



ALL  
THE  
EMPTY  
PLACES

LAMENTATIONS FOR THE SEASON OF LENT

*For Jim*

# Dear Friends at New Valley Church,

As we begin this journey together, let me answer a couple of very common questions!

## WHAT IS "LENT?"

Lent is the 40 days of praying and fasting that leads to Easter. Just like Advent is a season of waiting that prepares us for Christmas, Lent is a season of waiting for Easter when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus. So why is it 40 days? 40 is a significant number for trials and waiting in Scripture (The great flood had periods of 40 days, Moses spent 40 days on Mt. Sinai, the Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years, Jesus fasted in the wilderness for 40 days).

So what do we “do” during this season. **Really, the main purposes of Lent are repentance, self-examination, and earnest prayer.** We get to that place of earnest prayer by (1) **fasting** from some good thing(s) and (2) **committing acts of compassion** for the least, the lost, and the poor. These two things are what St. Augustine called the “two wings of prayer”—they lift our prayer life to more earnest heights.

## ISN'T LENT A CATHOLIC THING?

Yes and no. Lent was practiced long before the divide between Roman Catholics and Protestants, and so, like many other things, it need not be a difference between the two groups. We affirm the rich protestant truth that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. Praying, fasting and participating in Lent does not make us righteous or more acceptable before God. Participating in Lent is not a Scriptural mandate, nor should anyone’s conscience be bound to do so. However, it is a helpful, wise, and time-honored tradition that draws us back to our need of Jesus Christ.

**Please remember: Fasting for it’s own sake is not the point of this season!** Fasting must lead us to greater intimacy with God and more earnest prayer. When you feel your need and your desires, **THAT** is the time to turn to God and see him as the answer to your longings.

I hope that this guide is helpful. I’m praying that in the midst of self-denial, you discover more of the One who denied himself for you.

Gray Ewing  
Pastor, New Valley Downtown

# Concerning Lamentations

## THE ABC'S OF SORROW

Lamentations is a masterful book of Hebrew poetry. Although it often appears in our Bibles in the “Prophets” section, in the Hebrew Bible, it appears in “the Writings” with other poetry like the Psalms and Ecclesiastes. The reason I say it is masterful is because it is beautifully written as several acrostics of the Hebrew alphabet. The beginning of each section in the first 4 chapters all begin with a different letter. You obviously can’t see this in English, but it shows how much labor went into creating this beautiful writing inspired by God. Even though many think Jeremiah wrote the book of Lamentations, the truth is we just aren’t sure who wrote it. Throughout this devotional, I will refer to the writer as “The Poet.”

The subject of the book is sorrow over the loss of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC by Babylon and God’s people were forced to go into exile. The writing addresses the emptiness, the anger, the sorrow, the pain, and the repentance that comes when you face the hard things in a sinful world. As Christians, it is necessary that we not flinch away from these subjects. Jesus himself felt sorrow and wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41-44). It is right and good that we go to the sorrowful places as well as the happy ones.

## WHAT IF I DON'T FEEL SAD?

You may have avoided this book of the Bible. Maybe it depresses you. It may very well sober you. Perhaps you are in a “good” season where things are going well. Is it a good thing to read Lamentations right now? Absolutely! It is for several reasons. First, life is always a series of consolations and desolations. Even on the best days there is deep evidence of the fall; and on the worst days, there is evidence of amazing grace. We need rhythms that address both. Secondly, many times when we are “happy” or “normal” on the outside, we are intentionally or unintentionally masking deep hurt from the recent or distant past. It is spiritually good to go to these places. Thirdly, you may be relatively healthy but chances are very good that you know someone who is in the depths of despair right now. When you aren’t there, it’s hard to go there. I recommend that you do this for yourself, but it is possible to pray this entire devotional on someone else’s behalf.

## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

There are forty devotions here, one for every day of Lent (starting with Ash Wednesday). However, the guide can be used at any time. Try not to be too rigid with the way this is used. The whole point is to be guided through the words of Lamentations, to a posture of prayer. In general, I recommend you...

- [1] Read the passage slowly, multiple times.
- [2] Sit in silence and meditate on the “Invitation”
- [3] Read the reflections and lamentations, pausing again to make your prayers specific and real.
- [4] When you come to the “Response of faith” Try standing up, or speaking out loud. Tell your heart the truth of the matter in no uncertain terms.

The point of Lamentations is not to stay sad for its own sake. It is to be honest, cathartic, real. But affirming our faith even beyond our understanding is necessary. We must not think that doubt and sorrow are permanent postures of a Christian, even if they are real ones.

*“[Lamentations] speaks first of God’s judgments; secondly, to exhort the people to repentance; thirdly, to encourage them to hope; and lastly to open the door for prayer to God, so that the people in their extremities might venture to flee to God’s mercy; which could not have been done without faith.”* John Calvin

# All the Empty Places

## *Lamentations 1:1-2*

1 HOW DESERTED LIES THE CITY,  
ONCE SO FULL OF PEOPLE!  
HOW LIKE A WIDOW IS SHE,  
WHO ONCE WAS GREAT AMONG THE  
NATIONS!  
SHE WHO WAS QUEEN AMONG THE PROVINCES  
HAS NOW BECOME A SLAVE.  
2 BITTERLY SHE WEEPS AT NIGHT,  
TEARS ARE ON HER CHEEKS.  
AMONG ALL HER LOVERS  
THERE IS NO ONE TO COMFORT HER.  
ALL HER FRIENDS HAVE BETRAYED HER;  
THEY HAVE BECOME HER ENEMIES.

# No Resting

## *Lamentations 1:3-4*

3 AFTER AFFLICTION AND HARSH LABOR,  
JUDAH HAS GONE INTO EXILE.  
SHE DWELLS AMONG THE NATIONS;  
SHE FINDS NO RESTING PLACE.  
ALL WHO PURSUE HER HAVE OVERTAKEN HER  
IN THE MIDST OF HER DISTRESS.  
4 THE ROADS TO ZION MOURN,  
FOR NO ONE COMES TO HER APPOINTED  
FESTIVALS.  
ALL HER GATEWAYS ARE DESOLATE,  
HER PRIESTS GROAN,  
HER YOUNG WOMEN GRIEVE,  
AND SHE IS IN BITTER ANGUISH.

**INVITATION:** Sit in silence. Read the passage again, slowly. What word or phrase jumps out at you?

**REFLECTION:** What is more sad, really, than something that used to be full and is now empty? Something that used to be filled with life, and is now characterized by absence. We can think of a beautiful building, now falling apart from neglect; or the deflating balloons after a party. More serious still, we think of the empty rooms where children used to sleep who have now grown up, been lost, or moved away; or the empty side of the bed where a spouse used to sleep. The poet is looking at Jerusalem. A city once full of the people of God, now exiled. A city once vibrant, now destroyed. His first lament is for the sheer emptiness of the place.

**LAMENTATION:** Take a moment to reflect on all the empty places in your life. Where do you feel the lack of a good thing? Speak to your father about this absence.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** Father, fill me with this truth: You are enough, and you provide enough.

**INVITATION:** Sit still, rest. Try to only enjoy God in the present moment.

**REFLECTION:** Judah can't find a place to rest. Just like when they left Egypt centuries before, once again God's people are wandering. In one of the poets beautiful phrases, he even says the roads themselves are sad about it (vs.4). This used to be the way: people would go down the road to Zion and rest in God's presence. But now they are far away and the roads are desolate.

**LAMENTATION:** Do you long for rest? What is the source of your movement, your stress, your anxiety? Name it in God's presence.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** Today, my God, I desire to rest in the sure knowledge that you have saved me and brought an end to my striving for acceptance.

# Enemies are at Ease

*Lamentations 1:5-7*

5 HER FOES HAVE BECOME HER MASTERS;  
HER ENEMIES ARE AT EASE.  
THE LORD HAS BROUGHT HER GRIEF  
BECAUSE OF HER MANY SINS.  
HER CHILDREN HAVE GONE INTO EXILE,  
CAPTIVE BEFORE THE FOE.  
6 ALL THE SPLENDOR HAS DEPARTED  
FROM DAUGHTER ZION.  
HER PRINCES ARE LIKE DEER  
THAT FIND NO PASTURE;  
IN WEAKNESS THEY HAVE FLED  
BEFORE THE PURSUER.  
7 IN THE DAYS OF HER AFFLICTION AND WANDERING  
JERUSALEM REMEMBERS ALL THE TREASURES  
THAT WERE HERS IN DAYS OF OLD.  
WHEN HER PEOPLE FELL INTO ENEMY HANDS,  
THERE WAS NO ONE TO HELP HER.  
HER ENEMIES LOOKED AT HER  
AND LAUGHED AT HER DESTRUCTION.

