

GOOD

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-33

(Prepared by Gene Thompson using LifeWay's ETB materials.)

1. Have you ever been in such a difficult situation that you wanted to ask, "Why me, Lord? What did I do to deserve this?"
2. What are some ways people respond to God during times of suffering? (anger, blame God, withdraw from God, question God, draw near to God.)

Some people attribute their suffering to God and as a result reject Him outright. Others do not reject God, but question why He allowed them to experience such suffering. Some become depressed and withdraw while others draw near to God.

3. How many times have you considered suffering a blessing in disguise?
Probably none of us have considered it a blessing while enduring the suffering, but later we can see a blessing that came from it.

4. Think about people you rely on when suffering extreme emotional or physical pain. What characteristics do the people we turn to possess that cause us to turn to them? (understanding, love me, good listener, sympathetic, empathetic, caring, compassionate, administer truth, wise, give godly advice, etc)

Sometimes all we need is for someone to sit quietly with us as Job's friends did for seven days without a word.

The book of Lamentations was written right after Jerusalem had been destroyed by the Babylonians. To picture in your mind what it was like think about the before and after pictures of Lahaina that recently burned to the ground. That was the situation in Jerusalem. It was the darkest day for Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed in 722 BC and carried off into captivity by the Assyrians. Now the southern kingdom of Judah had been destroyed and the people carried off into captivity and dispersed around the known world in 586 BC.

Most scholars believe Jeremiah wrote Lamentations and as we read the book we see many similarities in writing style of the books, Jeremiah, and Lamentations. **See Lam. 3:48-51.**

The book of Lamentations is a composite of five somber poems all related to the destruction of the city. The first four are in acrostic format with the Hebrew alphabet.

We will discover how Jeremiah looked for and found God's peace during that terrible time of destruction!

FROM DESPAIR TO HOPE! Read Lam. 3:19-24

1. Did the writer ask God to remember because He had forgotten? (No. In the Old Testament, God "remembering" is a way of saying He is about to do something.)
Jeremiah was asking God to show him and his people compassion amid their despair. Even in his darkest moment, a wonderful thought came to Jeremiah's mind: hope in the Lord. He found hope when he took his eyes off his circumstances and looked to God!
2. What happened to Jeremiah when he kept his eyes on his circumstances? (He became depressed, expressed by the bitterness of wormwood and poison.)
3. What did Jeremiah "call to mind" in verses 21-24? (God's love and faithfulness.)
The word for "love" here is the Hebrew word "chesed". It is so rich a word about God's love that it is difficult to translate—no one word can express it's meaning fully. It describes God's loving disposition, kindness, and faithfulness to His people.
4. What brought Jeremiah to a different perspective? (He took his eyes off his circumstance and put his eyes on God.)
5. What conclusion did Jeremiah come to when he focused on the Lord? (He had hope—confident assurance—that God would act on their behalf.)

6. How did he express his confident assurance? (Verses 22-24.)
7. What do we find new every morning? (Like the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to the Promise Land found manna every morning, we find God's mercies are new with each dawn.)
8. Why is it important that God's mercies are new every morning? (We can never exhaust God's compassion for us. Though we may think He gets tired of dealing with our hardships and sin, His compassions are fresh with each new day!)
9. What does Jeremiah mean when he says, "The Lord is my portion"? (When the Israelites entered the Promise Land every family was given a portion of land except the Priest and Levites. Their portion was the Lord, Himself. Here Jeremiah is saying, "Our land may be destroyed, and we are carried off but "the Lord is my portion; therefore I will put my hope in Him.")

Jeremiah shows us how to focus on God's love and mercy even when we are walking through times of despair, when there seems to be no hope.

FROM WAITING TO SEEING! Read Lam. 3:25-30

When we experience grief and pain, we want it to end immediately. Generally, God doesn't work that way.

1. When we are suffering and powerless to end it, what do we need to do according to verse 25? (We need to patiently wait for the Lord's timetable and seek God through prayer and reading His Word.)

As we pray and read His Word we will experience the Lord's goodness, His purpose, and His will.

However, most of the time we pray, "Lord, give me patience, and do it right now."

2. What does waiting for the Lord look like, and why is it so hard? (Trusting that God is working behind the scenes, in ways we cannot see right now. Yielding to His will through faith.)

3. Why is it so important for believers to wait on God and learn as they do so? (See Isa. 40:31. It is not common for us to soar like eagles, to run and not grow weary, or walk and not faint. When we wait upon the Lord, He renews our strength!)

"Waiting" on God means trusting that He always does what is right at the right time. Those who wait on the Lord must also seek Him by fixing their hearts and minds on Him. Waiting on the Lord is an expression of our faith in Him!

4. What does the way a person responds to hardship say about his or her relationship with God? (Bearing God's discipline must be done the right way to have its intended effect. No good thing has ever resulted from complaining about God.)
5. Why is it best to bear the yoke of discipline while we are still young? (We learn to trust God while we are young and spare ourselves much sorrow and we have sweet fellowship with the Lord in our life longer.)
6. Is it okay to question God when going through trials and difficulties? (It is okay, but we need to "check our pride and arrogance" at the door.)

"Let him put his mouth in the dust" is an expression of humility. To come before God with our head bowed in submission.

7. What are some tangible ways believers can encourage others who are experiencing hardships? (Pray for them. Help meet any physical needs they may have. Give them an opportunity to express what they are feeling without judging them. Most of the time we simply need to listen to them, very little we can say will help. Just being there and listening will give them support.)

We see the strength that Jeremiah gained in waiting patiently on God. We can find strength and help as well when we wait on Him to work out things in our lives. No matter how dark things might seem, we can trust Him to do what is right for us.

FROM REJECTION TO COMPASSION! Read Lam. 3:31-33

1. How do we know Jeremiah has confidence in God's love? ("He will not reject us forever." "He will show compassion according to His abundant, faithful love." "He does not enjoy bringing affliction or suffering on mankind.")
2. How is discipline a function of love? (Without discipline we are left on our own. If there is no discipline, we self-destruct.)

Just as loving parents take no joy in disciplining their children, so the Lord does not enjoy causing His people pain. When He does so, it is only for the sake of our spiritual well-being. God's discipline is a function of His love.

3. What impact should God's faithful love and ongoing mercies have on us during times of suffering and grief? (We know God loves us and has a purpose in it all. We know God will work His will in our lives if we surrender to Him.)

No matter how great your grief is, God's grace is greater still!

C.S. Lewis made a classic statement on pain: "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

SUMMARY AND CHALLENGE!

1. How did Jeremiah identify with his people? (Jeremiah was suffering as much or more than his people were. He endured the same pain they did or even more because he knew what was coming.)
2. What is the hardest thing you're going through in your life right now?
3. How is God using that for your good and His glory?
4. How can your pain be used to minister to others who need hope?

God loves us! Jeremiah didn't look out on green pastures and still waters and see that God is loving and good. He looked out and saw and smelled and heard devastation everywhere, yet He knew God was/is good. What he describes here isn't based on what he saw or how he felt, but on what he knew in his heart!

Are you confident in your relationship with Jesus as your Savior?

If not get it settled today! See me or one of our staff pastors.

Pray thanking God for the peace He gives us and praise Him for the hope we find in Him during times of despair.