

Zoom in with me for a second and look at a snapshot of my life. I say I believe that God is the king of the world, that He has everything under control, but I'm living in a way that doesn't reflect that one bit. It's the beginning of a new Karis year, so I'm stressed out. My to-do list is huge. We're kicking everything off again for the semester. I have new initiatives I want to pull off. My email inbox seems bottomless. There are new people coming on staff. And that's just Karis.

At home, I have three little kids under 7 that I'm trying to shepherd well. I have a wife who deserves my love and care. I'm trying to re-do our deck that's about to fall apart. In the midst of that, our washing machine breaks down. It seems like the money never covers the bills. So I'm anxious, I'm worried, I'm stressed. I wake up in the middle of the night and send an email. I have trouble sleeping some nights much at all. I have a stiff neck and back because of stress. It seems like I can never really rest my mind and relax. Because of all of this, I can be grumpy and irritable.

Now, I'm actually doing far better this fall. But these things are still battles I'm fighting. What about you? Feel really relaxed right now? Well, the first round of midterms are just around the corner. Soon you may get a couple of new projects thrown your way at work. Your car may just be a couple of weeks or potholes from breaking down. Then you'll know what I'm talking about. How do we get like this? Why are we so anxious and stressed all the time? And what do we do about it? We weren't meant to live like this. How can we change?

I'm going to get there today, but let me begin by sharing three introductory thoughts that I'll need to recap each week of this series. They really set the stage for understanding how to shake all this anxiety and frustration. **First, worship is meant to involve our heads, hearts, and hands.** We must begin with right thoughts of God or theology in our heads. This is why we must study Scripture carefully. We get truth in our minds. Then we know the God of the Bible. He then wants us to cherish those truths in our hearts. God wants us to love them. This is the essence of worship. We delight in who God is. We delight in how He works. Then that true thinking and feeling shows up in our doing. It comes out in our hands, our actions. All three are connected for right worship. Take one out and you have a problem.

**Second, the essence of sin is an exchange of worship.** **Romans 1** speaks of human beings trading the glory of Creator God for the worship of created things. This is what sin fundamentally is. It all starts here. The progression in that passage is really clear: **verse 21** says our thinking became futile - we believed lies in our heads - and then our feeling became darkened - we embraced them in our hearts. We became worshippers of idols and then our conduct came to reflect that worship. All three - head, heart, and hands - are engaged when we worship the true God or false gods, or idols.

**Third, our actions flow from what could be summarized as four main idols.** If you've been around much at Karis, you've heard these, but we need to revisit them today. If we think about idolatry in our culture today at all, we tend to think about idols in terms of actions. Let's take sex and work as two examples. Why do men seek to have as many conquests as possible? Why would they make sex an idol? Maybe they want to impress their friends. Perhaps they want to exert might over others. What about for a female? Why would she have hundreds of sexual partners? Maybe she wants to be seen as beautiful and desirable. Maybe she likes the way it feels; it provides an escape of some sort. What about work? Why would someone labor 80 hours a week? Why would someone sacrifice 10 years of their life to get to the top? Well, maybe it's to get to the top: where you can boss people around, have plenty of cash and zero worries, and have everyone look up to you. Do you see? Those actions are tied to something much deeper. Promiscuity is the fruit of something deeper at the root. Something is driving the workaholic.

We've found it helpful here to speak of four core, deep idols: approval, power, comfort, and, what we'll focus on the most today, control. We want to be liked: approval. We want to be boss: power. We want to be at ease: comfort. We want to know the plan: control. We make ourselves gods. We make it all about us. We long for these things. And they enslave us. Most of us struggle in one or two of these the most. In the next four weeks, in this series, we'll be looking at four realities about who God is, four Gs, if you will. He is glorious, gracious, good, and, today, great. Those are the four truths that must be in our heads to liberate our hearts from these idols. Jesus says, in **John 8:32**, ***"And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*** If we get in our heads that God is in control, that He is king, we can get rid of all of this anxiety and worry and frustration.

