GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS:

a study of

LAMENTATIONS

TEACHER GUIDE

SUNDAY SCHOOL | 7 WEEKS
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Dr. Daniel Hinton, author
Dear Family,

It may seem a little strange to study a song book of laments. This is perhaps among the darkest books in the Bible. And for this reason, it is so right. So appropriate. Our world, our days, and our own hearts are filled with dark places and dark times.

One of the most important things to remember about the Bible is that it is “situational”. Meaning, God wrote his perfect word from people who were in situations, and into the lives of people in situations. Some good. Some bad. And some dark. There is not a dark night of the soul that is not explored in the word of God.

Perhaps the most tragic of all the verses in Lamentations is the first verse: “How lonely sits the city...” The city of Jerusalem was one of the most vibrant places one could ever imagine. Breath taking, stunning. Under the reign of her most dominant monarchs, she was untouchable. And yet while her geography did not changed her majesty did. She is on the hill, and is decimated. She is the city that cannot be hidden, even though she would want to me. How lonely.

Into that loneliness the prophet Jeremiah weeps. He mourns for the loss of innocence, the mourns the loss of blessing, He mourns the loss of victory. And then into this downwards spiral of feeling, comes one of the most breathtaking passages in all of Scripture: Great is your faithfulness.

Church, it is no exaggeration that I am thrilled to study this. We explore deep questions about the existence of pain, the place of God in our pain, and what this means about our view of God and how he loves His children.

Can there be a greater joy than huddling around the Bible and studying it together? I can’t imagine one. I look forward to seeing you each Sunday!

For the Kingdom,

Steven Smith, Senior Pastor
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START HERE (5 Minutes)
Choose a story, discussion starter, or media clip in order to spark the interest of students. These are provided in each lesson.

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)
Read the text. Keep students engaged by asking volunteers to read portions or have each student read one verse or paragraph until the entire text is completed.

REVIEW THE TEXT (15-20 Minutes or 25-30 Minutes)
Take time to unpack the text. In the case of historical narrative, set the context, retell the story, highlight the major scenes and moments, and explain their significance.

CONTEXT - Historical background is provided to help understand the passage.

CONTENT - Concise observations and expert commentary are provided in order to help students understand the meaning of the passage. In this Bible Study section, teachers may choose the amount of information they’d like to cover using one of two routes.

• OPTION 1 TAKE THE DIRECT ROUTE - Follow the black text on the left side of the page for the simplest, most direct content. This option is great for discussion-based teachers. To allow more time for discussion, the direct route Review the Text section should take 15-20 minutes.

• OPTION 2 TAKE THE SCENIC ROUTE - Bulleted beneath the main text, you will find a teal arrow signaling additional commentary and content for those teachers focused more on lecture. Teachers who take the scenic route can expect the Review the Text section to take about 25-30 minutes.

CONCLUSION - Summary statements explain the main ideas of each passage.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)
In hopes of allowing students to reflect personally on the message of the text, and to allow for deeper relational ties important to discipleship, three questions will be provided to stimulate discussion in the class.

RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)
While many students are accustomed to receiving uplifting, useful information in Sunday School, it is critical to allow time and space for students to open their hearts to absorb the truths presented and begin to apply them in their lives. These short exercises are intended to graciously nudge students toward personalizing the messages of the text and move toward Christ-likeness in application.
INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

• Lamentations is the prophet Jeremiah’s song book. After all of the destruction Jeremiah witnessed and warned against, it is thought that he penned these poems shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC.

• Lamentations is considered an Exilic prophetic book meaning it was not written before or after the exile, but during the exile.

• After refusing to heed the warnings of the prophets, the Northern Kingdom was taken into exile by the Assyrians in 722BC. In 586BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and took the southern Kingdom of Judah taken into captivity. The city was in shambles, its people deported or left desolate. This is the time period in which Jeremiah writes his laments.

