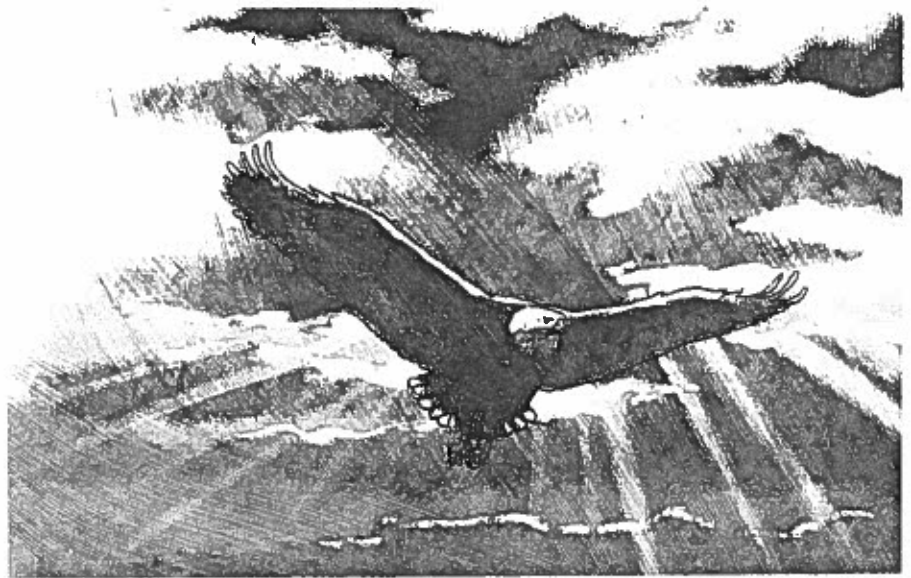
Through the word of the prophet Isaiah, God made the declaration to act on behalf of the people to save them in time of trouble. When the people heard this good news, something interesting happened to them. Read Isaiah 40:6-8.

4. What did the people say about themselves (verse 7)?

5. What did they say about God (verse 8)?

In verses 12-26 the prophet sang the praises of God the creator of heaven and earth. Then in the section starting at verse 27, the prophet made a shift of focus. The prophet did not continue to speak of God as the grand creator of the universe. Instead, the prophet spoke of God who is concerned for people. The whole universe is focused in God's concern for people like you. This announcement of help from the prophet ends with some very encouraging words for young people like you.

Read Isaiah 40:27-31 aloud. Write down one verse from this passage that you think expresses the hope we have in God.



FINDING A WAY

Throughout the ages people have looked to God for help. The Israelites looked to God to send one called the *Messiah* to save them from their enemies. They looked for the Messiah to restore the kingdom of David. God had been present with people in all times, although sometimes God's presence had been more visible than at other times.

Christians carried the good news that the Messiah (or the *Christ* in the Greek language) had come in Jesus who is called *Christ*. They proclaimed that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ was evidence that God had come to save all people.

The gospel writer *Luke* wanted to tell everyone what God had done in Jesus Christ. To do that, Luke wrote a history of Jesus called a *gospel*. Luke gave two reasons why he wrote this gospel. One reason was to "set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us." The second reason was so that the readers would "know the truth."

Read Luke's introduction to his story of Jesus Christ in Luke 1:1-4.

1. Luke used the word *fulfilled* to describe what happened. What is the difference between an event that just *happened* and one that *fulfilled* something?

When troubles come, people look for someone who is greater than themselves.

2. If you had lived during the time of Jesus and Luke, what sorts of things would you have wanted to be fulfilled? In other words, what would you have been looking for in a Savior Messiah? Make a list. Then discuss them together as a class.

3. In what ways are you looking for the same Messiah today?

People have looked to Luke's story of Jesus and the other books in the Bible for hope and encouragement. For generation upon generation, people have read and studied these books,

looking for the truth about God and how God wants us to live. The Bible is the one book in which all we think and believe about what God has done for us is recorded for all to read. In the Bible, believers see God at work saving God's chosen people.

That is what the church has said about the Bible. Now it is up to you. You do not need to write anything down; just think about the next three questions.

- How does the Bible tell the truth for you?
- What helps you to understand the things Luke and the other writers recorded in the Bible?
- What are you looking for in a Savior in your troubled times?

Luke wanted to tell everyone what God had done in Jesus Christ.



Shaping life

FOR YOU

Near the beginning of this session in "How Are You Doing?" on page 87, you read the story about two friends, Ariel and Ha. One of the most important things that Ha did for Ariel was to be with her in her time of trouble.

If you were in a troubled situation, which of the following would you rather have? Check (✓) the ones that apply.

- ___ a letter of encouragement
- ___ a parent
- ___ a telephone call from a friend
- ___ a hug from a friend
- ___ someone to listen to you
- ___ a Bible

Now turn your thinking around. What do you have that you can offer someone who is experiencing trouble?

1. Name three qualities about yourself that could help someone else.

2. Write down one verse from Isaiah 40 that you think could be of comfort to someone in trouble. Discuss with one other person why you chose that verse and how it could help.

What most people find so important in a time of trouble is the presence of another caring person. People say that they can withstand almost anything if they are not alone. You are not alone.

FURTHER

opportunities

Mishna Minutes.

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:3—7:27 sounded the keynote of the new age that Jesus brought. This sermon has been the subject of generations of Christian meditation and reflection. The most familiar portion of this sermon is called the *Beatitudes* (Matthew 5:3-12). Read the Beatitudes once each day for a week.

Read these verses slowly to allow God's word to sink in. Keep a small notebook of thoughts and questions that come to mind as you read. Seek to keep these verses in your memory. They are strong words concerning the direction of Christian discipleship. They are strong words of assurance when you face troubled times.

Activity 1

Reread Isaiah 40:1-11, 27-31. Select one or two verses that you find meaningful. Write the verse or verses on a 3" x 5" card. Post the card in a place where you will see it every morning.

Activity 2

Select a verse from Isaiah 40 and make a greeting card for someone you know who is experiencing difficulty. Include a word of encouragement of your own. Be sure to send the card.

Activity 3

Make a banner that expresses the hope you have in a troubled world. You may wish to include on the banner symbols of the bad things in life as well as symbols of God's promised salvation. Ask your pastor or worship committee if the banner could be used as a part of a worship service.

FOCUS

ON FIRST- CENTURY LIFE IN ISRAEL

What was it like to be your age in Galilee of Judea in A.D. 30?

First of all, your country was under control of the Roman Empire for about 70 years. The Romans allowed many of the Jewish religious and social practices to continue. They were tolerant, but they were quick to act at the slightest hint of an uprising by the people. If you had grown up in Galilee, you probably would have witnessed public crucifixions.

Galilee was considered to have the best farmland in Palestine. Its soil was very rich and was dotted with groves of fruit trees and cultivated fields of wheat and other small grains.

If you had lived in the town of Nazareth, you would have seen people from all over the world. Nazareth lay on the busy roads on which pilgrims traveled to and from Jerusalem. Merchant caravans passed through almost daily from Egypt or Damascus.

The family was the cornerstone of Jewish life. Family often meant more than husband, wife, and children. Family included three or four generations living in one house.

A son remained in his mother's care until he was five years old. He then came under his father's guidance. He was instructed in a trade and taught the Jewish Law and the other duties of faith and life. The son's father usually selected the wife for his son. The daughter stayed under her mother's influence learning household duties until her marriage. Her husband was selected for her in an arrangement worked out by her father and the father of the man she would marry.