The Lord, my friends, is great. This is the first thing to grasp in this series, the first G. **God is great, so we do not have to be in control.** Let's see that today, as we look closely at **Isaiah 40**. He is speaking here to the people of Judah who have been judged for their sin and have been taken into captivity by the Babylonians. They're down and out and hopeless. He seeks to comfort them. See five statements here about the Lord's greatness. Here the Lord says, in **verse 9**, ***"Behold your God."*** People of God, Karis, see Him, in all His glory.

**First, see His strength.** Listen to **verse 10**. ***"Behold, the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him."*** He would rescue His people from exile. He would bring ***"reward"*** for them and ***"recompense"*** for their enemies. He promises for the same for us, His Church. He will save us, friends. He'll bring us out of exile in this fallen world. He'll take us to be with Him in a renewed world. For now, we're to trust Him. Hear the comfort in these words.

This verse speaks of what theologians have called His omnipotence. He is all-powerful. No one can stand against Him. He is the strongest being in the universe. He can accomplish anything that He wants. And He's on our side.

## **Second, hear His size. Verse 12 says,**

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand and marked off the heavens with a span, enclosed the dust of the earth in a measure and weighed the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance?

This is our God. Try to hear what Isaiah is saying here. Think about all the oceans on earth. God is so huge that He could hold all of them in the palm of His hand. Look up and see the skies, or the heavens. My wife likes to measure things with her fingers or arms, and she's pretty good about that. God could hold up a span - which is the distance between His thumb and little finger like this - and measure all of it. Ponder the totality of dust on the earth. He could put it in a measuring cup. Think about all the majestic mountains. He could measure them in scales. Toss in the hills. He could measure them, as well. Picture God as a skilled craftsman effortlessly building the earth on a workbench. That's the image here. He's huge.

Of course, God doesn't have hands. God is Spirit. This is a metaphor that grasps for some way to try to describe Him. **Verse 12** speaks of His infinitude. He's infinite. He has no limitations - not in terms of time or space. So He can be everywhere at once. He's omnipresent. He can be at many points in time at once. He's eternal.

## **Third, ponder His knowledge. Verses 13 and 14 teach that His wisdom is infinite, also.**

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel? Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding?

Of course, the answer to these rhetorical questions is nobody. God doesn't need advice. He doesn't need help "getting" things. Nobody taught Him anything. He's the standard of knowledge. As a Dad it can get humorous sometimes to get in mini-disputes with my 7-year-old about what is real or true or right. Son, you don't understand. You can't tie your shoes. You need help with your pants. Why are you questioning me? But we do it all the time. God's knowledge is massive. It's perfect. It's complete. He's omniscient. All-knowing.

**Fourth, consider His sufficiency.** He doesn't need anyone or anything. He's completely self-sufficient. **Verse 16** says, "***Lebanon would not suffice for fuel, nor are its beasts enough for a burnt offering.***" What's this talking about? Isaiah is using the imagery of temple sacrifice. Take all the animals in the country of Lebanon. Offer them up for me. It wouldn't be enough. That nation was known for its trees - cedars in particular. There is still a picture of a cedar on their flag today, even with significant deforestation. Take all the wood in this country known for wood and try to burn those sacrifices. It wouldn't be enough.

Now this says something about what God deserves - more than we could ever give. But it also says something about what He already has. He's got everything. He needs nothing. He allows us to worship Him. But He doesn't need it. He is great. He's self-sufficient.

**Fifth, see His sovereignty.** This is the last and most important idea for today that we see here. And it's woven throughout. He's completely in control. He is King of the universe. Here the language is used to speak of His sovereignty regarding the nations. God's people had long been picked on by surrounding lands. Isaiah's here speaking to them during their time of exile. God's saying through Him: I'm in control! It may not look like it, but I am.