# Naked and Ashamed

*Lamentations 1:8-11*

8 JERUSALEM HAS SINNED GREATLY  
AND SO HAS BECOME UNCLEAN.  
ALL WHO HONORED HER DESPISE HER,  
FOR THEY HAVE ALL SEEN HER NAKED;  
SHE HERSELF GROANS AND TURNS AWAY.  
9 HER FILTHINESS CLUNG TO HER SKIRTS;  
SHE DID NOT CONSIDER HER FUTURE.  
HER FALL WAS ASTOUNDING;  
THERE WAS NONE TO COMFORT HER.  
"LOOK, LORD, ON MY AFFLICTION,  
FOR THE ENEMY HAS TRIUMPHED."  
10 THE ENEMY LAID HANDS  
ON ALL HER TREASURES;  
SHE SAW PAGAN NATIONS  
ENTER HER SANCTUARY—  
THOSE YOU HAD FORBIDDEN  
TO ENTER YOUR ASSEMBLY.  
11 ALL HER PEOPLE GROAN AS THEY SEARCH FOR  
BREAD; THEY BARTER THEIR TREASURES FOR FOOD  
TO KEEP THEMSELVES ALIVE.  
"LOOK, LORD, AND CONSIDER,  
FOR I AM DESPISED"

**INVITATION:** Sit in silence and think: "Who are my enemies?" (Hint: the old formula is helpful: The World, The Flesh, and the Devil).

**REFLECTION:** Enemies are real and powerful. The poet here thinks about some of the most heartbreaking feelings when it seems the "other side" is winning: (1) Seeing enemies in comfort (2) Glory being gone (3) People laughing at your downfall (4) remembering different or simpler or more prosperous times. God's word is not shy in speaking about the power of the enemy. Our enemies are the systems of injustice (World), our own battles with sin (Flesh) and Satan himself (Devil). We cannot make the mistake of assuming that because God is greater and more powerful, then he will not allow the power of evil to have a place. He allows it for now.

**LAMENTATION:** Pray out loud all of the evil things in the world you can think of. God, how long will you allow these things to have victory?

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. (1 John 4:4)

**INVITATION:** Sit in silence. Re-read the passage. Ask: What am I ashamed of?

**REFLECTION:** The first effect of sin coming into the world was that Adam and Eve knew that they were naked. Their eyes were opened and they knew they were exposed before a holy God. Lamentations says this is how Israel felt being led into exile. She had done wrong and now she was exposed. Worse, nations have come in and taken advantage of her exposure (vs. 10). This is what sin does, it shows us who we are before God. And God takes our nakedness, and covers it with his grace.

**LAMENTATION:** God, hear me as I name out loud the things of which I am ashamed... Hear me, God. I pray for everyone who is exposed at this moment because of someone else's sin. We pray for victims of sexual abuse. We think of those trapped in abusive marriages.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:17)

# He Made Me Desolate

*Lamentations 1:12-15*

12 "IS IT NOTHING TO YOU, ALL YOU WHO PASS BY?  
LOOK AROUND AND SEE.  
IS ANY SUFFERING LIKE MY SUFFERING  
THAT WAS INFLICTED ON ME,  
THAT THE LORD BROUGHT ON ME  
IN THE DAY OF HIS FIERCE ANGER?  
13 "FROM ON HIGH HE SENT FIRE,  
SENT IT DOWN INTO MY BONES.  
HE SPREAD A NET FOR MY FEET  
AND TURNED ME BACK.  
HE MADE ME DESOLATE,  
FAINT ALL THE DAY LONG.  
14 "MY SINS HAVE BEEN BOUND INTO A YOKE;  
BY HIS HANDS THEY WERE WOVEN TOGETHER.  
THEY HAVE BEEN HUNG ON MY NECK,  
AND THE LORD HAS SAPPED MY STRENGTH.  
HE HAS GIVEN ME INTO THE HANDS  
OF THOSE I CANNOT WITHSTAND.  
15 "THE LORD HAS REJECTED  
ALL THE WARRIORS IN MY MIDST;  
HE HAS SUMMONED AN ARMY AGAINST ME  
TO CRUSH MY YOUNG MEN.  
IN HIS WINEPRESS THE LORD HAS TRAMPLED  
VIRGIN DAUGHTER JUDAH.

**INVITATION:** Sit in silence. Is God inviting you to pray something?

**REFLECTION:** Have you ever felt any of these things:  
(1) God is angry with me (2) God is trying to trap me  
(3) God is intentionally making things hard for me.

Why would He? These are common feelings and can be truthful or dangerous depending on what you mean. God certainly tests his people...this is all throughout Scripture. He prunes the thorns and allows hard times. But Scripture is equally clear that he does this as a Father, for the good, growth and maturity of his children whom he loves unceasingly

**LAMENTATION:** What are your "desolations"? Think of today, this month, and/or this year. What has been hard? Tell God how you feel about these things, being as honest as you can.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I believe that nothing can snatch me from the Father's hand (John 10:29)

# No One is Near to Comfort Me

*Lamentations 1:16-17*

16 "THIS IS WHY I WEEP  
AND MY EYES OVERFLOW WITH TEARS.  
NO ONE IS NEAR TO COMFORT ME,  
NO ONE TO RESTORE MY SPIRIT.  
MY CHILDREN ARE DESTITUTE  
BECAUSE THE ENEMY HAS PREVAILED."  
17 ZION STRETCHES OUT HER HANDS,  
BUT THERE IS NO ONE TO COMFORT HER.  
THE LORD HAS DECREED FOR JACOB  
THAT HIS NEIGHBORS BECOME HIS FOES;  
JERUSALEM HAS BECOME  
AN UNCLEAN THING AMONG THEM.

**INVITATION:** Be still and know that God is God.

**REFLECTION:** Have you ever felt that, even though there may be people all around you, no one was "near." This seems to be what the poet is feeling on behalf of Israel. Israel is stretching out her hand, and receiving no comfort. Sometimes there is no immediate comfort to be had. Sometimes tears flow, and absences remain for the time being. Yet, the loss of comfort for a season need not be a loss of faith.

**LAMENTATION:** Name one thing before the Father that you are pretty sure no one understands except you and Him.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** He is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think

# I Have Been Most Rebellious

*Lamentations 1:18-22*

18 "THE LORD IS RIGHTEOUS,  
YET I REBELLED AGAINST HIS COMMAND.  
LISTEN, ALL YOU PEOPLES;  
LOOK ON MY SUFFERING.  
MY YOUNG MEN AND YOUNG WOMEN  
HAVE GONE INTO EXILE.  
19 "I CALLED TO MY ALLIES  
BUT THEY BETRAYED ME.  
MY PRIESTS AND MY ELDERS  
PERISHED IN THE CITY  
WHILE THEY SEARCHED FOR FOOD  
TO KEEP THEMSELVES ALIVE.  
20 "SEE, LORD, HOW DISTRESSED I AM!  
I AM IN TORMENT WITHIN,  
AND IN MY HEART I AM DISTURBED,  
FOR I HAVE BEEN MOST REBELLIOUS.  
OUTSIDE, THE SWORD BEREAVES;  
INSIDE, THERE IS ONLY DEATH.  
21 "PEOPLE HAVE HEARD MY GROANING,  
BUT THERE IS NO ONE TO COMFORT ME.  
ALL MY ENEMIES HAVE HEARD OF MY DISTRESS;  
THEY REJOICE AT WHAT YOU HAVE DONE.  
MAY YOU BRING THE DAY YOU HAVE ANNOUNCED  
SO THEY MAY BECOME LIKE ME.  
22 "LET ALL THEIR WICKEDNESS COME BEFORE YOU;  
DEAL WITH THEM  
AS YOU HAVE DEALT WITH ME  
BECAUSE OF ALL MY SINS.  
MY GROANS ARE MANY  
AND MY HEART IS FAINT."

**INVITATION:** Re-read the passage very slowly. Ask God to speak!

**REFLECTION:** Sometimes, we are very aware that the reason for our sorrow is because of our own sin. We are not just sad about the injustices "out there"...we are sad about the injustice inside each of us. The poet says that he has "rebelled" and "transgressed." He is in internal torment (ESV says "stomach churns") over his sin.

