



WEEK 6

LAMENTATIONS

FALL READING GUIDE

LAMENTATIONS

GOD MEETS US IN OUR SUFFERING



WEEK 6

OCTOBER 10, 2022



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

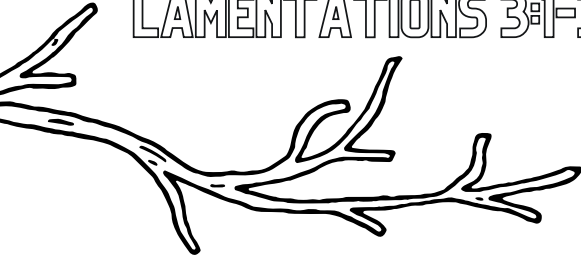
... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.

WEEK 6

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-30



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DAY 1

DARKNESS



First read **Lamentations 3:1-6.**

The prophetic poet speaks in first-person singular. Instruction and correction have been prevalent in the first two poems. But now Jeremiah engenders sympathy with his readers by saying, **“I am the man who has seen affliction ... driven ... into darkness without any light”** (vv.1a,2). Shared suffering has a way of fostering intimacy and understanding. Though Jeremiah has referenced his own sorrow (see 2:11-13), it would’ve been easy for Israel to assume that he was immune to their grief and therefore unable to understand their pain. But Jeremiah has felt the weight, **“under the rod of [God’s] wrath”** just like everyone else (v.1b). His body wastes away, just like theirs (v.4). He’s overwhelmed by bitterness, just like others (v.5). He dwells in the darkness, **“like the dead of long ago”** (v.6). Jeremiah is suffering too. Despite the pain of suffering there’s intrinsic hope and power when we realize our suffering is shared. When three Hebrews boys were thrown into a furnace, a fourth entered the fire with them. And it changed everything. King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished, **“I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods”** (Daniel 3:25). Shared suffering is powerful. It gives hope. It brings comfort. It points us to the one who willingly entered our affliction, who bore the wrath of God, and who stepped into the darkness of our sin, suffering, and death. And because Jesus shared our suffering, in him we find eternal hope and comfort (see Hebrews 2:18).

DAY 1

DARKNESS



1. What does it say about the Son of God that he willingly enters our suffering?
2. How are you learning to enter the darkness and suffering of others? What sin has been revealed in this practice? What fruit has been produced?
3. How ought Jesus' suffering change your perspective on your own suffering?



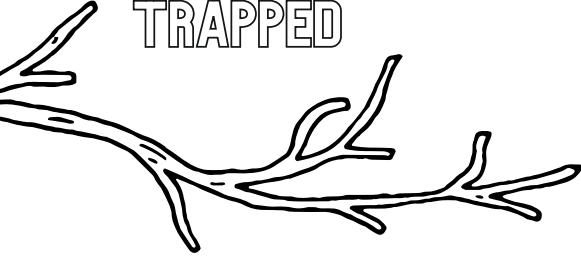
Heavenly Father ...

I'm often fearful and unwilling to share in the sufferings of those around me. Forgive me. This exposes a love of comfort which outweighs a love for my neighbor. Help me to look to Jesus, who perfects my faith by entering my suffering and whose Spirit empowers me to do the same for others.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2

TRAPPED



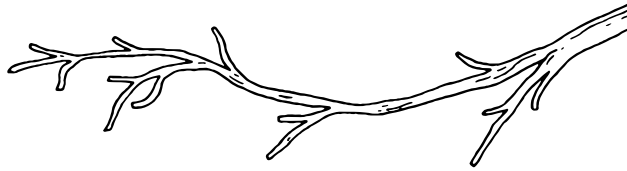
First read **Lamentations 3:7-12**.

