



THE BIBLE TOP
5

What do the five most searched, highlighted and shared Bible verses really mean? Are they sometimes misunderstood? These five famous Bible verses may not mean what many people think they mean, but like all of God's Word, what they truly tell us is so much more!

THE BIBLE TOP 5 • Isaiah 41:8–16 • Tim McConnell • July 26, 2020

We are looking at famous verses. Most popular, and maybe most popularly misunderstood. **The Bible Top 5**, five of the most searched, most quoted, most shared, most clicked, probably most tattooed verses in the Bible. I thought about starting there. Which verses get tattooed on people the most? What are people looking for in the Bible? What are they searching for? The most popular verses are also most popularly misunderstood, and sometimes the misunderstanding makes them popular. But the actual meaning is so much better. Today we look at Isaiah 41:10: "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). I think it's the first half that drew the popularity in search engines over the last year. Isn't there a verse about not being afraid? "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God." Yeah. We need that.

Does the verse mean that no bad thing will come your way? Does this passage tell us that if we follow Jesus, if we get right with God, there will be no hardship, no suffering, no difficulty--the follower of Christ can expect no bad thing? If you were in the room with me, I think I would have just heard a scoff or two. We are not so naive as we, to think that following Jesus means nothing bad will ever come our way? I think that is how some outsiders view Christ-followers. People think this is what Christians believe. "That's why those people go to church. They're trying to get God on their side so nothing bad happens to them. Silly superstition." Well, that would be silly superstition. Sometimes too, I'm afraid, it does creep into our hearts. "I did what Pastor Tim said, I tried what the Bible said, I kept the rules my youth leader told me, and I'm still getting burned. This God thing isn't working for me." Does God promise a life with no bad thing? No. But there is a promise that's even better than a life full of rainbows and lollipops! There is a promise we need.

Isaiah speaks in a time when great powers were rising to threaten the people of God. The Assyrian and Babylonian empires had military might way beyond what the Israelites could match. Anxiety about the future was high, and really, hard times were coming. But, Isaiah makes clear, God is not losing power. God is not losing control. God has a plan and is capable of accomplishing it. Even if that plan includes hardship, suffering, anxiety and pain, hang in there--God will bring His plan to the finish line. This is the side of God presented in our passage today. "For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you" (Isaiah 41:13).

The people felt helpless on the landscape. Verse 14 is a little funny. "'Do not be afraid, you worm Jacob, little Israel, do not fear, for I myself will help you,' declares the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:14). Worm? It's funny to me that God goes with that image. "God, I feel like a worm on a sidewalk here. I feel as helpless as an insect, about to be stepped on and crushed." We might expect, "No, no. You're not a worm." But God goes with, "Yeah, you're kind of a worm." The truth is we are very small. We are very helpless. So many forces could bring my life to an end right now, today, this instant! God does not pretend otherwise, but inserts the promise, "I am your God. You're small, but don't be afraid. I'm big. I'll help you." In fact, God promises, you might feel like a worm who can only make a little track in the mud, but in My hands you will be a plow powerful enough to flatten mountains. "See, I will make you into a threshing sledge, new and sharp, with many teeth. You will thresh the mountains and crush them, and reduce the hills to chaff. You will winnow them, the wind will pick them up, and a gale will blow them away. But you will rejoice in the Lord and glory in the Holy One of Israel" (Isaiah 41:15-16).

Does that mean we will never face hardship? No. Life is hard. God never promises otherwise. I love the sunshine days when life feels like walking

hand in hand with Jesus through the wildflower meadows with the warm sun on my back and a cool breeze! I love when life is all lined up, the economy is soaring, my wife and I have all the time in the world for each other, our kids are hitting home runs every day! Oh boy! I love good times, but I grow the most in hard times. We love the happy times, but we grow in the hard times. God isn't as concerned with your comfort as your character. Is it any wonder God allows hard times for those He loves? Times of suffering become an instrument in God's hands to shape us and form us. Some hard things God allows, the impact of a broken world. Some hard things God sends as a test. Remember a test is an occasion to advance, like a final exam. We advance through testing. Some suffering we bring down on ourselves, the natural consequences of foolish behavior. And some painful things are done to us by others. All of them, all of them, God can use to shape and form you and I more into the likeness of Jesus. Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Pastor and author John Piper was bold to put out a book immediately on *Coronavirus and Christ*, suggesting seven things God might be doing in this pandemic. God is not dethroned by COVID-19. God is not pushed to the sidelines. Piper offers seven things God may be doing. Things like allowing us to see physically the ravaging effects of sin on the created order; allowing us to experience the damage of sinful choices. Awakening the world to hope for the second coming of Christ. Issuing a divine thunderclap reminding us of mortality and the need for eternal life in Jesus. Calling Christians to brave acts of good will and compassion that reveal the light of Christ. Uniting the people of the world under one global struggle and distributing the Gospel through new global connections. Who knows? I was challenged to read Piper's take, and encouraged too. In history this is how things look in the rearview mirror when we look back on plagues and epidemics. People got serious about God.

