



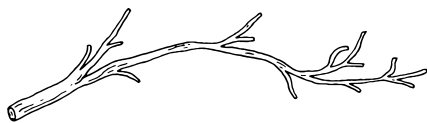
WEEK 9

LAMENTATIONS

FALL READING GUIDE

LAMENTATIONS

GOD MEETS US IN OUR SUFFERING



WEEK 9

OCTOBER 24, 2022



CHURCH IN THE SQUARE

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EVERY DAY ...

... A PASSAGE TO READ,

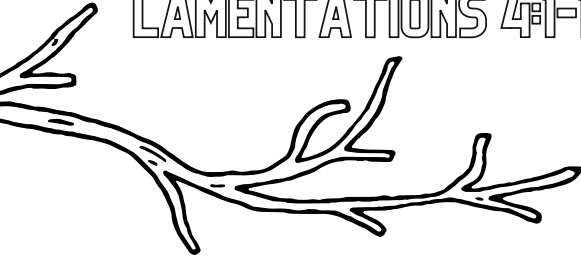
... SOME COMMENTS TO CONSIDER,

... THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK,

... A PRAYER TO PRAY.

WEEK 9

LAMENTATIONS 4:1-10



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TRUE LEADERSHIP

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DAY 2

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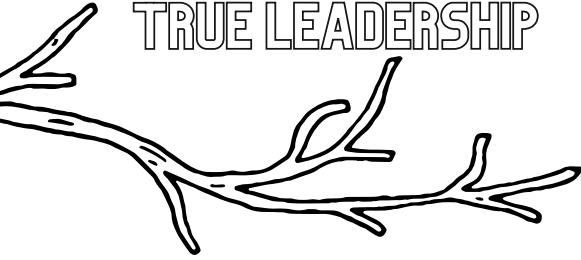
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DAY 1

TRUE LEADERSHIP

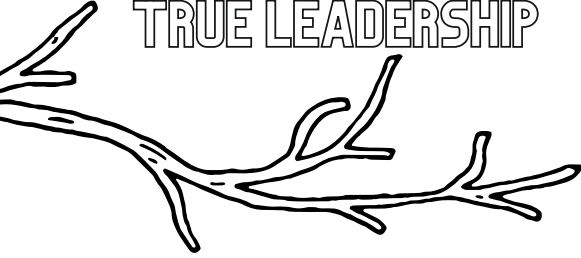


First read **Lamentations 4:1-2.**

Leadership has never been more important. Yet, good leadership has, perhaps, never been harder to find. The leadership landscape of our day bears striking resemblance to the typography of grief we traverse in Lamentations 4. From the outset Jeremiah tells us, **“How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed!”** (v.1). Gold is nonreactive. Oxygen doesn’t corrode gold. Author Steve Smith explains, “what seemed untouchable is now touchable” (Exalting Jesus in Jeremiah and Lamentations, 290). Specifically the three-fold leadership structure God put in place for his people has corroded under the consequence of idolatry. **“The precious sons of Zion,”** her prophets, priests, and kings, are not immune to the siege of Israel’s enemies (v.2). Their failure is a timeless and timely cautionary tale to us: human leadership always fails. Therefore Christians ought neither be completely skeptical nor completely trusting of human leadership. Rather we trust that the Lord has ordained our leaders, but we also long for a true and better prophet, priest, and king, Jesus Christ who is completely trustworthy (see Romans 13:1, Hebrews 1:1-2, 4:14, and Matthew 2:6). Jesus is the true leader who never fails his people.

DAY 1

TRUE LEADERSHIP



1. Why is it important to remember that God ordains leaders?
2. Are you naturally more trusting or skeptical of leaders? How does today's lesson affirm and challenge your tendency?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is prophet (Hebrews 1:1-2) ... priest (Hebrews 4:14) ... and king (Matthew 2:6)?



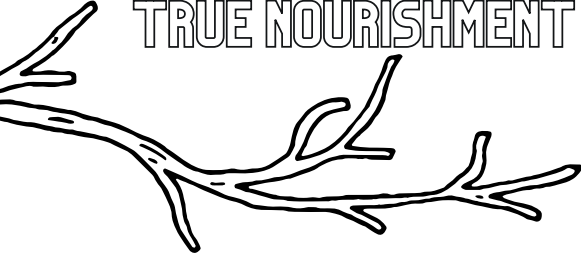
Heavenly Father ...

