

A Story of Strength

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Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.

(Isaiah 41:10)

Passage Background and Summary

Isaiah wrote words of comfort during times when the people of Israel were plagued by wars, rumors of war, and suffered the oppression of living in exile. Yet, amid all that the people suffered, Isaiah offered words of comfort and hope. The above verse is one example. In chapter 40, Isaiah told the people if they hope in God their strength would be renewed. Isaiah continually reminded the people that despite difficult times, God was their source and their strength. Dr. Guidry's message draws from Isaiah's words to provide a prophetic message for this moment.

2020 on all accounts has been a rough time for us. From the tragic death of Kobe Bryant to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic to the continuing killings of African Americans at the hands of police or white vigilante, the country, the world has experienced collective trauma. Likewise, many of us individually have experienced trauma during this time whether its loss of income or loss of family members and friends, we have been through it. But that is only a single story.

Guidry described a concept, developed by American-Nigerian novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichi called single stories. Single stories are stories told through one perspective, one point of view. Single stories fail to embrace a breadth of ideas and tends to focus solely on the negative. That one story becomes the only story.

Single stories are not the only stories especially for people of faith. For believers, more than one thing can be true at the same time.

What we have been through is only one of our stories. The other story recognizes that despite what we are going through, God is still on the

throne; God is still control. God is the God of multiple stories. Through everything we have endured, God has been with us. Our story will be one of what God is doing through the storm. What we have been through, sets us up to proceed toward what is ahead.

How do we proceed toward what lies ahead, toward the next chapter of our story?

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 1. **Proceed despite the struggle.** The struggles will not stop, but you proceed anyway. In these times, our prayer may not be to ask God to remove the barrier, but for strength to endure it. Our situation may not get easier, but God can make us stronger.
 2. **Reaffirm what you believe about God and yourself.** Know that God is with you. Decide who your God is to you. Believe that the God of your ancestors is also with you. God and your ancestors have given you the strength to proceed.
 3. **See the emerging story.** See what God is doing in this day. Do not miss what God is doing in your life, even when it is not obvious. What you are going through is not the end of your story.

Discussion Questions

1. What is fear? Does it serve a purpose in our lives, if so what?
2. What causes you the greatest amount of anxiety during this season of your life?
3. Is there a story that you have told about yourself or something that you have been through that continues to shed a negative light on your life, your beliefs about yourself and its value?
4. What is another story that shows how the challenges you have been through have made you who you are today?
5. Describe an instance in which you relied on God's strength during a trial and one where you did not. What was the outcome in each situation?
6. How have been able to trace God's hand working in different circumstances?
7. What have you discovered about yourself during this season that you can carry with you into the next season?
8. What fruit has come or will come out of this wilderness season? For you? For the community? For the church? For the world?