Jeremiah continues his personal lament, personifying God as his angry enemy. God has built walls between them (v.7a). God has put chains on him (v.7b). God blocked him with stones (v.9). God is a bear who, **“tore me to pieces”** and a warrior who, **“bent his bow and set me as a target”** (vv.10-12). Jeremiah is trapped like the rest of us. He may be a prophet, but he’s not special. He may be a messenger, but he still needs a mediator. It’s easy to see the sins of others and miss our own, isn’t it? It’s easy to voice instruction and correction for a group and think ourselves immune, right? It’s much harder to admit corporate and personal culpability. Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings are for him too. He’s vulnerable to divine consequence and so he moves to the first person. “Justice must move from the third person to the first person, from the abstract to the personal” (Rah, 126). The problem of sin is within all of us and so we need a solution from outside of us. We need someone for whom there is no wall between them and God ... whom no chains could hold ... and who can’t be blocked by a stone. Are you with me? Jesus tears down walls (Ephesians 2:14). Jesus breaks chains (Luke 4:18). Jesus rises from the dead despite the stone in his way (Matthew 28:2). Jesus, unlike everyone else, is not trapped.

DAY 2
TRAPPED



1. How do these pictures of God accurately describe his response toward sin?
2. What does this passage teach you about your culpability in corporate sins and injustices?
3. How does the gospel empower us to respond to sin, mistakes, and corporate injustices?



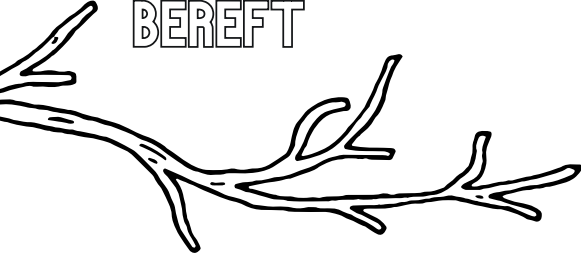
Heavenly Father ...

I often hesitate to include myself in the larger problems of this world. In ignorance or arrogance I presume myself above the fray. But it's clear. On my own I'm trapped by my guilt just like everyone else. Yet your Son, Jesus has freed me and empowered me to live in freedom. Help me today not to go back to old chains of fear and sin but to follow you with gladness.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3

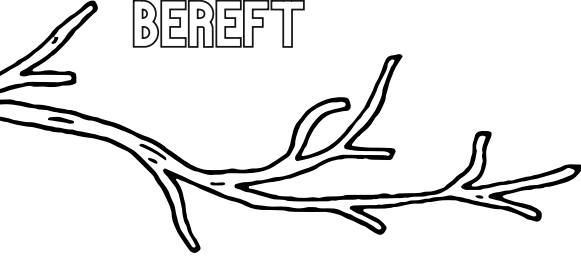
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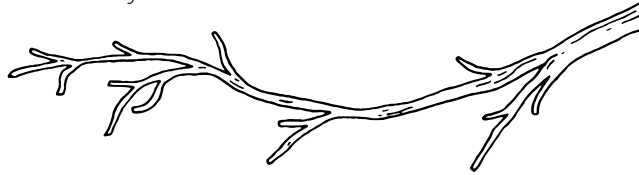
First read **Lamentations 3:13-18**.

With devastation all around him and devastation deep within him, Jeremiah says, **“endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord”** (v.18). He’s done. Though he has repeatedly acknowledged that suffering has come as a just consequence for sinful rebellion against God, this is too much. Physical and spiritual suffering have led to social suffering. He has **“become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long”** (v.14). As if a reflex to the pain, the core of his being rejects any and every semblance of peace (v.17a). James tells his readers that **“sin when it is fully grown brings forth death”** (James 1:15). Paul tells us sin’s cost is always death (Romans 6:23). But we often take this as proverbial. In other words, we might believe that sin is unhelpful but not devastating. We may believe we’ll all die one day as a consequence of the Fall (Genesis 2:17), but we rarely take seriously that sin kills us every time we are **“lured and enticed”** away from God’s love (James 1:14). Lamentations is a bleak counterpoint to our casual relationship with sin. Yet even at our lowest points, when we run out of hope, hope doesn’t run out on us. On the cross Jesus experienced the fullness of physical, spiritual, and social suffering. And his endurance did not fail him. Rather, **“for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame”** (Hebrews 12:2).

DAY 3
BEREFT



1. What does it mean to hope in God? Why is he worthy of our hope?
2. Have you ever been “done” like Jeremiah? What was that like?
3. How does the hope of the cross meet us no matter what or how great our sorrow may be?



Heavenly Father ...

Consequence and suffering lead down a deep, dark, and deadly path. May your Word wake me up to this reality and cause me to learn to hope afresh in your gospel truth ... even today.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4

FAITHFULNESS



First read **Lamentations 3:19-24**.