Heavenly Father ... Human leadership always fails. So help me to find my hope and assurance only in you. In Christ, we know your Word. In Christ, we know your mercy. In Christ, we know your power. Empower us to rest in your sovereignty and love and lordship.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 2

TRUE NOURISHMENT

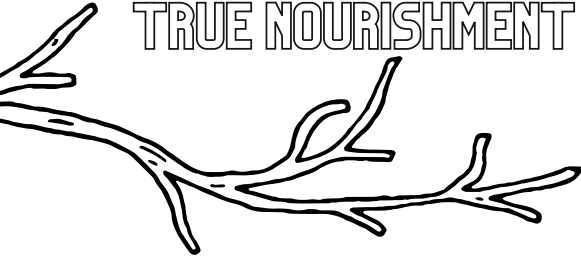


First read **Lamentations 4:3-4.**

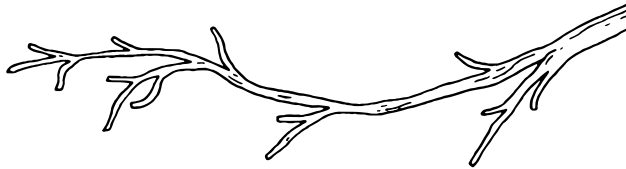
When leadership fails so does everything else. This is especially true if we've looked to our leaders to protect and serve us in ways only God can. Amidst the siege, social order unravels in Jerusalem and the most basic needs of the community are left unmet. Humanity feels stripped away. Mothers have, **"become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness,"** unable or simply unwilling to provide for their children (v.3). They lack the parental instincts of animals. It's not just mothers. The children of Israel, **"beg for food, but no one gives to them"** (v.4, see also 2:11-12). Israel's physical starvation is emblematic of a soul or community ravaged by idolatry. Hearts marred with sin, ache and hunger for real nourishment. Whether we realize it or not we beg for sustenance, but nothing in this world gives it to us. We seek to fill our soul's longings with experiences, relationships, and powers which all promise satisfaction yet always leave us empty. Writer C.S. Lewis observed this in his book, *Mere Christianity*, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." Some of our longings find whispers of fulfillment in God's good world. Others will not be satisfied until we meet Jesus. On that day the fullness of his promise will be realized, **"whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst"** (John 6:35). Today we lament. In the age to come, we'll feast.

DAY 2

TRUE NOURISHMENT



1. How can we be sure that God satisfies all our deepest desires and needs?
2. What 'hunger' in you is currently unsatisfied? How is this unmet desire teaching you to trust the Lord?
3. Why is Jesus our true nourishment?



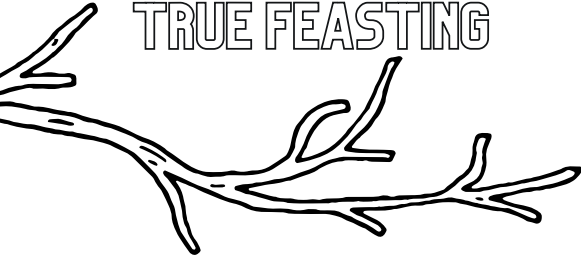
Heavenly Father ...

My soul is hungry. And in my sin it's easy to chase after quick fixes through experiences, relationships, and powers of this world. Help me to trust you. Help me to find joy and satisfaction in you, in the fellowship of your Holy Spirit and the nourishment of your Word.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 3

