

The background of the entire page is a dense, intricate network of bare tree branches, rendered in a vibrant red color against a light, warm-toned background. The branches are thin and delicate, creating a complex, web-like pattern that fills the entire frame. The overall aesthetic is one of autumnal melancholy and natural beauty.

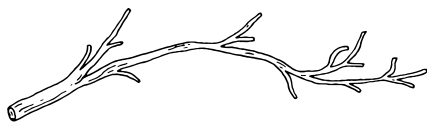
WEEK 2

LAMENTATIONS

FALL READING GUIDE

LAMENTATIONS

GOD MEETS US IN OUR SUFFERING



WEEK 2

SEPTEMBER 12, 2022



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

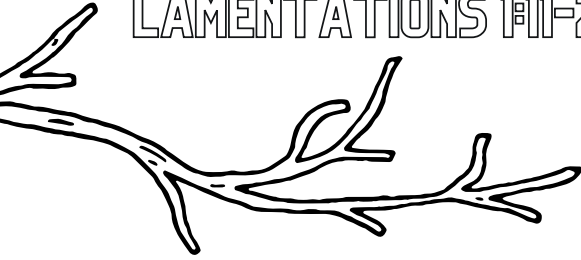
... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.

WEEK 2

LAMENTATIONS 1:11-22



DAY 1

GOD AFFLICTED ME

P.5

DAY 2

GOD REJECTED ME

P.7

DAY 3

GOD PUNISHED ME

P.9

DAY 4

GOD SHAMED ME

P.11

DAY 5

GOD FORGOT ME

P.13

DAY 1

GOD AFFLICTED ME



First read **Lamentations 1:11-13.**

This passage is alarming. For many of us, it cut against the grain of our understanding of God. Jerusalem's groaning, despisement, sorrow, and affliction are not happenstance. The poet laments, "The Lord inflicted [this pain] on the day of his fierce anger" (v.12). Why does God do that? Well, the book of Jeremiah recounts the errors of God's people. In fact, Jeremiah is trying to protect them and call them to repentance.

Lamentations is Israel's response to consequence.

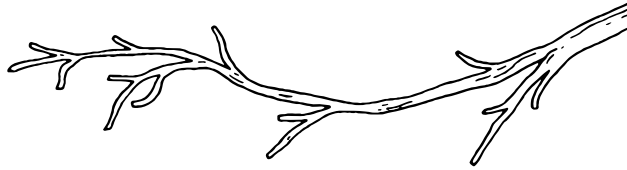
Author Steven Smith explains, "A prophetic voice is the evidence that God did not want this. He sent Jeremiah to help prevent it. But they passed up the possibility of prevention, and they learned the hard lesson that to ignore God's prevention is to embrace God's condemnation" (Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah and Lamentations, 268). Perhaps this passage is alarming to us because sin is not. In fact, we often choose to reject the way of Jesus because it seems too costly. Yes, obedience is costly. But here we learn sin is always more painful.

DAY 1

GOD AFFLICTED ME



1. How does this passage challenge your view of God?
2. What fear regularly leads you to sin and disobedience?
3. How does Jesus take on our ultimate, cosmic affliction on the cross?



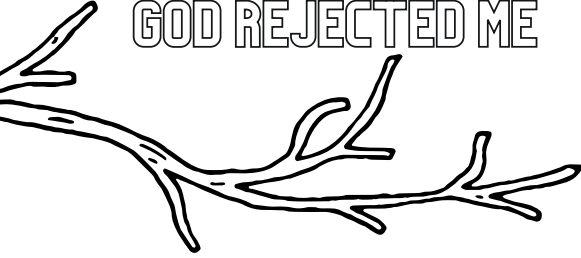
Heavenly Father ...

You are good and you desire our good. Forgive us for believing that obeying you will lead to our demise. By the power of your Spirit and the righteousness of your Son, help us to trust that the only place we're always safe is in your will.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2

GOD REJECTED ME

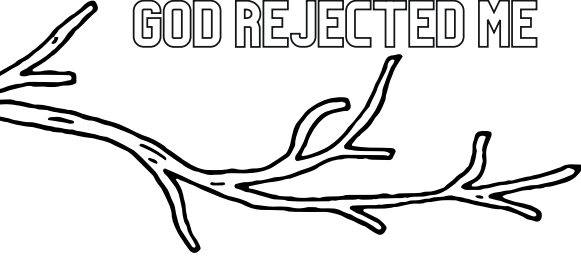


First read **Lamentations 1:14-17.**

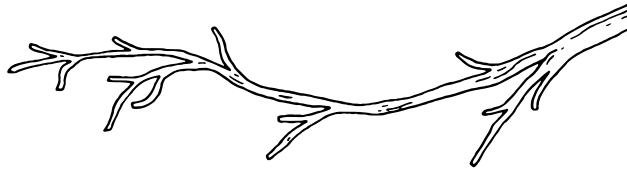
“The American church avoids lament,” writes Professor Soong-Chan Rah (Prophetic Lament, 22). Rah goes on to explain how our lack of lament leads to a moral forgetfulness. This is a luxury which eludes the people of God in Lamentations. They can’t forget. Their “transgressions were bound into a yoke” (v.14). A yoke of course is a wooden cross-piece which locks two animals together by the neck behind a plow or cart of some kind. It gives their master control and the animals a forced guidance. A yoke is bondage. The Apostle Paul embraces this metaphor in Galatians, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Galatians 5:1). Most American Christians take this to mean freedom in Christ is a life without outside control ... without a yoke. But Jesus famously says, “Take my yoke upon you” (Matthew 11:29). The yoke of lament is for the people’s good because it’s meant to help them (and us!) see that the only burden which will not crush us is the one placed upon us by a loving Father and forgiving Savior. God’s momentary rejection is for the sake of our eternal acceptance.