**LAMENTATION:** I know that there is an absence in me. I have done things I ought not to have done, and failed to do things I ought to have done. Hear my confession.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I'm believing today that even though I feel the weight of sin, God is able to see everything and forgive.



# The Cloud and the Fire

*Lamentations 2:1-3*

1 HOW THE LORD HAS COVERED DAUGHTER ZION  
WITH THE CLOUD OF HIS ANGER!  
HE HAS HURLED DOWN THE SPLENDOR OF ISRAEL  
FROM HEAVEN TO EARTH;  
HE HAS NOT REMEMBERED HIS FOOTSTOOL  
IN THE DAY OF HIS ANGER.  
2 WITHOUT PITY THE LORD HAS SWALLOWED UP  
ALL THE DWELLINGS OF JACOB;  
IN HIS WRATH HE HAS TORN DOWN  
THE STRONGHOLDS OF DAUGHTER JUDAH.  
HE HAS BROUGHT HER KINGDOM AND ITS PRINCES  
DOWN TO THE GROUND IN DISHONOR.  
3 IN FIERCE ANGER HE HAS CUT OFF  
EVERY HORN OF ISRAEL.  
HE HAS WITHDRAWN HIS RIGHT HAND  
AT THE APPROACH OF THE ENEMY.  
HE HAS BURNED IN JACOB LIKE A FLAMING FIRE  
THAT CONSUMES EVERYTHING AROUND IT.

**INVITATION:** Breathe deeply. Picture the grace you have received as a deep well or overflowing cup  
**REFLECTION:** The cloud and the fire! Both are symbols of God's presence as he led Israel out of Egypt. But both are used in this passage to convey God's displeasure. Imagine the cloud and the fire from the perspective of the Egyptians. For them, Israel's release was their rightful judgment. We must not hide from this aspect of God's character. We must be thankful that he triumphs over the enemy, and that we are no longer his enemies in Christ.

**LAMENTATION:** I know, God, that you are a consuming fire. You are the judge of all the earth. There is a trembling in your presence.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry; for the spirit would grow faint before me, and the breath of life that I made. (Is. 57:16)

# He is like an Enemy

*Lamentations 2:4-6*

4 LIKE AN ENEMY HE HAS STRUNG HIS BOW;  
HIS RIGHT HAND IS READY.  
LIKE A FOE HE HAS SLAIN  
ALL WHO WERE PLEASING TO THE EYE;  
HE HAS Poured OUT HIS WRATH LIKE FIRE  
ON THE TENT OF DAUGHTER ZION.  
5 THE LORD IS LIKE AN ENEMY;  
HE HAS SWALLOWED UP ISRAEL.  
HE HAS SWALLOWED UP ALL HER PALACES  
AND DESTROYED HER STRONGHOLDS.  
HE HAS MULTIPLIED MOURNING AND LAMENTATION  
FOR DAUGHTER JUDAH.  
6 HE HAS LAID WASTE HIS DWELLING LIKE A GARDEN;  
HE HAS DESTROYED HIS PLACE OF MEETING.  
THE LORD HAS MADE ZION FORGET  
HER APPOINTED FESTIVALS AND HER SABBATHS;  
IN HIS FIERCE ANGER HE HAS SPURNED  
BOTH KING AND PRIEST.

**INVITATION:** Sit in silence and enjoy God's presence for a few minutes.

**REFLECTION:** God is not our enemy. God is the enemy of our enemies. But in his chastisement of his people, it certainly feels this way at times. The reason that Judah has lost its special temple, its special feasts, its strongholds is because of their own sin and rebellion. They know this. The poet has already talked about how it is the people's fault. However, sometimes we cannot shake this feeling that God is against us; that he could have done more if he chose to; that he could have set us up better for success.

**LAMENTATION:** Reflect on a time when it felt like God was slinging arrows at you, seemingly without cause. Tell your Father about this.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** If God is for us, who can be against us. Today I trust that you are for me, your child.

# Abandonment in the Sanctuary

*Lamentations 2:7-8*

7 THE LORD HAS REJECTED HIS ALTAR  
AND ABANDONED HIS SANCTUARY.  
HE HAS GIVEN THE WALLS OF HER PALACES  
INTO THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY;  
THEY HAVE RAISED A SHOUT IN THE HOUSE OF THE  
LORD  
AS ON THE DAY OF AN APPOINTED FESTIVAL.  
8 THE LORD DETERMINED TO TEAR DOWN  
THE WALL AROUND DAUGHTER ZION.  
HE STRETCHED OUT A MEASURING LINE  
AND DID NOT WITHHOLD HIS HAND FROM  
DESTROYING.  
HE MADE RAMPARTS AND WALLS LAMENT;  
TOGETHER THEY WASTED AWAY.

# On the Ground in Silence

*Lamentations 2:9-10*

9 HER GATES HAVE SUNK INTO THE GROUND;  
THEIR BARS HE HAS BROKEN AND DESTROYED.  
HER KING AND HER PRINCES ARE EXILED AMONG THE  
NATIONS,  
THE LAW IS NO MORE,  
AND HER PROPHETS NO LONGER FIND  
VISIONS FROM THE LORD.  
10 THE ELDERS OF DAUGHTER ZION  
SIT ON THE GROUND IN SILENCE;  
THEY HAVE SPRINKLED DUST ON THEIR HEADS  
AND PUT ON SACKCLOTH.  
THE YOUNG WOMEN OF JERUSALEM  
HAVE BOWED THEIR HEADS TO THE GROUND.

**INVITATION:** Take a moment to review the last 24 hours. Notice all that God has provided. What are the little gifts?

**REFLECTION:** In exile, worshipping God was hard. The poet can remember a time when they had a temple and established routines of sabbaths and feasts. Now, the sanctuary is destroyed and empty. Normally, there would be a shout of praise in the sanctuary, now there is a shout of triumph from the enemy (vs. 7). There is a real sense in which we continue in this exile. Worship is hard for us, it's not built into the culture or our normal everyday rhythms. We long for a day when everything and everyone is built for the purpose of glorifying God.

**LAMENTATION:** God, my life is not established in worship. I long for a time when it is easy, expected, and built in part of this world to worship your Name.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I know that one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess the name of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:10)

**INVITATION:** Silently pray the 3 "C"s. Offer up to God everything from the last 24 hours you need to CONFESS; Everything you want to CELEBRATE, and every CARE that is burdening you.

**REFLECTION:** Have you been in a place where it felt like (or was actually true) that "everything is lost." Here the poet says: The city seems lost, the leaders seem lost, the law and order seem lost, even the presence of God seems lost. Those who care have nothing left to do but sit in silence, dust and ashes. Have you felt before that the major aspects of your life physically and spiritually were disintegrating?

**LAMENTATION:** God, my life does not work the way I think it should. Even now I am thinking of things in my family, in my workplace, in my home, in my physical body, in my emotional health that seem fragile or broken.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** For God alone my soul waits in silence, from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. (Ps. 62:1-2)

# Where is Bread and Wine?

*Lamentations 2:11-12*

11 MY EYES FAIL FROM WEeping,  
I AM IN TORMENT WITHIN;  
MY HEART IS Poured OUT ON THE GROUND  
BECAUSE MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED,  
BECAUSE CHILDREN AND INFANTS FAINT  
IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY.  
12 THEY SAY TO THEIR MOTHERS,  
"WHERE IS BREAD AND WINE?"  
AS THEY FAINT LIKE THE WOUNDED  
IN THE STREETS OF THE CITY,  
AS THEIR LIVES EBB AWAY  
IN THEIR MOTHERS' ARMS.

# Wounds as Deep as the Sea

*Lamentations 2:13*

13 WHAT CAN I SAY FOR YOU?  
WITH WHAT CAN I COMPARE YOU,  
DAUGHTER JERUSALEM?  
TO WHAT CAN I LIKEN YOU,  
THAT I MAY COMFORT YOU,  
VIRGIN DAUGHTER ZION?  
YOUR WOUND IS AS DEEP AS THE SEA.  
WHO CAN HEAL YOU?

