

# “Fly, Run, Walk”

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Isaiah 40: 21-31

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Almost 12 years ago my family had the opportunity to live in Mexico for 6 months. After the birth of our third child, Petra, my husband took parental leave from his work, and the 5 of us ventured off to Mexico to learn a new language and experience living in a different culture. We lived in the city of Guanajuato, which is located in the geographic center of Mexico, in the mountains. It is an incredibly old and beautiful city— a UNESCO World Heritage Site because of the unique architecture. For the last 300 years silver mining has been one of the main industries. It was silver money that built the incredibly beautiful churches and theatres. Living there was a wonderfully rich experience for our whole family.



One of the things that first struck me when we arrived in Mexico was the manual labour. In all my life I have never seen manual labour to the extent that I saw it there. No doubt manual labour is very present all over Mexico, but in Guanajuato, it takes your breath away. Guanajuato is built in the mountains, and everywhere you go there are stairs. To get from the downtown, where all the stores were, up to our house, we had to climb up 362 stairs.

That's about 8 stories. And everywhere in the city was the same; some people had a higher climb and others not quite so many stairs, but everyone did stairs. Walking up stairs did get a little easier in my time there, with muscles strengthening and my blood adapting to less oxygen at the high altitude, but you can only get so used to climbing 362 but-who's-counting stairs. I always marveled when I saw an old woman coming from the *mercado*



with large colourful bags loaded down with fruit, vegetables and meat climbing up the stairs slowly and deliberately.

But it was the construction men who took the prize. All day they would go up or down the stairs with loads of sand or bricks. The sand was in enormous bags that they would fill at the truck at the bottom of the stairs, and the bricks would be stacked from as low as their hands stretch down behind their backs up to the top of their heads in a pillar of three or four in diameter. I couldn't imagine carrying those loads two steps, let alone up hundreds of stairs for about 8 hours a day. Real manual labour has just about disappeared in Canada. There are many heavy machine operators, but very few heavy load bearers.

At least there are very few *physical* heavy load bearers. We all know what it is like to carry heavy loads of worry, of grief, of stress, of loneliness. This has been a long winter for many. With so much snow and ice, it can feel heavy just carrying the burden of living through winter. What burdens are you carrying? If we went around the room, I don't think we'd find a single person who isn't carrying a heavy burden of some kind. Life is hard. The book of Job says "*For hardship does not spring from the soil, nor does trouble sprout from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.*" (Job: 5:6-7) Whether it is our health, pressures from work, relationship troubles, financial worries or significant changes in life, there is plenty for us to be concerned about. From time to time we all suffer under the weight of bad relationships, bad health and bad cash-flow.

The scripture passage we read today might be partly familiar to you. It is a very hope-filled passage that speaks of the Sovereignty of God. But the prophet Isaiah isn't delivering this message to happy, light-hearted people with no cares or concerns. He delivers this message to the people in exile. They were weary and weighed down. It seemed to them that God had forgotten them and that life would forever be hard.

Not so long ago most experts believed that eagles only did short migrations, not the long distances ones that the little birds do – it just didn't seem possible for such big birds to fly very far. Now we know that eagles migrate from Alaska in the fall to the Southern U.S. and Mexico to spend the winter. How do they do it? They need to glide as much as possible and use powered flight—where they flap their wings—as little as possible.



The wings of eagles are designed such that they can take advantage of even the slightest upward current of air. They deliberately fly close to mountains to catch thermals – the warm up-thrusts of air. With the help of good air currents, an eagle can take off at dawn and not land once until dusk.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could catch some thermals from time to time?