DAY 2

GOD REJECTED ME



1. What do you think it means that you are free in Christ?
2. How have you misused your gospel freedom?
3. How have you experienced the paradoxical freedom that comes through lament, sorrow, and repentance?



Heavenly Father ...

Lamenting my sin helps me to see my sin as you do. And so when the burden and sorrow of my brokenness and the chaos of this world seem heavy on my shoulders, help me to find hope and joy and freedom in the light burden afforded to me in Christ Jesus, your Son.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3

GOD PUNISHED ME



First read **Lamentations 1:18-19**.

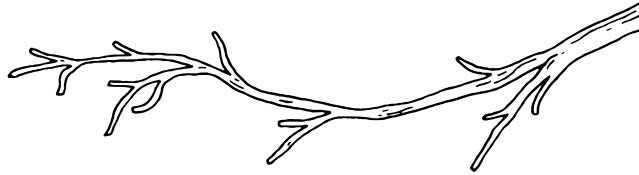
While the poet continues to lament God’s punishment, they begin to acknowledge that, “The Lord is in the right” (v.18a). This is a vital aspect of lament which makes it drastically different from childish complaining. The weight of consequence is heavy; there is suffering and broken relationships and death. But it’s not unbridled blame and frustrations and emotions. There is worship and confession, “I have rebelled against the word” (v.18b). This is not an explanation or theologizing of what’s happening. As Professor Soong-Chan Rah says, this is a people willing to “deal with reality.” It’s the simplest of admissions--God is God, we are not. He is in the right. We have rebelled. In our sorrow sometimes that’s all we’ve got. And in the economy of God’s love and grace, a mustard seed will do (see Matthew 17:20).

DAY 3

GOD PUNISHED ME



1. Why is the Lord in the right?
2. What does it look like for you to “deal with reality” this week?
3. How does the cross demonstrate the rightness of God and the wrongness of humanity?



Heavenly Father ...

Give me eyes to see reality, even as I learn to lament the injustice in my heart and world. I trust that by living in reality I'll come to see your love, grace, and justice. Humble me. Help me. Make me more like your Son.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4

GOD SHAMED ME



First read **Lamentations 1:20-21.**

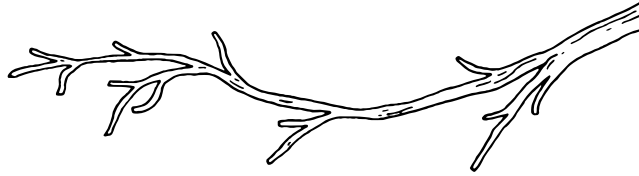
Admitting our failures is necessary for restoration. As the rapper JAY-Z put it, “you can’t heal what you never reveal.” Being exposed in the light of God’s holiness and judgment is hard, but it eventually frees us. Again the poet laments, “I am in distress ... I have been very rebellious” (v.20). Lament indeed is the willingness to come face-to-face with deep sorrow. Lament slows us down. Because healing from the suffering of sin takes time. Lament retrains the heart and mind about what is true and beautiful. This is perhaps one of the primary reasons many American churches don’t make regular the practice of lament; lament does not promise a quick and repeatable process by which seats are filled and budgets are met. Lament, like maturity, takes time. Perhaps that’s why Shawn Carter wrote his wise lyrics, not in his first project at 26, but in 2017 when he was almost 50. Time has a way of teaching us the power of walking in the light. Late in his life, the Apostle John taught his readers, “if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

DAY 4

GOD SHAMED ME



1. Why do you think God cares so much about sin?
2. How has lamenting slowed you down?
3. How does Jesus empower us to not lose hope as we lament and walk in the light?



Heavenly Father ...

I'm scared. Lamenting exposes impatience, distrust, and my fear of silence. Grant me endurance and faith. Help me to know you are more powerful than whatever I'm lamenting. Thank you that I can be certain that because of your Son, Jesus ... lamenting lasts for the night but joy comes in the morning.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5

GOD FORGOT ME



First read **Lamentations 1:22**.

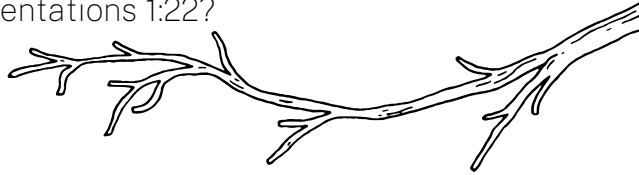
Jerusalem has admitted her sin, but she also asks for vindication. God “inflicted” sorrow but he used Israel’s “enemies” to do so (v.12). And so repeatedly the first poem asks for enemies to meet the same sorrow as Israel. “You have brought the day you announced; now let [my enemies] be as I am ... Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me” (vv.21,22). As theologian Walter Burggeman observed, lament often moves to a plea and then a plea met, becomes praise (Psalms and the Life of Faith). When we make a plea, whatever it might be, we ask, God have you forgotten us? Like the psalmist whom Jesus quotes on the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?” (Psalm 22:1). Though God may not do what we ask, when we ask it ... what a comfort to know our Savior identified with our cry when he endured every affliction and defeated all our enemies. May we praise him.

DAY 5

GOD FORGOT ME



1. What does God's silence and patience to exact justice teach us about his character?
2. Do you wait patiently on the Lord? What's that look like?
3. How does the cross reveal God's final response to the cries of Lamentations 1:22?



Heavenly Father ...

Lament and sorrow and suffering feel really lonely. But your Word reminds me that I am not forgotten. Forgive my sin which always leads me to isolation and pleas for vindication. Help me to wait patiently upon you as you renew my strength and give me endless reasons to praise you.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

GOD IS WITH US
IN SUFFERING.

