

An aerial photograph of a beach. The top half shows dark blue, turbulent ocean waves crashing onto the shore, creating white foam. The bottom half shows the golden-brown sand of the beach, which is cracked and textured. The text is overlaid on the image.

S T R E N G T H

F O R T H E

W E A R Y

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D E R E K W . H . T H O M A S

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## E N D O R S E M E N T S

“Some Christians (and pastors) excel in afflicting the comforted while others comfort the afflicted. Few have the grace to do both. The prophet Isaiah was one of those who could, and reading these pages based on his great prophecies will convince you that Dr. Derek Thomas has learned to be another. Here is a spiritual treat, giving us both an exalted view of the majesty of God and a deep sense that Christ’s grace is sufficient for all our needs. *Strength for the Weary* is simply a feast of good things—truly nourishing spiritual fare, skillfully prepared and lovingly presented.”

—Dr. Sinclair B. Ferguson  
Teaching Fellow  
Ligonier Ministries

“Derek Thomas is one of the few men in the world who can blend the highest degree of biblical and theological scholarship together with the most insightful, practical, and pastoral wisdom and grace and do it in such a way that everyone can understand and benefit from it. *Strength for the Weary* is Derek Thomas at his best. If you are a Christian, you can be sure that you will experience struggle and opposition in this life. Jesus told us it would be so. That is why you need to read this book. And, as you do, you will find your heart warmed, your soul encouraged, your mind expanded, and your faith strengthened. You will find the help that you need as you strive to walk by faith and not by sight in every situation of your life.”

—Dr. Guy M. Richard  
President  
and Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology  
Reformed Theological Seminary, Atlanta

“One of the things I have long admired about Derek Thomas is the deliberate way he seeks to comfort weary Christians with clear biblical teaching. Drawing from select passages in Isaiah, Dr. Thomas combines the insights of a theologian, the skill of a preacher, and the concern of a pastor in a devotional book written for the purpose of encouraging downtrodden pilgrims. I needed this book. I suspect you do as well. Reading these straightforward but carefully crafted meditations on God’s Word may not provide immediate relief from your pain. But this book will direct you to the God of all comfort. For that reason, Derek Thomas’ *Strength for the Weary* is a much-needed resource for finding lasting rest in a world of constant sorrow.”

—Dr. John W. Tweeddale  
Academic Dean and Professor of Theology  
Reformation Bible College, Sanford, Fla.

S T R E N G T H

F O R T H E

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES



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In memory of J. Alec Motyer  
1924–2016  
Scholar, preacher, pastor



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## P R E F A C E

Weariness in the Christian life is something we all experience at some stage or another. Sometimes, it is impossible to give a reason for the exhaustion we feel. We are just *tired*. Life throws challenges at us, and we find ourselves floundering. To use an illustration from the prophet Isaiah, we walk “in darkness and [have] no light” (Isa. 50:10). And some trials seem, at least to us, to have no purpose. It is interesting that the Bible records God Himself saying as much to Satan: “You incited me against him to destroy him *without reason*”<sup>1</sup> (Job 2:3, emphasis added). Of course, nothing God does is “without reason” *for Him*. His actions are always purposeful. Nothing He does is random. But it sometimes appears to us as though God’s actions are indiscriminate and haphazard. The trials seem pointless—so much so that we find ourselves thinking, “Does God *really* care?”<sup>2</sup>

Finding help in the midst of our trials is what this book is about. And the help that we have in mind is that offered in the second half of Isaiah. This is not the place to address the technical issues of whether there are, in fact, *two* or even *three* Isaiahs. Let me insist at once that I do not believe this

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hypothesis. Much Old Testament scholarship, however, having lost touch with the Bible's own self-attesting authority, has long since balked at Isaiah's ability to accurately predict events that came more than a century and a half after his death. Hence, there must be "another" Isaiah—someone who claimed to be Isaiah—who wrote during or even after the Babylonian exile. This "other" Isaiah supposedly gave accurate prophecies from a later historical vantage point, where the interjection of a sympathetic Persian king looked far more likely than it did in the eighth century BC. Conclusions suggesting two or even three "Isaiahs" are expressions of disbelief in the inerrancy of Scripture. Suffice it to say that I do not believe this hypothesis is necessary.

