

Fork^{Lift}

Encouragement for the “Road”

Leader’s notes and Bible passages available online

[Please do NOT use the “if time permits” sections when your study session time is limited. These sections could possibly be done by the participant in private.]

Introduction:

"I have heard there are troubles of more than one kind.
Some come from ahead and some come from behind.
But I've bought a big bat. I'm all ready you see.
Now my troubles are going to have troubles with me!" ~ *Dr. Seuss*

Share with the group or in small groups what you think about this humorous quote. Can you relate this quote to a difficult time in your life? *Answers will vary, but encourage everyone to share. Make it clear that everything confided within the group stays within the group.*

Opening Prayer: Dear Almighty Father, we rejoice and thank You for creating and sustaining each one of us. We give You thanks and praise that, in spite of our daily failure to live as Your children, we have forgiveness and the hope of eternal life because of Your Son’s victory over sin and death and the grave. Please send Your Holy Spirit to be with us today as we study Your Word. We love You, Lord! In Jesus’ great Name we pray, Amen.

The dictionary defines a forklift as a “self-propelled, tractor-like machine used for hoisting and transporting heavy objects by means of steel fingers inserted under the load.” In other words, the forklift carries the weight of a load that one person alone could not possibly lift. Let us consider the burdens each of us has and the way our Lord lifts the weight of those burdens from us.

Bowed down ...

David says in **Psalm 145:14**: *The LORD upholds all those who fall and lifts up all who are bowed down.*

A common phrase of commiseration offered in today’s society is “You look as if you are carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders.” Read **Psalm 38, verses 4 and 18**. What is the root cause of being bowed down?

4 My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. 18 I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin. sin, guilt

Continue reading **Psalm 38:5–17**. Identify specific physical characteristics of being bowed down cited in this Psalm.

5 My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. 6 I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. 7 My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. 8 I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart. 9 All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. 10 My heart pounds, my strength fails me; even the light has gone from my eyes. 11 My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away. 12 Those who seek my life set their traps, those who would harm me talk of my ruin; all day long they plot deception. 13 I am like a deaf man, who cannot hear, like a mute, who cannot open his mouth; 14 I have become like a man who does not hear, whose mouth can offer no reply. 15 I wait for you, O LORD; you will answer, O Lord my God. 16 For I said, "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips." 17 For I am about to fall, and my pain is ever with me.
i.e., wounds fester, stooped over, poor health, bad back, heart pounds, feeble, poor eyesight, poor hearing, difficulty speaking, poor balance and pain is always present

Share with the entire group or in small groups a time in your life when you have felt bowed down. *Answers will vary.*

If time permits: Luther defines sin as “every thought, desire, word, and deed which is contrary to God's Law.” There are two types of sin: original and actual. Identify which type of sin is referred to in the following:

Psalm 51:5 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. *original*

Matthew 15:19 19 Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. *actual*

Romans 5:19a 19 Through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners. *original*

Galatians 5:19 19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. (Sins of commission) *actual*

James 4:17 17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins. (Sins of omission) *actual*

Upholds and lifts up ...

According to **Psalm 145:14**, who upholds and lifts up those who are bowed down? *the Lord*

In each of the passages below, identify the burden and how the Lord lifts us up. *(Have each participant look up a passage, read it aloud and identify from what and how the Lord lifts us up.)*

Psalm 40:1–3 (Psalm 46:1; Nahum 1:7) 1 I waited patiently for the LORD; he turned to me and heard my cry. 2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. 3 He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD.

(1 God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.) (7The LORD is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him...)

He lifts us out of the slimy pit where we wallow around and get “stuck” in our own problems and trouble; He is our Rock – a firm, unchanging foothold in this slippery world.

Psalm 55:22. 22 Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall. *We can cast our worries and cares on the Lord and He will handle them.*

Psalm 94:19 19 When anxiety was great within me, your consolation brought joy to my soul. *His consolation turns anxiety to joy.*

Matthew 6:25–34 25 “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? 26 Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are

you not much more valuable than they? 27Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? 28"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. 29Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. 30If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. 34Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

We do not need to worry – God will take care of all our needs

Matthew 11:28–30 28"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." **Jesus' great invitation to find rest for our souls!**

John 3:16 16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **Jesus loved us so much! He died and rose again, so we might have forgiveness and eternal life.**

2 Corinthians 4:13–18 13 It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, 14because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. 16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

As the Holy Spirit works in our life (through Word and Sacrament), we are renewed daily and do not lose heart as we anticipate that "the best is yet to come"!