**INVITATION:** Be still. Try to picture as best you can the love of God. Ask Him to sustain you today.

**REFLECTION:** One of the greatest burdens in Christian life is not being able to help and change other people. We offer what we can, and when it doesn't work, we can become sad, preoccupied and even angry. That is the way the poet feels. In a time of crisis, he sees children going hungry in the streets, asking for bread and wine. But their mothers can't provide. Their is a "torment within" (11) when we see things we can't change, and people that we can't help.

**LAMENTATION:** Gracious God, my soul is burdened for [name person]. I cry out to you for help. I mourn that I do not have what it takes to fix them.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I believe in a God who binds up the brokenhearted and dresses their wounds (Ps. 147:3). I trust that God will make things right either now, in the future, or in eternity.

**INVITATION:** What is the most enjoyable thing to you about knowing God? Reflect on that right now.

**REFLECTION:** There are parts of the ocean even today that have not been explored. There are depths that we cannot reach. And there are depths of our wounds and depths of ourselves that we also cannot reach. How do you deal with a wound that is too deep even for understanding? The poet rightly asks "Who can heal you?" All of us are wounded whether we realize it or not, and many of us are carrying depth of sorrow we haven't yet comprehended. God is the answer to the question.

**LAMENTATION:** God, I'm not able to say everything that is wrong. But I know it is deep and dark. I can't reach it.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I trust the one who made the seas is also the one who is intimately familiar with all my ways (Ps. 139:3)

# Mouths Open Wide Against You

*Lamentations 2:14-17*

14 THE VISIONS OF YOUR PROPHETS  
WERE FALSE AND WORTHLESS;  
THEY DID NOT EXPOSE YOUR SIN  
TO WARD OFF YOUR CAPTIVITY.  
THE PROPHECIES THEY GAVE YOU  
WERE FALSE AND MISLEADING.  
15 ALL WHO PASS YOUR WAY  
CLAP THEIR HANDS AT YOU;  
THEY SCOFF AND SHAKE THEIR HEADS  
AT DAUGHTER JERUSALEM:  
"IS THIS THE CITY THAT WAS CALLED  
THE PERFECTION OF BEAUTY,  
THE JOY OF THE WHOLE EARTH?"  
16 ALL YOUR ENEMIES OPEN THEIR MOUTHS  
WIDE AGAINST YOU;  
THEY SCOFF AND GNASH THEIR TEETH  
AND SAY, "WE HAVE SWALLOWED HER UP.  
THIS IS THE DAY WE HAVE WAITED FOR;  
WE HAVE LIVED TO SEE IT!"  
17 THE LORD HAS DONE WHAT HE PLANNED;  
HE HAS FULFILLED HIS WORD,  
WHICH HE DECREED LONG AGO.  
HE HAS OVERTHROWN YOU WITHOUT PITY,  
HE HAS LET THE ENEMY GLOAT OVER YOU,  
HE HAS EXALTED THE HORN OF YOUR FOES.

# Arise, Cry Out in the Night!

*Lamentations 2:18-19*

18 THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE  
CRY OUT TO THE LORD.  
YOU WALLS OF DAUGHTER ZION,  
LET YOUR TEARS FLOW LIKE A RIVER  
DAY AND NIGHT;  
GIVE YOURSELF NO RELIEF,  
YOUR EYES NO REST.  
19 ARISE, CRY OUT IN THE NIGHT,  
AS THE WATCHES OF THE NIGHT BEGIN;  
POUR OUT YOUR HEART LIKE WATER  
IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD.  
LIFT UP YOUR HANDS TO HIM  
FOR THE LIVES OF YOUR CHILDREN,  
WHO FAINT FROM HUNGER  
AT EVERY STREET CORNER.

**INVITATION:** If you are able, pray on your knees. Posture your heart toward the living God.

**REFLECTION:** There is almost no worse feeling than knowing you are weak. The poet says that the best prophets Judah had still mislead them and didn't do their job to prevent exile. Now, God's people are the subject of ridicule, gloating, and bullying. The picture is a mouth wide open, spitting out curses. Kicking the people of God when they are down. We know this feeling. There is something that we think is good, but when someone else sees it, they think it is pathetic and suddenly we feel exposed.

**LAMENTATION:** Father, I'm scared to love things, to think things are beautiful or good or true. I'm afraid that others will not see it that way. I confess this as a weakness and long for beauty, truth and goodness to be openly acknowledged and agreed upon.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** God, you shut the mouths of the lions for the sake of Daniel your servant. I believe You will shut the mouths of everyone who speaks against you. (Dan. 6:22)

**INVITATION:** Lift up your hands to the Lord. Pray for his presence!

**REFLECTION:** Like this passage, the psalms are filled with images about staying up in "the watches of the night." This was a military term (keeping a watch out) but eventually became just a part of the day like "morning." Perhaps you are familiar with this time as well. You've been asleep for a number of hours. You wake up with a burden, a restlessness, or an energy. Often times, we wake with anxiety. The struggles of life seem amplified 10X in the dark and we wonder what we are going to do to survive and thrive. That panic is what the poet feels here. So much has gone wrong. He wakes to pour out his tears to the Lord.

**LAMENTATION:** I feel great burdens for things I think will never be settled.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** My God! You are my song in the night. (Ps. 77:6)

# Look, O Lord, and Consider

*Lamentations 2:20-22*

20 "LOOK, LORD, AND CONSIDER:  
WHOM HAVE YOU EVER TREATED LIKE THIS?  
SHOULD WOMEN EAT THEIR OFFSPRING,  
THE CHILDREN THEY HAVE CARED FOR?  
SHOULD PRIEST AND PROPHET BE KILLED  
IN THE SANCTUARY OF THE LORD?  
21 "YOUNG AND OLD LIE TOGETHER  
IN THE DUST OF THE STREETS;  
MY YOUNG MEN AND YOUNG WOMEN  
HAVE FALLEN BY THE SWORD.  
YOU HAVE SLAIN THEM IN THE DAY OF YOUR ANGER;  
YOU HAVE SLAUGHTERED THEM WITHOUT PITY.  
22 "AS YOU SUMMON TO A FEAST DAY,  
SO YOU SUMMONED AGAINST ME TERRORS ON  
EVERY SIDE.  
IN THE DAY OF THE LORD'S ANGER  
NO ONE ESCAPED OR SURVIVED;  
THOSE I CARED FOR AND REARED  
MY ENEMY HAS DESTROYED."

# Darkness and Chains

*Lamentations 3:1-9*

1 I AM THE MAN WHO HAS SEEN AFFLICTION  
BY THE ROD OF THE LORD'S WRATH.  
2 HE HAS DRIVEN ME AWAY AND MADE ME WALK  
IN DARKNESS RATHER THAN LIGHT;  
3 INDEED, HE HAS TURNED HIS HAND AGAINST ME  
AGAIN AND AGAIN, ALL DAY LONG.  
4 HE HAS MADE MY SKIN AND MY FLESH GROW OLD  
AND HAS BROKEN MY BONES.  
5 HE HAS BESIEGED ME AND SURROUNDED ME  
WITH BITTERNESS AND HARDSHIP.  
6 HE HAS MADE ME DWELL IN DARKNESS  
LIKE THOSE LONG DEAD.  
7 HE HAS WALLED ME IN SO I CANNOT ESCAPE;  
HE HAS WEIGHED ME DOWN WITH CHAINS.  
8 EVEN WHEN I CALL OUT OR CRY FOR HELP,  
HE SHUTS OUT MY PRAYER.  
9 HE HAS BARRED MY WAY WITH BLOCKS OF STONE;  
HE HAS MADE MY PATHS CROOKED.

**INVITATION:** Rest and take deep breaths. God is here.

**REFLECTION:** Is it right to ask questions of God? Is it ok to reason with him and tell him you don't understand? If Scripture is our guide, our answer must be Yes! The poet is basically asking: "Do you realize what's happened to us? It feels uniquely bad. Why are you ok with this?"

**LAMENTATION:** God, there are many things I do not understand. Please hear me as I name them before you...

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** Even though I have questions, my faith is greater than my understanding. I trust you, God. I know that my thoughts and ways are not the same as yours (Is. 55:8) and you are God.

**INVITATION:** Take a walk around your house, your yard, or your neighborhood block. Prayerfully notice all the gifts and beautiful things.

**REFLECTION:** "You kept me in the dark!" This is the poet's cry against God. In the dark, the world takes on different shapes. You can become disoriented, even in your own house. That helpless feeling is constricting (like chains). The longing for light and freedom can become an obsession. What the writer is struggling with is, again, his own humanity and inability to understand. Being in the dark is not a comfortable place, but it is nonetheless sometimes where God leads us.