Hear **verse 15**: *“Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.”* Listen to **verse 17**: *“All the nations are as nothing before him, they are accounted by him as less than nothing and emptiness.”* Hear the imagery again. Drops. Dust. All the superpowers are like a tiny drop you try to shake out of a soda can. They're like that dust that accumulates on those books on your bookshelf. And our Lord can make all those nations go away like we do when we finally grab a dust rag and make that dust go away. The nations are nothing. Nobodies. Meaningless to Him. Yes, it again says something about His size. But it says even more about His control.

The passage goes on. Look with me at **verses 21-26**.

Isaiah 40:21 Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

22 It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in;

23 who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.

24 Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble.

25 To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

26 Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name, by the greatness of his might, and because he is strong in power not one is missing.

My wife and kids are freaked out by bugs. Every couple of days I hear shrieking in the house and I have to run down and rescue them. I grab a piece of toilet paper, go over to the bug, trap him, squeeze him, and flush him. He has no chance. God, it says, hovers over the earth - again He's that big - and we're to Him like grasshoppers - we are that small.

But again, He's sovereign. **Verses 23 and 24** say that He takes down rulers as He wishes. He could smash them all like grasshoppers. He says that they're like tiny, helpless plants. With minimal effort, He puffs on them and they're gone. He's like a storm that rips them out of the ground. The kings and rulers of the world might think they're tough and here to stay, but to God, they're only around as long as He wants them around. We see this also in **Isaiah 10**. Here it's Babylon. There He speaks of using Assyria like an axe to judge Judah.

**Verse 26** speaks of God putting the stars in space. Most pagan religions of that day worshipped the stars. But God put them there. And He keeps them there. His power keeps them from disappearing. God is that much bigger than any rivals, than any false gods. He is Creator. He made it all. He is sustainer. He keeps it going.

And because of that, the fact He made it, He rules over it all - like a carpenter that built a bookshelf. It's His. He's Lord. He's King. In other words, He's again sovereign. He is great. So He is in control. **Ephesians 1:11** says that He "***works all things according to the counsel of His will.***" That's all things. Everything. John Piper puts it like this:

This "all things" includes the fall of sparrows (Matthew 10:29), the rolling of dice (Proverbs 16:33), the slaughter of his people (Psalm 44:11), the decisions of kings (Proverbs 21:1), the failing of sight (Exodus 4:11), the sickness of children (2 Samuel 12:15), the loss and gain of money (1 Samuel 2:7), the suffering of saints (1 Peter 4:19), the completion of travel plans (James 4:15), the persecution of Christians (Hebrews 12:4-7), the repentance of souls (2 Timothy 2:25), the gift of faith (Philippians 1:29), the pursuit of holiness (Philippians 3:12-13), the growth of believers (Hebrews 6:3), the giving of life and the taking in death (1 Samuel 2:6), and the crucifixion of his Son (Acts 4:27-28).

This is our God. He's in control. And He's incomparable. Twice in this passage, in **verse 18** and in **verse 25**, He says, "To whom can you compare me, liken me?" The answer: no one! Isaiah says, "***Behold***" that God. He also asks, in **verses 21** and **28**, "Haven't you heard about this God? Don't you know about Him? Haven't you been taught this for a long time?" Some of you come today and could say honestly, "No I haven't heard about Him. I didn't realize this." It's news to you. But others of you have to admit, "Yes, I know that. I've been taught that since a child." You may know it in your head, but you're living as if it's not true. You're like me, as I began. You display that you think you're in control, and you're not. And you know what happens? That lie you're believing in your head and embracing in your heart comes out as worry, anxiety, and fear.