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.  
He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.  
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;  
but those 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 40: 28-31 NRSV)*

How do we do that?  
There are a number of ways. Here are some of my top choices:

1. Find regular ways to connect to the Source. Every day, every week find time to connect to God. Who will renew their strength? *Those who wait for the Lord*. 'Wait' is not waiting around reading your Twitter feed hoping that God will get here soon. Waiting on the Lord is being present to and expecting God's presence. Find ways to remember that the Lord is Everlasting and that God has not forgotten you. Generally, it's we who forget God. It is so easy to get distracted or to focus so much on the problem that we forget to look up. Looking up can take many forms: devotionals, quiet walks, singing or listening to Christian music, praying, meditating – something that works for you, that grounds you or reminds you of who you are and whose you are.
2. If you have a burden to bear—acknowledge it, and try to accept it. I'm generalizing a bit, and it's not always appropriate to accept it, but often half our problem is our fighting and resisting the fact that we have a burden in the first place. We are not promised an easy life, and some of these burdens *we are called to bear*. We may not understand why, but accepting that this is the way it is, makes it easier to bear. For example: the United Church is going through massive changes to its structure. We are getting information on it here and there, but a lot of the changes, and especially the implications of these changes, are just not clear. Yet so many clergy in particular are wrapped up in stress and anger and worry about it. It goes back to the Serenity Prayer, doesn't it? "God, Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change". We make our burdens so much heavier when we resist carrying the ones we have no choice about carrying.
3. Like that eagle, try to flap your wings less and glide more! I can remember when I took some swimming lessons with the local swim team. We would often be told to swim a set, like 400 meters of IM, and then we'd take a break at the wall. The coach would teach a bit and then we'd do another set. But sometimes instead of giving us a break he would tell us that we should make certain laps "recovery laps". Instead of stopping at the wall, we had to keep going, but we had to relax as we swam so we could prepare for an intense number of laps. "Recovery laps" always sounded like an oxymoron to me, but sometimes in life we don't get a real break from whatever we are carrying – parenting young children or caring for an infirm spouse are examples where you just don't get a real break. Somehow we need to build in recovery laps — ways of making the day lighter. Maybe that means not sweating the small stuff and letting go of perfection. Maybe that means doing what needs to be done at a slower more relaxed pace. Sometimes, especially when we grew up with a lot of drama and stress, we can get addicted to

drama, and we jump from one crisis to another. Somehow we need to breathe more and not turn every little parking ticket or critical comment into a crisis. Don't swim every lap tense and with all your muscles flexed. Actually the swim coach was always telling us that you swim faster when you relax. You can test it out for yourself the next time you're in the pool. In the deep end (if you can swim!) try floating with every muscle tensed up and then try again with muscles relaxed. You float and you swim better when you are relaxed! The same is true of us. There's a whole lot out there that we can't control. Perhaps we can't even control the fact that we have a burden to carry, but *we can control how we carry it*.

4. Help someone carry their load. Helping others makes us feel lighter and better. I am part of a small group. One of the members challenged the rest of us for the month of February to reach out to someone every day and say "I'm thinking about you, and I hope you have a great day." Pick up the phone, write a text or FaceBook Messenger. I'm always amazed at how it touches people, and how good it makes me feel.
5. Practice gratitude. We hear that so often, it sounds like a cliché, but study, after study tells us that gratitude make us feel better. It isn't always easy, especially when you are carrying a weight. It takes discipline, but it really changes you. When you feel heavy or anxious, increase your gratitude.

One of the things that is interesting about this piece of scripture is that little bit at the end that you maybe know by heart: "*but those 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.*"

Those little triplets are common throughout Hebrew scripture, but typically they build in importance so that the most important statement is the last one. So this one is curious. You would expect it be the other way around "Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall walk and not faint, they shall run and not be weary, they shall mount up with wings like eagles." But I think it's deliberately the opposite. It may be a reflection on aging – we start life full of beans and craving adventure and gradually, we slow down. In the end, life is not about attaining great speed or power, but learning to put one foot in front of the other in simple, faithful trust and service.

Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the creator of the ends of the earth. Put your life in the hands of the one who never grows weary and you will find your burdens easier and even worth carrying.

Let me close with a poem I love, written by Denise Levertov.

**The Avowal:**

*As swimmers dare to lie face to sky  
and water bears them,  
as hawks rest upon air  
and air sustains them,  
so would I learn to attain freefall,  
and float into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,  
knowing no effort earns  
that all-surrounding grace.*

Thanks be to God. Amen