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, my path and my understanding of your will is not at all clear to me.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** You are the Light of the world. You've given me the light of your son. That is enough for me. Even though it feels like it, I know that I don't really walk in darkness anymore.

# Living as a Target

*Lamentations 3:10-15*

10 LIKE A BEAR LYING IN WAIT,  
LIKE A LION IN HIDING,  
11 HE DRAGGED ME FROM THE PATH AND MANGLED  
ME  
AND LEFT ME WITHOUT HELP.  
12 HE DREW HIS BOW  
AND MADE ME THE TARGET FOR HIS ARROWS.  
13 HE PIERCED MY HEART  
WITH ARROWS FROM HIS QUIVER.  
14 I BECAME THE LAUGHINGSTOCK OF ALL MY PEOPLE;  
THEY MOCK ME IN SONG ALL DAY LONG.  
15 HE HAS FILLED ME WITH BITTER HERBS  
AND GIVEN ME GALL TO DRINK.

# I Have Forgotten what Prosperity Is

*Lamentations 3:16-18*

16 HE HAS BROKEN MY TEETH WITH GRAVEL;  
HE HAS TRAMPLED ME IN THE DUST.  
17 I HAVE BEEN DEPRIVED OF PEACE;  
I HAVE FORGOTTEN WHAT PROSPERITY IS.  
18 SO I SAY, "MY SPLENDOR IS GONE  
AND ALL THAT I HAD HOPED FROM THE LORD."

**INVITATION:** Re-read the passage. What is one word or phrase that rings true with your experience? Talk to the Lord honestly about this.

**REFLECTION:** The poet knows well the feeling of having a target on his back. Like behind every rock there is a bear or lion waiting to pounce, or an archer who has him in his sights. Because the desolations have added up, he feels like he is constantly being attacked. Does God trap us like this? Does he lie in wait for us to mess up so he can punish? Even though it can feel like this, this is not a picture consistent with our Lord (although it is a familiar feeling of his people).

**LAMENTATION:** Honestly Lord, sometimes it feels like you are waiting for me to mess up, or waiting for an opportunity to make my life harder.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I know that you do not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone (Lam. 3:33)

**INVITATION:** Breathe in peace of Christ, Breathe out anxiety.

**REFLECTION:** Sometimes when you have been in a hard season for so long, it's hard to remember what it was like when things were different. Was I really so happy then? What was so good? It does not feel possible that you could return to that state.

**LAMENTATION:** Think about the hardest area of your life right now. Share that with the Lord. Write down or express out loud all the things you miss from a better time.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** You have the power to restore the joy of my salvation! (Ps. 51:12)

# My Soul is Downcast Within Me

*Lamentations 3:19-20*

19 I REMEMBER MY AFFLICTION AND MY WANDERING,  
THE BITTERNESS AND THE GALL.

20 I WILL REMEMBER THEM,  
AND MY SOUL IS DOWNCAST WITHIN ME.

**INVITATION:** Sit still and think: What are you feeling about the Lord today? Are you joyful, angry, ambivalent, excited? Name this in prayer.

**REFLECTION:** Every Christian knows the feeling of a downcast soul. The image is so prominent in Scripture, that it is a wonder that it is talked about so infrequently in church settings. Sometimes, there is a blue quality to our faith. We aren't excited. We can be bitter, just tired, or bored. This is a part of the Christian experience, but it is not a reason to abandon faith. God can and does restore joy even when it feels like he never will again.

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, My soul is downcast within me. [if this is not true of you today, pray this lament for a friend or family member who is struggling]

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. (Ps. 43:5)

## NOTE: A BREAK IN THE CLOUDS

*Friends, you have made it 20 days with the Poet, going to all the empty places in our hearts. While it is difficult, it is ultimately such a faith-enriching exercise to name these things. For the next week, there is a break in the clouds. Chapter 3:21-42 is a shift for the writer of Lamentations. He focuses on God's character, his hope, and his return to God. Of course you may lament at any time in the Lord's presence. But for the next 7 days here, we will praying joyful prayers about God's character and promises.*



# His Compassions are New Today

*Lamentations 3:21-23a*

21 YET THIS I CALL TO MIND

AND THEREFORE I HAVE HOPE:

22 BECAUSE OF THE LORD'S GREAT LOVE WE ARE NOT  
CONSUMED,

FOR HIS COMPASSIONS NEVER FAIL.

23 THEY ARE NEW EVERY MORNING;

# Strength for Today, Bright Hope for Tomorrow

*Lamentation 3:23b*

23 GREAT IS YOUR FAITHFULNESS.

**INVITATION:** Today is a fresh day. God's mercies are new! Sit in his mercy.

**REFLECTION:** The ability to "call to mind" truth is a skill of faith. Even in the depths of the darkest place he's ever been, the Poet is able to call to mind what is ultimately true: God loves us unceasingly! Though we can be chastised, we are ultimately NOT consumed (22). Nothing destroys us because we are held in his hand. His mercies are new this morning! There is a real sense in which we have a blank slate. The blood of Jesus covers us.

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** I give you thanks today Father that your mercies are new! Thank you for not remembering my sin. Thank you for removing it as far as the east is from the west! Thank you for not consuming me in your anger (though I know I deserve it). I delight in you today Father!

**INVITATION:** This is the day the Lord has made. Take time right now to rejoice and be glad in it! (Ps. 118:24)

**REFLECTION AND THANKSGIVING:**

*Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee,  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not,  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever wilt be.*

*Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!*

*Summer and winter and springtime and harvest,  
Sun, moon, and stars in their courses above;  
Join with all nature in manifold witness,  
To Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love.*

*Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;  
Strength for today, and bright hope for tomorrow  
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.*

--Thomas O Chisholm (1923)



# The Lord is My Portion

*Lamentations 3:24-25*

24 I SAY TO MYSELF, "THE LORD IS MY PORTION;  
THEREFORE I WILL WAIT FOR HIM."

25 THE LORD IS GOOD TO THOSE WHOSE HOPE IS IN  
HIM,

TO THE ONE WHO SEEKS HIM;

# It is Good to Wait Quietly

*Lamentations 3:26-29*

26 IT IS GOOD TO WAIT QUIETLY  
FOR THE SALVATION OF THE LORD.

27 IT IS GOOD FOR A MAN TO BEAR THE YOKE  
WHILE HE IS YOUNG.

28 LET HIM SIT ALONE IN SILENCE,  
FOR THE LORD HAS LAID IT ON HIM.

29 LET HIM BURY HIS FACE IN THE DUST—  
THERE MAY YET BE HOPE.

**INVITATION:** What has delighted you in the last 24 hours? Give thanks to God for that.

**REFLECTION:** What does it mean that God is our "portion?" A portion is a satisfactory amount of something. It is enough for today. That is the way that we should think of God. He is enough not only for today, but everyday! He fills our cup. He provides a table in the wilderness. He gives what is good. There is no one who seeks God truly who is not given what he or she needs (25).

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** You, Father, have truly given me everything I need. I know that life, joy and godliness are all possible because you have provided what is necessary in your son Jesus Christ. I thank you for the living water that causes us to never thirst again. I thank you for the true bread from heaven that fills up all our empty places. Thank you for Jesus.

**INVITATION:** Sit quietly for an unhurried amount of time.

**REFLECTION:** Is silence good? Silence seems like death to most of us. We wake up to alarms, turn on the radio when we get in the car, and turn on netflix when we get home. We don't like silence. But God's word says that silence is a spiritually healthy thing. Why? What is it's value? Silence makes us confront ourselves. Silence makes the distractions go away; the distractions that make us feel like we are OK without God. It is difficult to achieve at first, but there can be a kind of pure joy in silence with God. Sometimes when you wait for him, you get to see his salvation and goodness in unique ways.

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Great God, thank you that you have not kept silent from us. Though it feels sometimes like you aren't there, or that you don't care, We have faith today that you have spoken to us in your son Jesus. Thank you that we can be silent in your presence. Thank you that the accuser has no word against us if we are in Jesus.

# Turn the Other Cheek

*Lamentations 3:30*

30 LET HIM OFFER HIS CHEEK TO ONE WHO WOULD STRIKE HIM,

AND LET HIM BE FILLED WITH DISGRACE.

