

## Isaiah 40:

### An Embodied Reading Exercise

**Instructions:** *Read the following poetic oracle from Isaiah, following the suggested reading and engagement directives in bolded italics throughout. Feel free to spread out throughout the park as you feel comfortable.*

**Read:**

**40** Comfort, comfort my people,  
says your God.  
<sup>2</sup> Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,  
and proclaim to her  
that her hard service has been  
completed,  
that her sin has been paid for,  
that she has received from the LORD's  
hand double for all her sins.  
<sup>3</sup> A voice *cries out in the wilderness:*

**Read, out loud to yourself:**

"Prepare the way for the LORD;  
make straight in the desert  
a highway for our God.  
<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be raised up,  
every mountain and hill made low;  
the rough ground shall become level,  
the rugged places a plain.  
<sup>5</sup> And the glory of the LORD will be  
revealed,  
and all people will see it together.  
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."  
<sup>6</sup> A voice says, "Cry out."  
And I said, "What shall I cry?"  
"All people are like grass,  
and all their faithfulness is like the  
flowers of the field.  
<sup>7</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
because the breath of  
the LORD blows on them.  
Surely the people are grass.

**Stop; read the next two lines to  
yourself 3 times:**

<sup>8</sup> The grass withers and the flowers fall,  
but the word of our God  
endures forever."

***Then, stand up and take a walk for  
several minutes. While walking, and  
without reading them, repeat those  
two lines to yourself over and over.  
Notice the world around you, above  
you, and below you as you walk and  
repeat the lines from v. 8.***

**After a few minutes, find a place to sit  
or stand and read:**

<sup>9</sup> You who bring good news to Zion,  
go up on a high mountain.  
You who bring good news to  
Jerusalem,<sup>[a]</sup>  
lift up your voice with a shout,  
lift it up, do not be afraid;  
say to the towns of Judah,

**Read, out loud, with a shout:**

"Here is your God!"

**Read, to yourself:**

<sup>10</sup> See, the Sovereign LORD comes with  
power, and he rules with a mighty arm.  
See, his reward is with him, and his  
recompense accompanies him.

<sup>11</sup> He tends his flock like a shepherd:  
He gathers the lambs in his arms

and carries them close to his heart;  
he gently leads those that have  
young.

<sup>12</sup> Who has measured the waters in the  
hollow of his hand,  
or with the breadth of his hand  
marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a  
basket,

or weighed the mountains on the  
scales and the hills in a balance?

<sup>13</sup> Who can fathom the Spirit<sup>(d)</sup> of  
the LORD,  
or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

<sup>14</sup> Whom did the LORD consult to  
enlighten him,  
and who taught him the right way?  
Who was it that taught him knowledge,  
or showed him the path of  
understanding?

***Pause, close your eyes for a moment  
and take a few deep breaths.***

***Then re-read the passage above.  
Consider the imagery. Look up at the  
sky. Is there water nearby? Consider  
it. Stand up and walk around for a  
while, if you are inspired to do so.  
What do you feel?***

***Read, to yourself:***

<sup>15</sup> Surely the nations are like a drop in a  
bucket; they are regarded as dust on the  
scales; he weighs the islands as though  
they were fine dust.

<sup>16</sup> Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,  
nor its animals enough for burnt  
offerings.

<sup>17</sup> Before him all the nations are as

nothing; *from nothing and emptiness  
they are reckoned to him.*

<sup>18</sup> With whom, then, will you compare  
God? To what image will you liken him?

<sup>19</sup> As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,  
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold  
and fashions silver chains for it.

<sup>20</sup> A person too poor to present such an  
offering selects wood that will not rot;  
they look for a skilled worker  
to set up an idol that will not topple.

***Stand up and find a piece of wood.  
Hold it in your hands; turn it over and  
over in your hands and examine it  
closely. Consider what it would be to  
take and form an organic piece of  
wood into an icon of worship. How  
does that compare to worshiping God?***

<sup>21</sup> Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the  
beginning?

Have you not understood since the  
earth was founded?

<sup>22</sup> He sits enthroned above the circle of  
the earth, and its people are like  
grasshoppers. He stretches out the  
heavens like a canopy, and spreads  
them out like a tent to live in.

***Pause and re-read the passage above.  
Consider the rhetorical questions.  
What do they make you feel? What  
effect do they have on you? Consider  
the sky above you, in its vastness.  
What emotions or thoughts does it  
provoke?***

**Read, to yourself:**

<sup>23</sup> He sets princes to *nothing*  
and the rulers of earth he makes as  
*emptiness*.

<sup>24</sup> No sooner are they planted,  
no sooner are they sown,  
no sooner *does their stem* take root in  
the ground, than he blows on them and  
they *shrivel up*,  
and a whirlwind sweeps them away  
like chaff.

***Stop; find a small plant. Don't destroy it but touch it. Experience the feel of the leaves between your fingers. Smell it. Consider the size of the plant as it relates to you. Consider how little effort it would take for you to destroy the plant. Re-read the small passage above with this in mind.***

**Read, to yourself:**

<sup>25</sup> "To whom will you compare me?  
Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One.

<sup>26</sup> Lift up your eyes and look to the  
heavens:

Who created all these?  
He who brings out the starry host  
one by one  
and calls forth each of them by name.  
Because of his great power and mighty  
strength, not one of them is missing.

***Pause and lift your eyes upward towards the sky. Consider the vastness of sky and space. Consider the complexity of each.***

**Read, to yourself:**

<sup>27</sup> Why do you complain, Jacob?  
Why do you say, Israel,  
"My way is hidden from the LORD;  
my cause is disregarded by my God"?

<sup>28</sup> Do you not know?  
Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God,  
the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary,  
and his understanding no one can  
fathom.

<sup>29</sup> He gives strength to the weary  
and increases the power of the weak.

<sup>30</sup> Even youths grow tired and weary,  
and young men stumble and fall;

<sup>31</sup> but 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.

***Close your eyes. Feel the breeze. Imagine what it might be like to soar in the air like a majestic bird. Take a few deep breaths and allow the air from the breeze to fill you and become a part of you. Feel the earth under you. Try to simply sit and experience the moment exactly as it is.***

***Then, re-read the passage above. What does this passage provoke in you? What do you feel?***

***Take a few moments to pray and reflect. Use the lines on the back to write your reflections.***