TRUE FEASTING

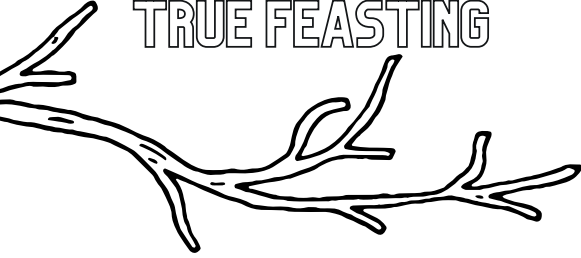


First read **Lamentations 4:5-6.**

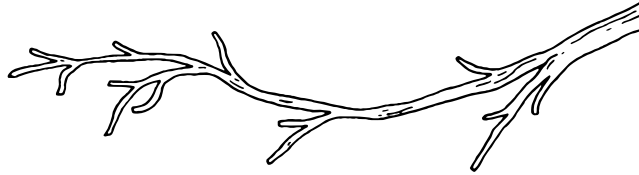
Revelation paints a picture about our future. Among the many scenes John illustrates, a particular image powerfully emerges. He sees a wedding and a banquet. The Bride, **“has made herself ready and it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”** and they enjoy the **“marriage supper of the Lamb”** (Revelation 19:7-8,9). What they wear and what they eat express glory, joy, and praise. The Bride is God’s people. The Lamb is Jesus Christ. A long-awaited promise has been realized (see Ephesians 5:25-33). The Church is wed to Christ, she’s adorned in righteousness, and they’re feasting. Feasting is about celebration. In Lamentations 4, Jeremiah reminds us Israel is no longer celebrating. **“Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps”** (v.5). Glory has given way to shame. Joy has turned to sorrow. Praise has become lament. What they no longer wear and no longer eat express this new reality. In our own lament we’re meant to behold John’s vision. Jesus is the groom who dies for us, his bride. He’s the Lamb and we feast on his sacrificial love. Jesus’ righteousness is the bright and pure robe which covers us, his people. What we wear and what we eat express a celebration that will never end.

DAY 3

TRUE FEASTING



1. How do we “feast” on the love of God?
2. What do you look to when you are in despair?
3. How does the gospel secure our invitation to the wedding and the banquet in the age to come?



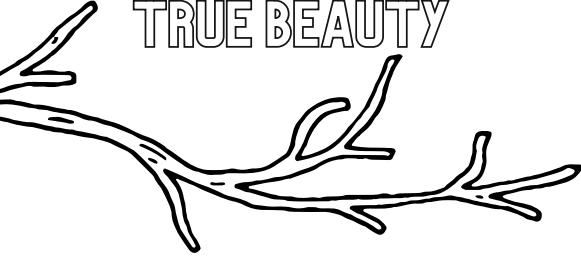
Heavenly Father ...

I long for the banquet you've promised to your people. Yet today, give me strength and trust. Help me to resist the urge to be pleased by the immediate and physical. Give me patience to wait on you in all things.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 4

TRUE BEAUTY

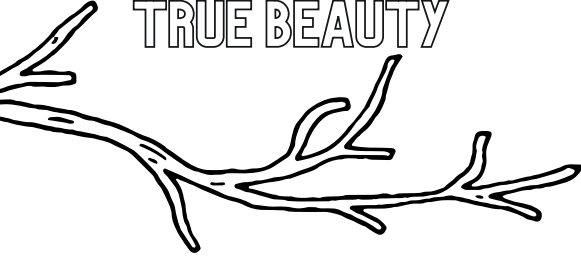


First read **Lamentations 4:7-8.**

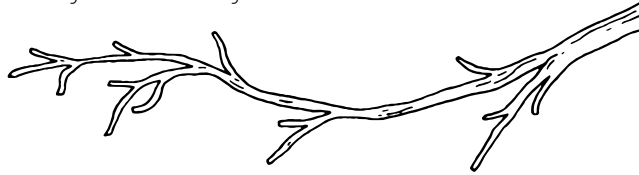
Beauty tells a story, but it never tells the whole story. Perhaps that's one of the reasons we're drawn to beauty. The writer of Proverbs 31 explains, **"Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised"** (Proverbs 31:30). Charm and beauty are not evil. It's just that they only tell us so much. Form does not determine substance. But what is seen often encourages us to ignore or even conceal what is unseen. The princes of Jerusalem trusted their appearance too much, **"the beauty of their form was like sapphire"** (v.7). But under the weight of their suffering, **"they are not recognized in the streets"** (v.8). While their skin and bodies looked healthy, their hearts were far from God. They didn't fear him. This world teaches us that we are shaped from the outside in. Our lives can be transformed, we're told, by the right clothes, brands, makeup, and so on. The right look. But the Scriptures teach us we are transformed from the inside out, or as Paul writes, **"by the renewal of your minds"** (Romans 12:2). You see, while by the world's reckoning Jesus **"had no form or majesty ... and no beauty that we should desire him,"** the Scriptures teach us, **"He is the radiance of the glory of God"** (Isaiah 53:2 and Hebrews 1:3). Jesus' beauty always tells the whole story because it's a quality which emanates from within, an otherworldly love and glory (2 Corinthians 4:18).