*Strength for the Weary* is not a commentary on the entirety of the second half of Isaiah. Instead, I have chosen some of the great texts from this magnificent portion of Scripture. The choice of texts was somewhat random; they are verses that have meant a great deal to me over the years and seem particularly poignant for the antagonistic culture in which we currently live. Here are some examples of these texts:

Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. (Isa. 40:1)

He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength. (Isa. 40:29)

I am the LORD, and there is no other,  
besides me there is no God. (Isa. 45:5)

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Come, everyone who thirsts,  
    come to the waters;  
and he who has no money,  
    come, buy and eat!  
Come, buy wine and milk  
    without money and without price. (Isa. 55:1)

For behold, I create new heavens  
    and a new earth,  
and the former things shall not be remembered  
    or come into mind. (Isa. 65:17)

Texts such as these are powerful weapons against unbelief and fear. When we commit them to memory and employ them when Satan and his minions attack us, these passages of Scripture can help us walk tall and reflect the glory of the Lord.

*Strength for the Weary* is therefore designed to do what the title suggests: provide encouragement to weary pilgrims on their journey through this world of trial and sorrow.

Currently, you may find yourself in “green pastures” and “beside still waters,” to cite the imagery of Psalm 23. If so, you may count yourself blessed indeed. But my guess is that if you have made it this far, you are in one of the other places mentioned in this psalm: “in the valley of the shadow of death” or “in the presence of [your] enemies.” If so, Isaiah’s timeless words of comfort are for you.

Three works on Isaiah by the late Alec Motyer are referenced in this book.<sup>3</sup> He “finished the race” in the summer of 2016, and a few days before the news of his home-calling arrived, I received



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a letter from him in the mail. I will always treasure it. Dr. Motyer was (and remains) the finest scholar on all things related to Isaiah, and consulting anyone else seemed superfluous.

These chapters formed part of a short series of sermons preached at First Presbyterian Church, Columbia, S.C., where I currently minister. These folks are very special indeed, and I am grateful to God for the honor of serving them. My sweet bride, Rosemary, is also part of my story. This year, we celebrated forty years of marriage. I cannot imagine life without her strength and support. There are no words sufficient to express my gratitude for her.

A dear friend, Dr. William (Bill) Bates, kindly agreed to proofread this manuscript, and I am greatly indebted to him for his invaluable insights. What errors remain are entirely mine.

Over the years, these great passages in Isaiah have done my soul much good. My prayer is that they will also help you to “be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16b–17a).

—Derek W.H. Thomas  
Christmas 2016

# STRENGTH FOR THE WEARY

He gives power to the faint,  
and to him who has no might he increases strength. (Isa. 40:29)

Playing hide-and-seek is a child's game. It is usually characterized by fun and laughter. Unless, that is, the stakes are raised and it becomes a sinister episode between God and me. All of a sudden, it is no longer a game, but a nightmare.

God has hidden Himself from me and I cannot find Him.

God has hidden Himself from me and doesn't want to be found.

“My way is hidden from the LORD.” (Isa. 40:27)

“Has God forgotten me?” Have you ever asked that question?

Christians *do* experience such days more frequently than we might admit. Consider the following trio of passages:

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Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps. 10:1)

Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? (Ps. 44:24)

How long, O LORD? Will you hide yourself forever? (Ps. 89:46)

*God doesn't love me anymore.* Can believers really think this? Yes, they can. And do.

It is what the serpent (Satan) suggested to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden—that “God doesn’t love you as much as you think He does.” In effect, Satan was saying, “If God *really* loved you, He wouldn’t deprive you of this fruit.”

And Adam and Eve believed the serpent more than they did the reassurances of God. The voice of the serpent drowned out the sound of God’s voice. And in the silence, they wandered away.

Evidently, those to whom the prophet Isaiah spoke in the eighth century BC were facing the same danger. God seemed “hidden” from their eyes.