**INVITATION:** Know that you are in God's presence. Is there something that God is asking you to think, feel or do?

**REFLECTION:** Jesus quoted this verse in the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5:38-40). Turn the other cheek, he said. We shouldn't as Christians pursue vengeance. Why? And why would the poet be talking here about that in Lamentations? What the poet is saying is that even in the midst of exile and the hardest things in his life, he is learning something of God. God is faithful, and good, like he's mentioned. But also, we learn from God how to be righteous in tough times. Even though we have these enemies who are pursuing and mocking, we can receive those blows. This is deep in God's character as he shows us in Jesus Christ. Jesus didn't just talk this talk, he walked the walk of receiving blows that he did not deserve.

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Thank you, Jesus, for receiving blows for me. You could have rightly considered me your enemy. Thank you for laying down your life for me as a friend. Teach me a measure of this grace for others. Even in my worst circumstances, show me how to be disgraced for the sake of your name!

# God Sees

*Lamentations 3:31-36*

31 FOR NO ONE IS CAST OFF BY THE LORD FOREVER.

32 THOUGH HE BRINGS GRIEF, HE WILL SHOW COMPASSION,

SO GREAT IS HIS UNFAILING LOVE.

33 FOR HE DOES NOT WILLINGLY BRING AFFLICTION OR GRIEF TO ANYONE.

34 TO CRUSH UNDERFOOT ALL PRISONERS IN THE LAND.

35 TO DENY PEOPLE THEIR RIGHTS BEFORE THE MOST HIGH,

36 TO DEPRIVE THEM OF JUSTICE— WOULD NOT THE LORD SEE SUCH THINGS?

**INVITATION:** Sit still prayerfully meditating on this phrase "So great is his unfailing love"

**REFLECTION:** God sees. He really does. The Scripture says he is "intimately acquainted with all our ways" (Ps. 139:3). One common thing that you will hear coaches say to the kids playing on their teams is "I see you." When the player is doing something really well, the coach will notice. He will want to encourage the player that he sees his good work. God sees things in our lives! What could be more comforting. He says that the "grief" he brings has purpose (vs. 33) and it has an ending (vs. 31).

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** Thank you God that the hard things are temporary. Thank you that you are working in us good for ourselves, good for our neighbors, good for the world, and good for eternity!

# Let Us Examine our Ways

*Lamentations 3:37-42*

37 WHO CAN SPEAK AND HAVE IT HAPPEN  
IF THE LORD HAS NOT DECREED IT?  
38 IS IT NOT FROM THE MOUTH OF THE MOST HIGH  
THAT BOTH CALAMITIES AND GOOD THINGS  
COME?  
39 WHY SHOULD THE LIVING COMPLAIN  
WHEN PUNISHED FOR THEIR SINS?  
40 LET US EXAMINE OUR WAYS AND TEST THEM,  
AND LET US RETURN TO THE LORD.  
41 LET US LIFT UP OUR HEARTS AND OUR HANDS  
TO GOD IN HEAVEN, AND SAY:  
42 "WE HAVE SINNED AND REBELLED  
AND YOU HAVE NOT FORGIVEN.

# No Prayer Can Get Through

*Lamentations 3:43-54*

43 "YOU HAVE COVERED YOURSELF WITH ANGER AND  
PURSUED US;  
YOU HAVE SLAIN WITHOUT PITY.  
44 YOU HAVE COVERED YOURSELF WITH A CLOUD  
SO THAT NO PRAYER CAN GET THROUGH.  
45 YOU HAVE MADE US SCUM AND REFUSE  
AMONG THE NATIONS.  
UNTIL THE LORD LOOKS DOWN (3:46-54)  
46 "ALL OUR ENEMIES HAVE OPENED THEIR MOUTHS  
WIDE AGAINST US.  
47 WE HAVE SUFFERED TERROR AND PITFALLS,  
RUIN AND DESTRUCTION."  
48 STREAMS OF TEARS FLOW FROM MY EYES  
BECAUSE MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED.  
49 MY EYES WILL FLOW UNCEASINGLY,  
WITHOUT RELIEF.  
50 UNTIL THE LORD LOOKS DOWN  
FROM HEAVEN AND SEES.  
51 WHAT I SEE BRINGS GRIEF TO MY SOUL  
BECAUSE OF ALL THE WOMEN OF MY CITY.  
52 THOSE WHO WERE MY ENEMIES WITHOUT CAUSE  
HUNTED ME LIKE A BIRD.  
53 THEY TRIED TO END MY LIFE IN A PIT  
AND THREW STONES AT ME;  
17 54 THE WATERS CLOSED OVER MY HEAD,  
AND I THOUGHT I WAS ABOUT TO PERISH.

**INVITATION:** Examine the last 24 hours. What have you felt, experienced, known, or done? Talk to God about these things.

**REFLECTION:** Where does evil come from? Looking at vs. 38, it would seem that God brings both good and evil into this world. If that were the case, it would be right for us to challenge God...why are you doing this evil! But notice that this is not what the poet means. He places the blame squarely on the unfaithfulness of God's people. He is calling for examination of himself and others. God has not been unfaithful. We have. But God does send hard things our way. Every time that God does this it is for the ultimate aim of the world's restoration.

**PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING:** I thank you today, my God, even for the hard things in my life. I trust that you are leading me to a good place. I trust that this world is in your hands and that I am as well.

**INVITATION:** Sit still know that God is there and He is attending to your soul.

**REFLECTION:** The clouds have returned. This is the common experience of every engaged Christian. There are many beautiful and glorious things about life in God, but it is very hard to be in this world with our trials. Christians should expect seasons of good things to often be followed by hardship. In particular, the poet here feels something that many, many of us have: My prayers are going nowhere. He is feeling everything that he has felt before: Abandonment by God, laughter and judgment from others, being hunted by enemies. But he is hard pressed because it feels like there is a barrier between himself and God

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, it feels like there is a barrier between you and me [if this is not true of you today, pray this lament for a friend or family member who is struggling]

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I know your eyes are on me. I know you are attentive to my prayer (1 Pet. 3:12)

# Do Not Fear

*Lamentations 3:55-57*

55 I CALLED ON YOUR NAME, LORD,  
FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE PIT.  
56 YOU HEARD MY PLEA: "DO NOT CLOSE YOUR EARS  
TO MY CRY FOR RELIEF."  
57 YOU CAME NEAR WHEN I CALLED YOU,  
AND YOU SAID, "DO NOT FEAR."

# Pay Them Back what They Deserve

*Lamentations 3:58-66*

58 YOU, LORD, TOOK UP MY CASE;  
YOU REDEEMED MY LIFE.  
59 LORD, YOU HAVE SEEN THE WRONG DONE TO ME.  
UPHOLD MY CAUSE!  
60 YOU HAVE SEEN THE DEPTH OF THEIR VENGEANCE,  
ALL THEIR PLOTS AGAINST ME.  
61 LORD, YOU HAVE HEARD THEIR INSULTS,  
ALL THEIR PLOTS AGAINST ME—  
62 WHAT MY ENEMIES WHISPER AND MUTTER  
AGAINST ME ALL DAY LONG.  
63 LOOK AT THEM! SITTING OR STANDING,  
THEY MOCK ME IN THEIR SONGS.  
64 PAY THEM BACK WHAT THEY DESERVE, LORD,  
FOR WHAT THEIR HANDS HAVE DONE.  
65 PUT A VEIL OVER THEIR HEARTS,  
AND MAY YOUR CURSE BE ON THEM!  
66 PURSUE THEM IN ANGER AND DESTROY THEM  
FROM UNDER THE HEAVENS OF THE LORD.

**INVITATION:** What is something you have been particularly afraid of recently?

**REFLECTION:** One of the greatest questions a Christian can ask himself is this: "What am I afraid of?" What are the fears that are following me right now? What is keeping me up? One helpful way to address fears is to do something called "catastrophising" (might be making up a word here). What is the worst thing that will happen? If that thing you feared happened, what would happen next? And if that happened, what would happen next? In the end, you will see that all fear is based in a desire for God. The poet here knows this and he feels that God is not closing off his ears to his cries.

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, hear me as I list my anxieties now...

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I know that by being anxious I'm not accomplishing anything (Matt. 6:27). Today I choose to trust in a God and believe that "his will be done" is the best possible thing for me.