Colossians 1:13–14 13 He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. **Our natural man and our sin burden are handled by Jesus Christ.**

After reading all these examples of God's uplifting presence in the life of His redeemed, what words come to mind? Share a good word with the entire group. **i.e., praise, thanksgiving, joy, hope, relief, contentment**

If time permits: Comment on the following. "When you feel like giving up, remember why you held on for so long in the first place." *Unknown* **Answers will vary.**

Show me the way ...

David prays in **Psalms 143:8**, *Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you. Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.*

How does God answer the prayer of David in your life? What encouragement does He give you as you continue down the road of life?

Acts 1:8 8But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." **the gift of the Holy Spirit**

Romans 6:4 4We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. **baptism**

Romans 15:4–5 4For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. 5May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus. **the Word of God**

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. **the Lord's Supper**

Philippians 1:14 14 Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly. **We are given opportunities, even in adversity, to share the Good News about Jesus our Savior.**

1 Thessalonians 5:11–18 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. 16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. **Christians encourage each other, in the good times and the bad.**

2 Thessalonians 2:16–17 16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word. **We are encouraged with our hope for the eternal future!**

Hebrews 10:25 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. **Christians encourage each other in worship and praise to God; in fellowship.**

Since we are encouraged, we can become encouragers. What are ways that you or your group can be encouragers for one another? Among your family? In your community? Into the world? **i.e., listen, communicate, encouraging cards, thank you cards and e-mails, welcome visitors at church and help them to follow the worship, "hands on" servant activities, prison ministry, food bank, supporting a missionary, going on short-term mission trips**

If time permits: Colossians 3:12–17 gives a word picture of the family of God. What characteristics does Paul say that members of this dearly loved family have? 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. **i.e., compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, love, peace of Christ, thankful, into the Word, teach, worship, do all in the Name of Jesus**

If time permits: In Acts, Barnabas — whose name means Son of Encouragement (**Acts 4:36–37**) — was a faithful companion to Paul on some of his missionary journeys. In **Acts 9:26–28**, he told of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus and made it possible for Paul to stay in Jerusalem. Can you name other encouragers in the Bible? (36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.) 26 When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord and that the Lord had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had preached fearlessly in the name of Jesus. 28 So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.

i.e., Aaron (Moses), Miriam (Moses), Elijah (Elisha), Ruth (Naomi), Jonathan (David), Mordecai (Esther), church @ Philippi (Paul), Lois/Eunice (Timothy), Onesimus (Paul – see Philemon)

To You [O Lord] I lift up my soul...

In what ways do I, in turn, lift up my soul to the Lord as David says in **Psalm 143:8**?

Psalm 134:2 *Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. praise and worship together “in the sanctuary”*

Psalm 141:2 *May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice. prayer*

Isaiah 40: 9 *You who bring good tidings to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who bring good tidings to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with a shout, lift it up, do not be afraid; say to the towns of Judah, "Here is your God!" witnessing – telling the Good News*

Philippians 4:6 *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. thanksgiving = thanksgiving*

Can you think of other ways? i.e., daily devotions, being daily nourished by the Word, using the talents that God has given to His glory

Just as a forklift relieves the weight and burdens of a heavy load, our Savior Jesus relieves the weight and burdens of our guilt and sin. Because of His redeeming work, we are encouraged to live godly lives to the glory of our awesome God. Thank God for His “lift” gift of the Holy Spirit in our lives, especially as we face difficult decisions, trials, and concerns.

Closing

End this session with a circle prayer. The leader should open and close this prayer. Every participant is encouraged to contribute a one-sentence prayer beginning with the phrase: **I praise You, Lord, for ...**

Sing “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” (*LSB* 739) or “What a Friend We Have in Jesus” (*TLH* 457; *LW* 516; *LSB* 770).

(Additional: A CD of Psalm 145 or Psalm 148 could be played in addition to reading these Psalms during the lesson.)

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