Finding God in difficult times is what this book is about. We will therefore almost exclusively confine ourselves to the second half of the book of Isaiah.<sup>1</sup> For here, too, in the period of Israel’s history leading up to eventual exile in Babylon—a century and a half in their future—the prophet predicts that the Lord’s people will experience a “dark night of the soul.”

605, 597, AND 586 BC:  
THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM

Transporting us into this future exile, Isaiah imagines the Lord's people believing the same lie as Adam and Eve in the garden. "How can God love me if He has abandoned me and my family to life in exile?"

Imagine, then, the story.

Over a period of twenty years, Jerusalem witnessed its own complete demise. In 605 BC, the first wave of deportations took place. Young men, such as Daniel, were taken to Babylon. In 597 BC, men such as the prophet Ezekiel were taken into captivity. Then, in 586 BC, the city of Jerusalem was destroyed, its walls torn down, and the temple ransacked and demolished. Zedekiah, Judah's final king, had his eyes put out after the murder of his two sons. Watching his sons die was the last thing he saw, and he ended his days in a Babylonian prison.

Jerusalem was set ablaze.

War is often glamorized, but in reality, it is about death and destruction, rape and torture. Little wonder then, that God's people were reduced to spiritual darkness. Where is the Lord in this calamity? How could He possibly permit such things to occur?

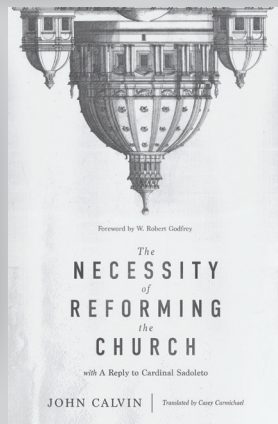
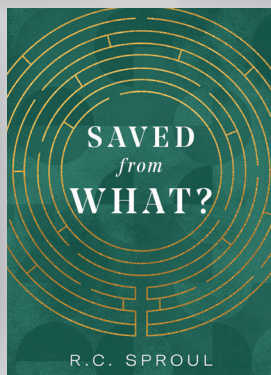
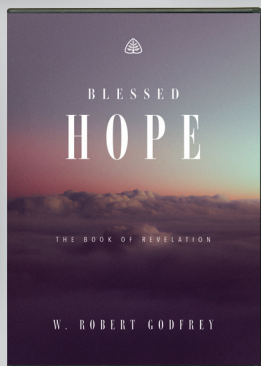
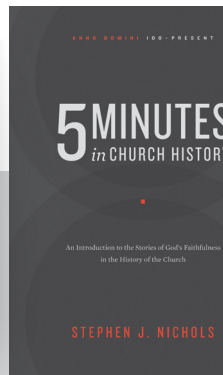
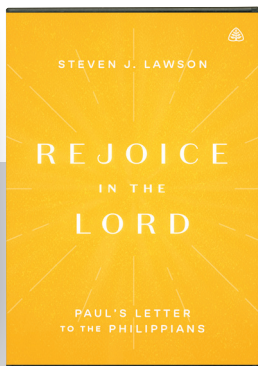
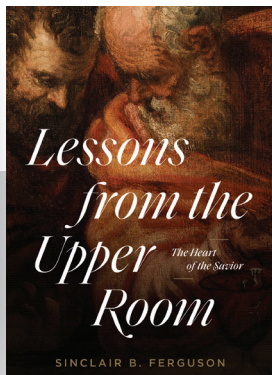
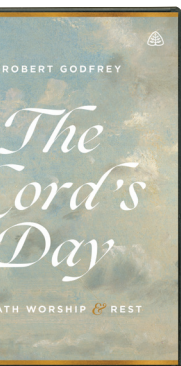
"My way is hidden from the Lord."

"Is this how it's going to be from now on? Pointless, hum-drum, without purpose or ambition?"

Locked in a dark cave of despair and gloom. Not so much "the best life now" but "the best life is somewhere in the past and it's never coming back."



We want to see men and women around the world connect the deep truths of the Christian faith to everyday life.



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