**INVITATION:** Read Psalm 131 (it's only 3 verses).

Wait to move to the next thing until it's true that you have "Calmed and quieted your soul"

**REFLECTION:** Lament is one of the ways we experience the justice of God. God's word does not teach us that we should be OK with wrongdoing in the world or wrongdoing done against us. Our faith does not say: "Just smile and believe in God." We don't take vengeance for ourselves but we do believe that God brings judgment to our enemies. He "takes up our case" which is a beautiful way of describing God; he is an advocate who sees our estate and cares. He will judge and punish every wrong thing. Thankfully, if we are in Jesus Christ, every "wrong thing" that is inside each of us, has already be punished in the cross.

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, I'm calling to mind all of the injustices around me. I'm wondering if you are going to take up these cases, or whether you care at all?

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I'm believing that every deed will be judged (Eccl. 3:17). I also believe that I will be judged righteous because of the blood of Jesus (Eph. 1:7).

# How the Gold has Lost its Luster

*Lamentations 4:1-3*

1 HOW THE GOLD HAS LOST ITS LUSTER,  
THE FINE GOLD BECOME DULL!  
THE SACRED GEMS ARE SCATTERED  
AT EVERY STREET CORNER.  
2 HOW THE PRECIOUS CHILDREN OF ZION,  
ONCE WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD,  
ARE NOW CONSIDERED AS POTS OF CLAY,  
THE WORK OF A POTTER'S HANDS!  
3 EVEN JACKALS OFFER THEIR BREASTS  
TO NURSE THEIR YOUNG,  
BUT MY PEOPLE HAVE BECOME HEARTLESS  
LIKE OSTRICHES IN THE DESERT.

# Destitute in the Streets

*Lamentations 4:4-8*

4 BECAUSE OF THIRST THE INFANT'S TONGUE  
STICKS TO THE ROOF OF ITS MOUTH;  
THE CHILDREN BEG FOR BREAD,  
BUT NO ONE GIVES IT TO THEM.  
5 THOSE WHO ONCE ATE DELICACIES  
ARE DESTITUTE IN THE STREETS.  
THOSE BROUGHT UP IN ROYAL PURPLE  
NOW LIE ON ASH HEAPS.  
6 THE PUNISHMENT OF MY PEOPLE  
IS GREATER THAN THAT OF SODOM,  
WHICH WAS OVERTHROWN IN A MOMENT  
WITHOUT A HAND TURNED TO HELP HER.  
7 THEIR PRINCES WERE BRIGHTER THAN SNOW  
AND WHITER THAN MILK,  
THEIR BODIES MORE RUDDY THAN RUBIES,  
THEIR APPEARANCE LIKE LAPIS LAZULI.  
8 BUT NOW THEY ARE BLACKER THAN SOOT;  
THEY ARE NOT RECOGNIZED IN THE STREETS.  
THEIR SKIN HAS SHRIVELED ON THEIR BONES;  
IT HAS BECOME AS DRY AS A STICK.

**INVITATION:** Take notice of the next 10 breaths. Know that God sustains each one.

**REFLECTION:** The shine always wears off. How we know this to be true, and yet how we continue to act like it is not. Despite experience to the contrary, we really do believe that a toy, or a vacation, or a 5% raise, or a new stage of life, or a membership, or moving to a place, will bring the sustained happiness that our souls long for. But every thing and every stage and every person will fade until we are made glorious forever.

**LAMENTATION:** Lord, I'm left empty. All the things I think will work, do not work at all. I'm exhausted from the search for the good, beautiful, restful life.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** "For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens... For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (2 Cor. 5: 1;4)

**INVITATION:** Ask for compassion! Dwell on those neighbors (local and global) who need help. Pray and intercede for them.

**REFLECTION:** Here in the United States, we have a strong desire to turn away from anything that upsets us. All over the world, there are hungry people. It is especially bad in certain countries, but there are hungry, trafficked, abused people in every city of the US as well. Is there any more sad picture than a thirsty infant or a child begging for bread (vs. 4)? This is the world we live in. Do not flinch. Face the pain that exists in your backyard and all over the world.

**LAMENTATION:** I am so overwhelmed thinking of the needs of this world. Who is sufficient for this? God, do you care? Will you act?

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I do not understand all of your purposes. But I know that you, Jesus, are the bread of life and the bread sent from heaven. (John 6:35). I know that eternal life is one of abundance for all who trust in you.

# As Bad as It Can Get

*Lamentations 4:9-14*

9 THOSE KILLED BY THE SWORD ARE BETTER OFF  
THAN THOSE WHO DIE OF FAMINE;  
RACKED WITH HUNGER, THEY WASTE AWAY  
FOR LACK OF FOOD FROM THE FIELD.  
10 WITH THEIR OWN HANDS COMPASSIONATE  
WOMEN  
HAVE COOKED THEIR OWN CHILDREN,  
WHO BECAME THEIR FOOD  
WHEN MY PEOPLE WERE DESTROYED.  
11 THE LORD HAS GIVEN FULL VENT TO HIS WRATH;  
HE HAS Poured OUT HIS FIERCE ANGER.  
HE KINDLED A FIRE IN ZION  
THAT CONSUMED HER FOUNDATIONS.  
12 THE KINGS OF THE EARTH DID NOT BELIEVE,  
NOR DID ANY OF THE PEOPLES OF THE WORLD,  
THAT ENEMIES AND FOES COULD ENTER  
THE GATES OF JERUSALEM.  
13 BUT IT HAPPENED BECAUSE OF THE SINS OF HER  
PROPHETS  
AND THE INIQUITIES OF HER PRIESTS,  
WHO SHED WITHIN HER  
THE BLOOD OF THE RIGHTEOUS.  
14 NOW THEY GROPE THROUGH THE STREETS  
AS IF THEY WERE BLIND.  
THEY ARE SO DEFILED WITH BLOOD  
THAT NO ONE DARES TO TOUCH THEIR GARMENTS.

# No Nation Can Save Us

*Lamentations 4:15-17*

15 "GO AWAY! YOU ARE UNCLEAN!" PEOPLE CRY TO  
THEM.  
"AWAY! AWAY! DON'T TOUCH US!"  
WHEN THEY FLEE AND WANDER ABOUT,  
PEOPLE AMONG THE NATIONS SAY,  
"THEY CAN STAY HERE NO LONGER."  
16 THE LORD HIMSELF HAS SCATTERED THEM;  
HE NO LONGER WATCHES OVER THEM.  
THE PRIESTS ARE SHOWN NO HONOR,  
THE ELDERS NO FAVOR.  
17 MOREOVER, OUR EYES FAILED,  
LOOKING IN VAIN FOR HELP;  
FROM OUR TOWERS WE WATCHED  
FOR A NATION THAT COULD NOT SAVE US.

**INVITATION:** If you are able, get on your knees and cry out to God for all the pain of sin, death and evil in this world.

**REFLECTION:** The Bible takes us to real places, even when they are extremely hard. This passage describes mother-cannibals. This is not sensational; this did and does happen. We believe in something called "Total depravity." The world is not as bad as it could be all the time; nevertheless, there is a depth of sin and suffering that is heinous and going on all the time. Because sin entered the world, we should expect at times to see it's full ugliness. Again, Christians must not stop our ears. We must listen, cry out, speak out, and work to end the horrific effects of the fall whenever we can. Ultimately, we must trust God alone to come and end this.

**LAMENTATION:** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer. 17:9). I acknowledge today just how bad things are. It seems so much of the time that there is no end, and no hope.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21: 1;4)

**INVITATION:** Try to harness all of your scattered thoughts. Ask God to hear them all at once as a prayer for His help.

**REFLECTION:** God's people wander among the nations. They can find no home. They are not wanted by anyone among the other nations. In a beautiful phrase from the poet, he says they are watching from their towers for a nation that could not save (vs. 17). What is so striking about this phrase is that "watching from the tower" is also how the psalmist describes waiting for God (Ps 130:6). They were looking for a nation to save them. This hope was in vain. However, waiting for God does and will bring them salvation.