People united in new ways. Christians demonstrated brave acts of love. Revivals broke out and patterns changed and things got generally better after--but not while the pain was still set in. After. You see the good effects after.

Does Isaiah 41 promise a constantly comfortable life? When the Bible speaks comfort, it is setting us up to expect a life with no pain, no bad thing? Suffering will certainly be a part of life, and part of life with God. Suffering becomes an instrument in God's hands to shape us, a megaphone to awaken us, a prod to move us and a chisel to cut away extraneous material as we are formed more and more in the image of Christ. "The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the Lord tests the heart" (Proverbs 17:3). The crucible. The silver goes into the crucible and is fired with heat. So much heat it melts, the precious metal turns to liquid. The impurities within it rise to the surface. The heat does that. The fire. The impurities once hidden rise to the surface where they can be seen. The silversmith removes them. The precious metal cools, refined. The crucible for silver. The furnace for gold. What about us? The Lord tests the heart. Remember, a test is an opportunity to advance.

Worse than going through the fires, then, is going through the fires without the shaping, purifying, refining hand of the Lord. Imagine going through the heat, all that melting heat, seeing your impurities rise, then just seeing them settle again back down into your soul. That, to me, seems worse than going through the fire in the first place. To go through it and get nothing out of it. To pass through the fire and come out the same person on the other side. My prayer for this season is that God will not allow me to pass through it the same. Lord, don't let me pass through this trial and come out the same man. Don't let our church come out the same. Don't let our city come out the same. Don't let our nation come out the same. Use this moment, this fire, and refine us, Lord!

Isaiah 41:10 is not a promise of no bad thing. But

it is a promise. "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isaiah 41:10). "Do not fear; I am with you." We don't live by fear but by faith. Our decisions, our lives, are not fear-based but faith-based. God is with us. "Don't be dismayed, I am your God." That's about hope. Push out the dismay, the despondency, the dark clouds of hopelessness. Why? Because "I am your God." You might feel as helpless as a worm, but look up. I am your God. I am your God. Don't dismay. "I will strengthen you and help you." God never pushes you into a trial to face alone. God is right here to strengthen and to help. "I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." Who is the right hand of God? It's Jesus. "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm achieved salvation for him, and his own righteousness sustained him" (Isaiah 59:16). Jesus. The arm is Jesus. Jesus the righteous right hand. Jesus sustains your life. Jesus is the saving right arm of the Lord. Jesus.

What is worse than suffering? Suffering with no purpose. What is worse than passing through the fire? Passing through the fire with no change, no refinement. Jesus has been through the fire. Jesus has been through suffering. Jesus walks with us in whatever pain and suffering we face. In Him we have peace. "Righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Psalms 85:10). Are you looking for peace in the middle of the fire? In Jesus, righteousness and peace kiss. Peace is not found in false comforts and temporarily-numbing vices we run to in our discomfort. Peace is found in the righteousness of Jesus Christ won for you on the cross. He's been through the fire. He'll walk through it with you. When you pass through the fires, hold on to Jesus. He's holding on to you. You will come out looking a little more like Him.

STUDY GUIDE

THE BIBLE TOP 5 • "No Bad Thing"

Isaiah 41:8-16

UP:

UP: Connect with God through Spending Time in His Word

Slowly, we are learning how to walk in a new atmosphere.

Grace is the word. Grace. John opens his gospel saying, "For from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Of all the peoples of the world, the children of God must walk in the grace of God if we are to reflect this core attribute of God. This summer the word is grace. In exactly the pace at which the Lord is leading you through Covid-19, may his grace abound to you.

Begin your study in prayer. Read and reflect on Isaiah 41:8-16.

- 1) According to verses 8-10, what has God done for His people?
- 2) Pastor Tim informs us this week that "the righteous right hand" of God mentioned in verse 10 is Jesus. How does your understanding of verse 10 deepen with this in mind?
- 3) What animal are God's people likened to in verse 14 and why is this actually great news?

OUT:

OUT: Connect With the World Around Us (Join God in His Mission)

4) It is easy to misapply Scripture like Isaiah 41:10 by reading our own misguided desires into the text. When we do this, we often presume that God only has ease and comfort and rest for us. Pastor Tim points out this week that the opposite is closer to the truth. The people of God will face circumstances akin to all the peoples of the earth. The difference for God's people is God promises to be with His people, for them and always strengthening them to walk in ever-increasing faithfulness. How does the knowledge that God has called you and promises to strengthen you and help you walk as His child affect how you live each day as a witness for God to those around you?

IN:

IN: Connect with Each Other

Host a conversation on how you feel, and how you don't feel, God's calling upon your life, His actively strengthening you and helping you to walk as His child in faithfulness toward Christ. Share your heart's requests around this conversation.

Pressing into the level of vulnerability that your group has built to date, close your time in prayer. Celebrating that God promises to strengthen you in faithfulness to Him, confess and rejoice together. Invite the Spirit to minister to your hearts. Ask God to give you the spiritual eyes to see how He desires to use you to be His witness in the coming days. Groups of 3 - 5 are ideal for this intimate, crucial time together.