Now let's consider that way of life up against this text. **First of all, it's folly.** It's dumb. It makes no sense. Look at **verses 18-19** there in **Isaiah 40**. There Isaiah is taunting the idolater. He says, "Wow. You who say you can't afford a proper sacrifice of worship for me buys the best wood you can find. You don't want it to rot, even though I endure forever. You get a craftsman to make it perfect. You overlay it with gold. You put silver chains on it. And it just sits there and looks stupid!" How foolish! Now we can laugh at the sarcasm of the prophet. But we're just as foolish. We set ourselves up as god. We're in control. The world's good hinging upon our decisions and productivity!? So ridiculous. Idolatry is folly.

**Second of all, it's futility.** Do you ever feel like you're playing an endless game of Whack-A-Mole? The more they pop out, the more you hit them? The more you hit them, the more they pop out? That's what it's like when we try to keep everything around us in control. It'll kill us. I heard of one guy compare email to grasshoppers. He was running and there were grasshoppers jumping up everywhere. He just ran faster, and then there were just more and more grasshoppers to come out. Going faster made things worse. He said it's the same way with email. The faster we try to respond to them, the more we create faster responses from others. Trying to keep your email inbox to zero, if you get a lot of emails, is impossible. It's futile. And trying to do it even makes things worse. Remember the movie *Bruce Almighty*? He tries to play God and ends up with all of these millions of emails, all at once, and he can't handle it. If we look at the world honestly, from our very limited perspective, keeping everything in control, even in our small corner of it, is futile.

**Third, it's fantasy.** We got the idea for this series from the great book, *You Can Change* by Tim Chester. In that book, speaking of God's greatness, he says, "For me, the issue is escapism. I have to choose between a fantasy in which I'm sovereign and the real world in which God is sovereign, between my false sovereignty and God's real sovereignty." I remember when I was in Mizzou this dude who clearly got stoned, put music on his headphones, and danced around like nuts, singing along and singing aloud in Lowry Mall. He was in a fantasy. Who knows where he was?! We can live in reality, where God is in control, as we've seen in Isaiah, or we can live a fantasy. Imagine how ridiculous we look, jumping around, stressing out, trying to carry the world on our shoulders. We can't.

**Fourth, it's blasphemy.** What? Yes, this is a slap in the face to God. We look up, and say to Him, "You're not really in control. You're not really King. I am." Yes, worry is sin. And the worst thing about sin is not that it hurts us, or even others, but that it dishonors God. Jerry Bridges puts it like this:

Anxiety is a distrust of God... so when I give way to anxiety, I am, in effect, believing that God does not care for me and that He will not take care of me in the particular circumstance that triggers my anxiety of the moment. Anxiety is a sin also because it is a lack of acceptance of God's providence in our lives.

In other words, he goes on to say, we lose sight of the fact that God is in control of all our circumstances and events. We don't trust Him. Francis Chan puts it like this: "Worry implies that we don't quite trust that God is big enough, powerful enough, or loving enough to take care of what's happening in our lives." We have to repent of this. It's sin. It's blasphemy.

**Fifth, it's misery.** But sin *does* hurt us and others. How do you feel when you're stressed out? Can't sleep? Not good, right? Is that a feeling you often want to have? Sometime go on the internet and search "meth use before and after." The pictures will blow you away. People look like they've aged 25 years in just a short few. That's what worry and anxiety and frustration will do to our souls, if not also physically. It kills us.

And it strangles others. When we want everything perfectly in balance, we resort to trying to control others. We become critical and manipulative and just plain mean. Sin kills. So does worry. If the guy with the headphones goes into the highway, he pays! Often so do others.

That's what denying God's sovereignty and asserting ours is like. But why do we do this? And what can we do about it? We do it because we're sinners. In the garden, Adam and Eve listened to Satan and spurned God's rule. They wanted to rule on their own. We've been doing it ever since. We have to fight this until we die. Again, we've all exchanged God's glory for His creation, fundamentally ourselves, and have become idolaters.

Now, when we become Christians, we're freed from this. The power of sin has been broken. We're saved from its penalty. But we fight its presence in our lives. The problem is that we get in our heads that God is sovereign, but it doesn't come through in our lives. There is a difference between what we say we believe and how we really live.