**LAMENTATION:** I want so badly for some system, some country, some educational path, some resource to be my help. All of them in the end are vain.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** My soul is waiting on God. I'm really watching and waiting for him (Ps. 130:6).<sup>20</sup>



# Our Days were Numbered

*Lamentations 4:18-22*

18 PEOPLE STALKED US AT EVERY STEP,  
SO WE COULD NOT WALK IN OUR STREETS.  
OUR END WAS NEAR, OUR DAYS WERE NUMBERED,  
FOR OUR END HAD COME.  
19 OUR PURSUERS WERE SWIFTER  
THAN EAGLES IN THE SKY;  
THEY CHASED US OVER THE MOUNTAINS  
AND LAY IN WAIT FOR US IN THE DESERT.  
20 THE LORD'S ANOINTED, OUR VERY LIFE BREATH,  
WAS CAUGHT IN THEIR TRAPS.  
WE THOUGHT THAT UNDER HIS SHADOW  
WE WOULD LIVE AMONG THE NATIONS.  
21 REJOICE AND BE GLAD, DAUGHTER EDMOM,  
YOU WHO LIVE IN THE LAND OF UZ.  
BUT TO YOU ALSO THE CUP WILL BE PASSED;  
YOU WILL BE DRUNK AND STRIPPED NAKED.  
22 YOUR PUNISHMENT WILL END, DAUGHTER ZION;  
HE WILL NOT PROLONG YOUR EXILE.  
BUT HE WILL PUNISH YOUR SIN, DAUGHTER EDMOM,  
AND EXPOSE YOUR WICKEDNESS.

This hope is not in vain.

**INVITATION:** Meditate on this: "In Your light, we see light." (Ps. 36:9)

**REFLECTION:** "Our days were numbered" is a biblical phrase we often use in English. It usually means that the inevitable is going to happen in a negative sense. Here, it is both negative and positive. Israel felt, as they were fleeing from their enemies, that they were going to be caught and trapped. Their days were numbered. However, the poet uses the phrase beautifully to turn the same thought on the enemy (Here called "Edom"). Even though it felt like Israel was in dire peril, the days of her exile were actually numbered. So, positively, Israel's days of exile were only a short number. But God's enemies will soon be destroyed forever.

**LAMENTATION:** God, it sometimes feels like I'm on the wrong side of history. It honestly feels sometimes like being united to Your cause is the losing side.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** This is my Father's world. /  
O let me ne'er forget / That though the wrong seems  
oft so strong / God is the ruler yet. / This is my  
Father's world: / why should my heart be sad? / The  
Lord is King; let the heavens ring! / God reigns; let the  
earth be glad! (Babcock, 1901)

# Orphans and Widows

*Lamentations 5:1-3*

- 1 REMEMBER, LORD, WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO US;  
LOOK, AND SEE OUR DISGRACE.  
2 OUR INHERITANCE HAS BEEN TURNED OVER TO  
STRANGERS,  
OUR HOMES TO FOREIGNERS.  
3 WE HAVE BECOME FATHERLESS,  
OUR MOTHERS ARE WIDOWS.

**INVITATION:** Meditate on this: Sanctify [us] by your truth, your Word is truth. (John 17:17)

**REFLECTION:** The theme of orphans and widows runs throughout Scripture from beginning to end. It is God's law in Exodus and Deuteronomy that Israel should take care of these vulnerable groups. It is also theologically true of God who is "Father to the fatherless, and defender of the widows." (Ps. 68:5). In the New Testament, James tells us that to take care of orphans and widows is true religion (James 1:27). The question here is whether God will make good on his promise to care for them. The poet laments out loud how disconnected he feels from the family of God. He feels like both his relationship and inheritance have been taken away.

**LAMENTATION:** My Father, it sometimes feels like I'm a stranger to this family of yours. Am I really known? Am I really cared for? I know it's true theologically, but I have trouble believing it.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** "Now if we are children, then we are heirs; heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (Rom. 8:17)

# We are Weary

*Lamentations 5:4-13*

- 4 WE MUST BUY THE WATER WE DRINK;  
OUR WOOD CAN BE HAD ONLY AT A PRICE.  
5 THOSE WHO PURSUE US ARE AT OUR HEELS;  
WE ARE WEARY AND FIND NO REST.  
6 WE SUBMITTED TO EGYPT AND ASSYRIA  
TO GET ENOUGH BREAD.  
7 OUR ANCESTORS SINNED AND ARE NO MORE,  
AND WE BEAR THEIR PUNISHMENT.  
8 SLAVES RULE OVER US,  
AND THERE IS NO ONE TO FREE US FROM THEIR  
HANDS.  
9 WE GET OUR BREAD AT THE RISK OF OUR LIVES  
BECAUSE OF THE SWORD IN THE DESERT.  
10 OUR SKIN IS HOT AS AN OVEN,  
FEVERISH FROM HUNGER.  
11 WOMEN HAVE BEEN VIOLATED IN ZION,  
AND VIRGINS IN THE TOWNS OF JUDAH.  
12 PRINCES HAVE BEEN HUNG UP BY THEIR HANDS;  
ELDERS ARE SHOWN NO RESPECT.  
13 YOUNG MEN TOIL AT THE MILLSTONES;  
BOYS STAGGER UNDER LOADS OF WOOD.

**INVITATION:** What parts of your body or soul are tired? Express those to the Lord.

**REFLECTION:** Again, we have the theme of exhaustion. Living in exile is expensive, dangerous, humiliating, and heavy. It is taking its toll on the people of God. We wonder: Does God care when I'm exhausted and weighed down? Israel must have wondered that for 400 years while in Egypt. God may seem slow to us, but in his perfect timing, he does bring relief. He does hear the cries of his people.

**LAMENTATION:** This is my burden today [name what is weighing you down]

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I know that my God does not delight in the suffering of his people. He rescues us when we are on the edge. He will not break a bruised reed. He will not put out a struggling candle wick (Matt. 12:20)



# Our Dancing has Turned to Mourning

*Lamentations 5:14-18*

14 THE ELDERS ARE GONE FROM THE CITY GATE;  
THE YOUNG MEN HAVE STOPPED THEIR MUSIC.  
15 JOY IS GONE FROM OUR HEARTS;  
OUR DANCING HAS TURNED TO MOURNING.  
16 THE CROWN HAS FALLEN FROM OUR HEAD.  
WOE TO US, FOR WE HAVE SINNED!  
17 BECAUSE OF THIS OUR HEARTS ARE FAINT,  
BECAUSE OF THESE THINGS OUR EYES GROW DIM  
18 FOR MOUNT ZION, WHICH LIES DESOLATE,  
WITH JACKALS PROWLING OVER IT.

# Why do you Always Forget Us?

*Lamentations 5:19-22*

19 YOU, LORD, REIGN FOREVER;  
YOUR THRONE ENDURES FROM GENERATION TO  
GENERATION.  
20 WHY DO YOU ALWAYS FORGET US?  
WHY DO YOU FORSAKE US SO LONG?  
21 RESTORE US TO YOURSELF, LORD, THAT WE MAY  
RETURN;  
RENEW OUR DAYS AS OF OLD  
22 UNLESS YOU HAVE UTTERLY REJECTED US  
AND ARE ANGRY WITH US BEYOND MEASURE.

**INVITATION:** Have you seen God at work today already? How so?

**REFLECTION:** Sometimes the music stops. In a movie, you will often see a scene of joy and laughter, maybe even dancing. But then something bad will happen and, quite literally, the music stops. This abrupt ending underscores how stark the contrast is. The poet is saying that in his heart (and in his people) the music has stopped. Dancing has turned to mourning. They have been interrupted by tragedy and their own sin.

**LAMENTATION:** I know this feeling of interruption. It seems like every time I feel, see, do or experience something good, there is someone or something to come and take it away. My heart longs for good all the time.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** I believe Psalm 30. Weeping may last for a time, but it WILL be followed with joy. I believe in the great reversal of this lament. Soon my mourning will turn to dancing. (Ps. 30:11)

**INVITATION:** Reflect on the last 40 days of this journey. What have you seen God do in your life?

**REFLECTION:** At times, it does feel like God has ultimately rejected us. It seems like forever since we enjoyed him. It feels like an eternity since we were warmed by the thought that we are his children. It may have been a long time since we had any interest in his Word. It seems like the God who so excited us in the beginning has now left us. The remedy to this is to see who God is: He is reigning from generation to generation (vs. 19). He has not forgotten you. He sees all, knows all, and does all. If you are going to be restored to him fully (vs. 21), it will have to be a work of God. He is the one who will restore you. Ask him boldly to do so. Ask, in the name of Jesus Christ. Because in Jesus, we have already been restored in FACT. Ask now, that you will be restored in EXPERIENCE.

**LAMENTATION:** I want to know you, God. I want to feel your presence. I want to be restored as a human being. I cannot do this by myself.

**RESPONSE OF FAITH:** Like a mother who can't forget her own child, I believe God will not forget me. (Is. 49:15-16)







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