In what feels like a final attempt to resuscitate his soul, Jeremiah calls truth to mind. During his teaching series on spiritual depression pastor Martyn Lloyd-Jones asks, “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? ... The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself” (*Spiritual Depression*, 20-21). This is what Jeremiah does. He talks to himself. He preaches to himself. At the very bottom of his sorrow, Jeremiah says to Jeremiah, “**The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end**” (v.22). Though God’s consequences have been severe, they will end. But God’s mercy will never end. Our sin never outlasts God’s love. It’s like what the Apostle Paul would say, “**where sin increased, grace abounded all the more**” (Romans 5:20). This is the foundation for Jeremiah’s ultimate message to himself. The homily of our circumstance may say hope has perished. But the mercy of the Lord gives us a new sermon: “**The Lord is my portion ... I will hope in him**” (v.24, see Deuteronomy 32:9). Save these words, you’ll need to preach them to yourself soon enough.

DAY 4

FAITHFULNESS



1. How have you experienced God's love and mercy recently?
2. What sin or sorrow have you thought too great for God's grace?
3. How does the cross teach us that 'sin never outlasts God's love'? How ought this change the way you live this week?



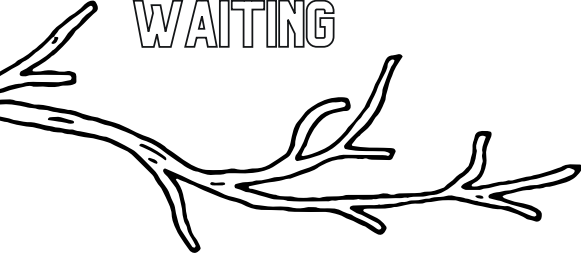
Heavenly Father ...

Great is your faithfulness. Great is your mercy. Great is your love. May the truth of your character always be loudest in my heart and mind.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5

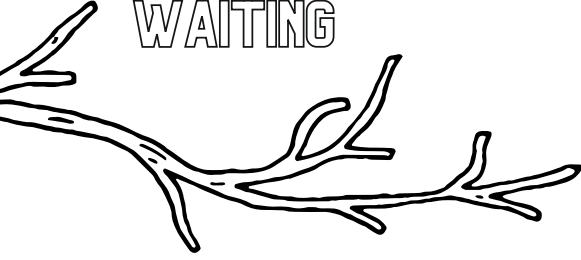
WAITING



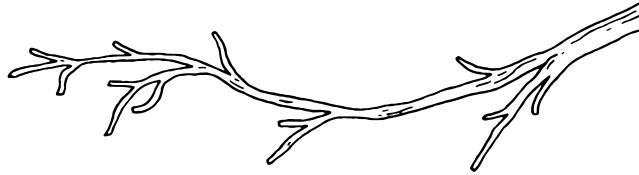
First read **Lamentations 3:25-30**.

Waiting is a familiar theme in the Bible. Isaiah famously said, **“they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength”** (Isaiah 40:31). King David heeded the prophet’s instruction and told himself, **“Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!”** (Psalm 27:14). God’s people are people who wait. We wait for his deliverance. We wait for his timing. We waited for his Messiah (Isaiah 7:14). We now wait for the Messiah’s return (Hebrews 9:28). Waiting strengthens God’s people and gives us hope (v.29). After all the languishing, suffering, and lamenting Jeremiah settles into this ancient disposition, **“The Lord is good to those who wait for him”** (v.25). Jeremiah is surrendering control and trusting God’s providence. He’s admitting limits and embracing God’s limitlessness. This is why waiting is so fundamental to the Christian experience; waiting cultivates genuine worship. One aspect of waiting is lament. Lament slows us down and quiets our hurried souls, helping us to long **“for the salvation of the Lord”** (v.26). In a cultural moment which prizes instant gratification and seems allergic to patience, in our waiting we bear witness to the reality of the kingdom.

DAY 5
WAITING



1. Why is God worthy of our waiting?
2. What are you waiting for?
3. How does the gospel give us hope and strength as we wait on the Lord?



Heavenly Father ...

Waiting is hard. But I know it's hard because I'm learning to surrender and admit my limits. I worship you. You are over all things and can do all things. Help me to trust you and bear witness as I wait on you.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

GOD IS WITH US
IN SUFFERING.