It's our confessional faith compared to our functional disbelief. Chester puts it like this:

On Sunday morning I sing of my belief in justification by faith (confessional faith), but on Monday morning I still feel the need to prove myself (functional disbelief). Or I may believe I'll be acquitted on the day of judgment, but still want to justify myself in an argument tomorrow. I may affirm God is sovereign (confessional faith), but still get anxious when I can't control my life (functional disbelief). Sanctification is the progressive narrowing of the gap between confessional faith and functional faith.

So what do we do about this? Let me give you four practical suggestions: preach, believe, gather, pray. **First, preach.** You need to learn to be a preacher. What do I mean? Because you're slow, like me, and rebellious, too, you'll need to keep reminding yourself you're not in charge. You'll have to remind yourself of passages like what we've seen today. You'll have to read them. You'll have to remind yourself of them. You'll have to yell at yourself just a bit.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it like this: "Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself?" That's right. If we listen to our sinful hearts, all we'll hear is that the world depends upon us. We have to tell ourselves the truth from God's word. C.S. Lewis put it like this:

The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job each morning consists in shoving it all back; in listening to that other voice, taking that other point of view, letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.

We must preach to ourselves truth. **Second, believe.** We must believe in our identity in Christ, as well as the work of Christ. Not only is God the Lord of the universe, but He's also our Father. He's not only in control, but He's also good. Look at **verse 11 of chapter 40** again. It reads, ***"He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young."***

The Lord is like a gentle shepherd to us. He'll carry us. He'll lead us. He'll feed us. And He'll protect us. This reminds me of conversations that I often have with my little sweet girl, Melia. She's afraid of the dark and thinks there are monsters in her room. She gets freaked out if we go downstairs and leave her up there. I say, "Sweetie, don't you trust me? Don't you know I'll take care of you? Don't you know that I won't leave you?" Friends, we're His sons and daughters. That's our identity. He's sovereign for us. Jesus tells His disciples in **Matthew 6** when they worry to remember God is their Father. He tells them to look at the lilies and the sparrows and see how He cares for them. He'll care for us far, far more than that, Christ says. Ed Welch has said, "Worriers are visionaries minus the optimism." If we have God as our Father, how could we not have hope for our future? Believe!

But let's also think of the work of Jesus. He lived and died so that we might be changed from idolaters to worshippers again. He came to earth to make us a part of that family again. In our times of worry and fear, we must fight to believe that He died to change us, that change *is possible*. We don't have to stay the way we are. This is our gospel.

He has made us new creations. As Chester puts it so well in his book, when we are tempted to sin, here with worry, we don't just say, "I *must* not do this." Rather, it's, "I *need* not do this." There's no reason to freak out. We have a Father. That's our identity. Plus, He'll help us learn how not to be anxious. He will change us. That's His work.

Isn't Jesus a good example of this for us, of faith? As God, yes, He was perfectly in control. But as man, He completely submitted to His Father's will. He trusted Him. He never worried. He never grew anxious. He shows us how *not* to live in sin. He died to rescue us out of that sin, as well. He paid for those sins and our way out of them on the cross.

So preach and believe. **Third, gather.** Don't try to fight this alone. Be in community. When you're alone, crazy voices are more likely to come into your head. You need help. This is why at Karis we have Community Groups: we need each other desperately. This is why all of our C-Groups get together in what we call Fight Clubs, where we read God's word and pray together. You need other people, people who are committed to you, and you to them, who can help you fight the fight of faith, to believe God is great and remind you that you are not. Adam had His lunch eaten by Satan. Only Jesus could make it alone. You ain't Him.