LITERARY CONTEXT

TRACING THE MESSAGE

I. PREVAILING THEMES

a. Sin- disobedience, apathy, idolatry, wickedness and their consequences.

b. Destruction- the wreckage of sin, the judgment of God and the resulting misery.

c. Judgment- the wrath of God, the sting of slavery, and Israel’s forfeiture of their initial blessing.

d. Confession- reckoning, repentance, and a call for rescue.
## II. LITERARY STRUCTURE & ELEMENTS

| Lament Pattern | “A lament was a funeral poem or song written and recited for someone who had just died (cf. 2 Sam. 1:17–27). The song usually emphasized the good qualities of the departed and the tragedy or loss felt by those mourning his death. Jeremiah was lamenting the tragic “death” of the city of Jerusalem and the results of her demise which were being experienced by the people.” Repetition of particular words along with a “limping meter” give Lamentations its tone of lament. |
| Acrostic Arrangement | Evidently Lamentations was written using an acrostic pattern. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, therefore, each line of Chapter 1, for example, begins with the next consecutive letter in the Hebrew alphabet. Chapters 1–4 follow this pattern. Chapter 3 contains 66 verses, so the first three verses begin with the first Hebrew letter. The fourth, fifth, and sixth lines begin with the second Hebrew letter, and so on. Although Chapter 5 does not follow this pattern, it also contains 22 verses. Scholars have noted that chapters 2–4 actually reverse a couple of the letters, which was apparently common and acceptable during that time period. Why use an acrostic? 1. Possibility 1: “to help readers remember the words of the lament.” 2. Possibility 2: “to emphasize to the readers the complete nature of their suffering because of sin... The alphabet was used to remind the people that Jerusalem’s judgment was ‘from A to Z.’” |
| Structural Balance | “The Book of Lamentations has a definite structural balance. Chapters 1–2 and 4–5 parallel each other and are arranged in a chiasm pattern. Thus chapters 1 and 5 focus on the people while chapters 2 and 4 focus on the Lord. Chapter 3 provides the pivot for the book, pointing to Jeremiah’s response in the midst of affliction.” See graphic below. |

### THE CHIASM STRUCTURE OF LAMENTATIONS

- Jeremiah’s response (Lam. 3)
- God’s judgment (Lam. 2)
- The Lord’s anger (Lam. 4)
- Remnant’s response (Lam. 5)
- Jerusalem’s desolation (Lam. 1)
III. THE MESSAGE OF LAMENTATIONS

Any discussion of pain and suffering in the contemporary mode triggers a response of entitlement, “We are suffering but we deserve better.” Living a life free of any obstruction to my full enjoyment of all things I want is what I deserve; it is my right.

While the Bible teaches otherwise we as individuals inhale this in the culture, and when we collectively come together we exhale it in church. Like second hand smoke, you don’t have to light the smoke to die from it. Church entitlement presents itself in different ways. For example, it presents itself in a steady flow of “church as entertainment” that insulates us from thinking deeply. Church as entertainment suggests that this is what life is like. But it’s not like this. Students groomed like this are not ready for the reality that awaits them in college.

The idea that we have the right to be happy is facilitated by preachers who will only tell us what we want to hear. We, as preachers, are all tempted there. I know I am. Yet, if I only tell people what they want to hear not only am I abdicating my ambassadorship, I am suggesting to believers that our allegiance to the God of all truth is secondary to our allegiance to a culture that wants nothing but froth. When feeling trumps thinking the enemy is the one who makes us think something unpleasant.

This is why the message of Jeremiah is as unpleasant today as it was then. The book of Jeremiah, and its song book, Lamentations, is a gift to the church in general and the preacher specifically. The gods of pagan nations so attracted the nation of Israel they thought they did not have to think about sin and suffering. And they didn’t. Affections warmed to the distractions of what is thin and fake are repulsed by the cold hand of pain.

Yet, when the judgment came they were given the precious gift of reality. Suffering is as insightful as it painful. With suffering comes sight. Vision comes when we are most blinded. Clear skies obscure reality.

Therefore, again, studying this book corporately is such a gift. It allows pastor and people to think about one of the most significant themes in Scripture – mourning over loss, suffering, and pain.

“It is a mute reminder that sin, in spite of all its allure and excitement, carries with it heavy weights of sorrow, grief, misery, barrenness, and pain. It is the other side of the eat, drink, and be merry’ coin.”

- Chuck Swindoll

Sources

LAMENTATIONS IN REDEMPTIVE CONTEXT

Scholars believe that Lamentations was written by Jeremiah shortly after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. Take a moment to walk the students through some of the studies we have done as a church over the past couple of years.