DAY 4

TRUE BEAUTY



1. Why is God beautiful? How do you see his beauty in his character and creation?
2. What draws you to beauty? How does it often only tell part of the story?
3. How does Jesus correct our cultural presumptions about beauty and also embody true beauty?



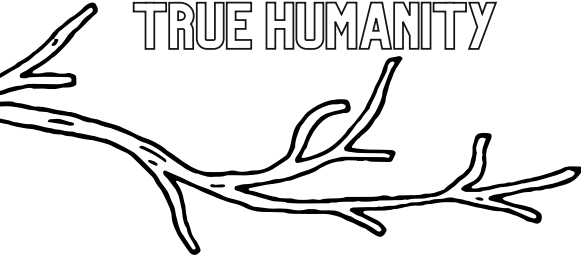
Heavenly Father ...

I do not want to be deceived. I want to be transformed from the inside out, reflecting the true nature of beauty ... your love and glory. Help me today to know the difference between the truth and a lie.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

DAY 5

TRUE HUMANITY

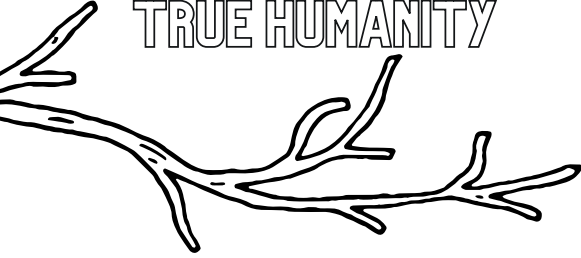


First read **Lamentations 4:9-10**.

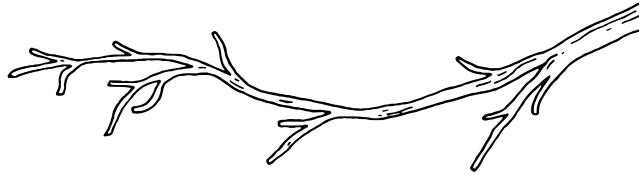
This is perhaps the most disturbing scene in the entire five-poem collection ... maybe even the whole Bible. Starvation and hopelessness turn mothers into cannibals. **“The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children”** (v.9). Humanity is being squeezed out of Israel. Sin always dehumanizes. Whether we are the subject or object of sin, sin hurts us. To be sure the impact is often not this obvious or severe, but nevertheless **“desire ... gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death”** (James 1:15). To be human is to be alive with the image of God. Sin leads to death and harms his image. Remember, these women are survivors too. The primary theme of this fourth poem is the destruction and suffering of Israel's leaders. **“Those who have been deemed worthy of honor by society are deemed inadequate by God,”** observes Soong Chan-Rah (*Prophetic Lament*, 167). Like an avalanche of grief, the brokenness of leadership cascades down through the entire society ... down to the very core of being. The indignity of their suffering will need more than a better leader to come along one day. What we need is resurrection. What we need is a true human being who does not simply reflect God, but *is* God in the flesh (see John 1:14). You see, despite the dehumanization of sin, Jesus restores our humanity.

DAY 5

TRUE HUMANITY



1. What does it mean to be made in God's image?
2. How have you seen people dehumanized?
3. How does Jesus restore our humanity through his life, death, resurrection, and lordship?



Heavenly Father ...

*We pray for those whose humanity feels squeezed out today.
We pray for those who are being treated as less than your
image bearers. Protect them. Comfort them. Restore them.
Breathe life into them and give them your dignifying peace.*

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

GOD IS WITH US
IN SUFFERING.