**Fourth, pray.** For each of these truths about God, I'm going to offer one spiritual discipline or means of grace, that helps us grow in our knowledge and experience of it. For this one, God's greatness, it's prayer. Why's that? It's because in prayer, unlike anything else, we express our great dependence upon Him. We proclaim that we can't do anything on our own, that we're completely helpless and needy, that we're not in control. We ask Him to do things, instead of us doing things. We acknowledge that He's the King of everything.

Prayer is frequently connected with worry in the Bible. In **1 Peter 5:7**, we're told to humble ourselves and cast all our anxieties on Him, because He cares for us. That's prayer. Turn to **Philippians 4:6-7**. It's on page 982. It says this:

Philippians 4:6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

How do we fight anxiety? Worry? Stress? God's word says to pray. We don't "let go and let God." Heard that before? We don't sit around and do nothing. We should work harder as believers than anyone! However, we seek to be guided by Him in prayer. And we seek to be supplied by His strength in prayer. Hard work done in prayer looks different from that in our strength. We won't worry. We'll have this "***peace of God, which surpasses all understanding***" that the passage talks about. We'll be leaning on Him and not ourselves.

Pastor Craig Cabaniss has said, "Worry inventories my resources and frets. Faith inventories God's resources and rests." Yes, we should pray that God will let us see and experience His greatness. But prayer itself makes us into people that live in light of His greatness. It's how we relinquish control and trust in Him. Preach, believe, gather, pray.

Well, what is the promise here in this passage, if we see the greatness of God? It's in the familiar section at the end of **chapter 40**. Earlier, Isaiah says God will carry us like sheep. Later, he says God will make us like eagles.

Isaiah 40:28 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.  
29 He gives power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength.  
30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;  
31 but they 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.

What does the Lord say here? He'll renew us. He'll make us fly. He'll give us stamina and endurance. The One who it says truly never gets tired, who is great, will put that greatness in us. We who wear out so easily and frequently will find strength. But what's required? Just the two hardest things possible, but things the Holy Spirit can do in us! **We have to first see ourselves as weak and helpless.** We have to admit we're weak, that we can't help ourselves, that we're not in control, that we need Him. **And we must second "wait for the Lord."** This is calling out to Him in prayer. It's being patient for Him to work. It's ceasing our activity. It's depending upon His. Many of you are tired or worried or scared or frustrated today, or you soon surely will be. If we see we're helpless sheep, He'll make us mighty eagles. Waiting is the hardest thing possible for humans, particularly if you're like me and struggle primarily with control. But, if we wait on Him, it's far, far better for us.

And friends, it's better for the world, for our city. We want to be a church that's on mission, impacting those around us. Isaiah begins, again, telling God's people to shout these truths from a mountain. Are we doing that? And, if we did, would they believe us? Or are we living in a way that totally denies it? Are we more calm, less stressed, more peaceful than those who don't claim to know Jesus? If we want to see our city changed, we must be different. Our lives must shout that God is great. Or they just won't listen at all.

Remember where we began, zoomed in, looking at you and me? Stressed out, worried, impatient and manipulating others? Zoom out with me and think about what kind of world I act like live in. It's one where unless I return an email NOW, someone dies and goes to hell, unless I perfectly parent my kids, there is no hope for them, if I can't get person A to repent and person B to serve, Karis falls apart. If we don't implement this idea RIGHT NOW, the kingdom will never be the same. The whole world's in my hands. It all depends upon me. From what we've seen in **Isaiah 40**, that's fantasy. Picture a little kid, playing basketball at the playground, talking smack about how he's the greatest, how he rules the world, when he's never heard of LeBron James or Kobe Bryant. But that's just basketball. He knows nothing of even the President of the U.S., he has no understanding of the suffering going on around the globe, he hasn't even been outside of Columbia. Friends, that's me and you. We've seen clearly today that God alone is great. That's reality. He is on the throne. He is the sovereign Lord. We're not. We do so much better to live in light of that reality. Let's let Him be in charge. Let's wait on Him. God is great so we do not have to be in control.