GOD STORY: Remind the students that the Bible tells one overarching narrative.

PSALMS: Remind the students about the era of the Kings, before the Kingdom split, when David wrote many of the Psalms.

NEHEMIAH: Remind the students where we were in the storyline when we walked through the book of Nehemiah. During the exile, Nehemiah was granted permission by Artzxerses, a foreign ruler, to return and rebuild Jerusalem.

LAMENTATIONS: So where are we now? Well, we have moved backward chronologically. It may be helpful to think of it this way. Remember when Nehemiah and God’s people joined together to rebuild the walls, and re-devote their lives to faithfulness? Rewind the story backward to when the city was first destroyed. This is when Lamentations is written. This is the beauty of the Bible. As disciples of Christ and students of the Word, we can read Lamentations through the lens of Nehemiah. We know what happens next in redemptive history. Jeremiah laments and rightfully so. And not too long after, Nehemiah weeps for the city, repents on behalf of the people and God uses him to do a tremendous work.
The pre-exilic prophets warned God’s people not to turn from their wickedness and return to God and his Law. Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel were written during the exile. Remember Daniel and his friends trying to live for God in Babylon? This was when God’s people were exiled, away from the Promised Land. Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi were written after the exile. This is a helpful chart to understand the circumstances under which the prophets were writing. There are a couple prophetic books which don’t fit as nicely into this chart, but for the sake of simplicity, this is a helpful overview.
Tell a Story.

During a television interview, David Frost asked former president George Bush how he could square his belief in a loving and all-powerful God with the miseries and injustices of life. Frost reminded Bush of the time he shed tears at the sight of starving children and of his grief when his own daughter had died.

President Bush said, “It never occurred to me to blame God for that.” He insisted that the Lord has provided enough food for everyone, but that starvation occurs because of human greed and ineptitude. The President said that his daughter’s illness had drawn the family closer to one another and to God. He was comforted because he knew that she had been caught up in the arms of her loving heavenly Father.

Like those starving children, we may suffer because of the greed and selfishness of others. Like the Bush family, we may endure sorrow for reasons we can’t understand. Or we may suffer because of our own sin, as Jeremiah recounted in his lament for the wayward tribe of Judah (Lam. 1:5).

In any case, we can trust God and say with the psalmist, “It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Ps. 119:71). With confidence, we can ask with Abraham, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).
There is so much within this world
Of brokenness and pain,
Yet nothing God in grace allows
Is ever done in vain.

God will spare you from suffering—or He'll give you the grace to bear it. ¹

SPARK A DISCUSSION.

By way of introduction, let’s see if we can collectively recount the Old Testament story in order to remember where Lamentations fits within the overall story. Using these 9 eras as a guide (borrowed from Max Anders’ 30 Days to Understand the Bible), ask the students to remember at least one story from each era.

Creation- the creation of the world, the fall of man, the flood, the tower of Babel
Patriarchs- Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph
Exodus- Egypt, enslavement, Moses, plagues, Passover, Red Sea, Law
Conquest- Joshua, Jericho, the promised land
Judges- cycles of sin, Deborah, Samson, Ehud
Kings- Saul, David, Solomon, kingdom split, Israel, Judah
Exile- Assyria, Babylon

** Lamentations takes place here, just after the siege of Jerusalem which lead to the exile of the nation.
Return- Zerubbabel, Ezra, Nehemiah
Silence- no biblical literature written, preparation for Christ

SHOW A CLIP:

Video Overview of Lamentations
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8GDFPdaQZQ

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

See Teacher Guide (p.4) for ways to creatively read the text.

Today’s Text: LAMENTATIONS 1
1 How lonely sits the city that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave.
2 She weeps bitterly in the night, with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers she has none to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they have become her enemies.
3 Judah has gone into exile because of affliction and hard servitude;
she dwells now among the nations, but finds no resting place;
hers pursuers have all overtaken her in the midst of her distress.
4 The roads to Zion mourn, for none come to the festival;
all her gates are desolate; her priests groan;
hers virgins have been afflicted, and she herself suffers bitterly.
5 Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper,
because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions;
her children have gone away, captives before the foe.
6 From the daughter of Zion all her majesty has departed.
Her princes have become like deer that find no pasture;
they fled without strength before the pursuer.
7 Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and wandering
all the precious things that were hers from days of old.
When her people fell into the hand of the foe, and there was none to help her,
her foes gloated over her; they mocked at her downfall.
8 Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy;
all who honored her despise her, for they have seen her nakedness;
she herself groans and turns her face away.
9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future;
therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter.
“O Lord, behold my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed!”
10 The enemy has stretched out his hands over all her precious things;
for she has seen the nations enter her sanctuary,
those whom you forbade to enter your congregation.
11 All her people groan as they search for bread;
they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength.
“Look, O Lord, and see, for I am despised.”
12 “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me,
which the Lord inflicted on the day of his fierce anger.
13 “From on high he sent fire; into my bones he made it descend;
he spread a net for my feet; he turned me back;
he has left me stunned, faint all the day long.
14 “My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together;
they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail;
the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand.
15 “The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst; he summoned an assembly against me
to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden as in a winepress
the virgin daughter of Judah.
16 “For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears;
for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit;
my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.”
17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her;
the Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes;
Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them.
18 “The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word;
but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering;
my young women and my young men have gone into captivity.
19 “I called to my lovers, but they deceived me;
my priests and elders perished in the city,
while they sought food to revive their strength.
20 “Look, O Lord, for I am in distress; my stomach churns; my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death.
21 “They heard my groaning, yet there is no one to comfort me. All my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that you have done it. You have brought the day you announced; now let them be as I am.
22 “Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my groans are many, and my heart is faint.

REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Jeremiah is writing shortly following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. For more information on the historical context, see the historical context guide on page 5.

LITERARY CONTEXT
1. Jeremiah uses an acrostic structure in the 22 verses of Chapter 1.
2. Note where chapter 1 fits within the chiastic structure of Lamentations.

Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ch 1)
   God’s Judgment (Ch 2)
   Jeremiah’s Response (Ch 3)

The Lord’s Anger (Ch 4)

The Remnant’s Response (Ch 5)²

REDEMTIVE CONTEXT
During this dark period of Israel’s history both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have been sacked and taken to exile. Though the future looks bleak for Israel, God’s people will dwell in the land once again. They will even worship in the temple again. The sin of Israel was massive and resulted in great carnage. However, their hardhearted stubbornness and propensity toward idolatry could not thwart God’s covenant faithfulness to his people. Through the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s people would defy the odds, rebuild the city walls and pledge their allegiance to Yahweh once more from God’s City. Ultimately, the carnage of sin found in the Old Testament could not thwart God’s faithfulness. It was into the carnage that Jesus ultimately came just a few hundred years later to proclaim the true kingdom and offer himself as a ransom for the sins of the world. For more information on the redemptive context, see the Redemptive Context Guide on page 8.
CONTENT

(1) Where are we?

Look at the opening lines of Lamentations.

How lonely sits the city that was full of people!
How like a widow has she become, she who was great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces has become a slave.

Look at how far Jerusalem has fallen. Evidently, there are a few things here that Jeremiah is drawing the reader’s attention to. The city once was bustling. And now it sits empty. And it was not just a crowded city in its day. It was a city knows for its greatness around the world.

And now? The text says she has become like a widow. Jerusalem has gone from royalty (ruling over others) to a slave.

The concept of widowhood is used throughout the Old Testament to depict a position of helpless despair; it is often linked with aliens and orphans as individuals who could not protect themselves (cf. Ex. 22:22; Deut. 10:18; 24:19–21; 26:13; 27:19; Isa. 1:17)³

How lonely sits the city. She was once lovely and vivacious. The center of the nation that was central to God’s plan. Was there a more envied place in all the world? God’s bride. This is the place where David ruled with imperial military gravitas. This is the place where Solomon built places so grand that Queen Sheba came to visit. Make no mistake about it Jerusalem was grand. Magnificent. Marvelous. The beauty is important to remember, because it makes Lamentations 1:1 more provocative. From epicenter to wasteland. One wants to think of great thriving cities of the United States that are now a fraction of theirformer glory. But the metaphor is not strong enough. This is Paris becoming a byword.⁴

Have you seen the equivalent of this type of spiritual carnage? Would you be willing to share about a time when sin brought forth such destruction is was hard to watch?

Many times, it seems, people would choose to move past the laments of Jeremiah and on into happier territory of the Gospels or the Epistles. But if we have read the Gospels and the Epistles we know that there is in fact no hope without lament. There is no salvation without a reckoning with our personal destruction. There is no rescue without a weeping over our lost estate.

Ironically, Jeremiah says there is no one to comfort Jerusalem. She lays hopeless. Her enemies prevail. And God’s people are scattered throughout the world. God asked his people to walk in humble obedience with Him, but God will not force wicked people into his presence. In this sense, the Israelites got what they wanted. Life without God. Life with foreign gods.
(2) How did we get here?

V5 Her foes have become the head; her enemies prosper, because the Lord has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions;
V8 Jerusalem sinned grievously; therefore she became filthy;
V9 Her uncleanness was in her skirts; she took no thought of her future; therefore her fall is terrible; she has no comforter.

Why do you believe this has happened to God’s people?  Who is responsible for this?

It is immediately clear how they got into this situation. They sinned. There is no doubt in Jeremiah’s mind what is happening here. In fact, a review of the book of Jeremiah would highlight all the areas in which God was calling his people to repent. God’s judgment shall not be restrained forever. Let the wicked be warned. This truth remains. An ultimate and unthinkable payment for the wickedness of mankind will come due. If you have not thrown yourself at the mercy of Christ, the acceptable payment for your sin, a judgment far greater than Jerusalem’s awaits.

(3) How do we get out of here?

Look at V14-18.

14 “My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand.
15 “The Lord rejected all my mighty men in my midst; he summoned an assembly against me to crush my young men; the Lord has trodden as in a winepress the virgin daughter of Judah.
16 “For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my spirit; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed.”
17 Zion stretches out her hands, but there is none to comfort her; the Lord has commanded against Jacob that his neighbors should be his foes; Jerusalem has become a filthy thing among them.
18 “The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and see my suffering; my young women and my young men have gone into captivity.

Jeremiah recognizes they are under the judgment of God. In that sense, there is nothing they can do to escape it. They’ve earned it. And now they must taste the bitterness of God’s wrath.

FROM THE PASTOR: “Suffering is inevitable. We think obedience is too much of a hardship. We don’t want to obey and resent God for asking us to do so. And following God is not easy. But the price of obedience is a bargain compared to the price of judgment. Prevention costs less than destruction. Anticipating sin costs less than repenting of sin.”

-Dr. Steven W. Smith

TEACHER TIP: Perhaps as you read back through these verses, emphasize the underlined sections below with your voice. Emphasis has been added here to show who is the one who is at work here.
DOES GOD DELIGHT IN PUNISHING HIS CHILDREN?
BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY

In Judah’s confession of guilt, she acknowledged that judgment was caused by the righteous God disciplining an unrighteous people. The Lord is righteous, yet I rebelled against His command. God is not the author of evil nor is He a supreme sadist who delights in inflicting punishment on others (cf. Ezek. 33:11; 2 Peter 3:9). But God is righteous so He does not allow sin to continue unchecked. Sin exacts a horrible price from those who enjoy its temporary pleasures. Jerusalem abandoned her God to experience those “pleasures.” Now Jerusalem was paying the cost—suffering ... exile (cf. Lam. 1:3), betrayal by allies, and death by starvation.  

The remainder of the book will speak more to Israel’s response to this judgment. But Chapter 1 simply laments the facts. The shining beacon of light to the world (Jerusalem) has been ransacked. A vibrant and holy people, set apart for God’s glory worships no longer in the holy of holies.

CONCLUSION
Sin brings ruin.

“Real faith grows out of honestly expressed doubt: What you’ll find is that God’s grace and love don’t cloud over the doubt; they go deeper than the doubt. Until you have deep questions and deep pain you’ll probably not have a deep experience of God. So God lets you have some of those so you can encounter a God whose love and wisdom and glory are deeper than the pain.”
-JD Greear

FROM THE PASTOR:
“What we know, reading the Bible as a whole, is that this is the city to which Christ will return. This is the city which will be made new and come down from heaven. She will ultimately be the opposite of loneliness and despair. However, that coming reality was a million miles away.”
-Dr. Steven W. Smith
The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

When you survey your life circumstances at this moment, would you say you are suffering? Suffering is sometimes corrective (discipline from God as a result of our sin), and it is sometimes instructive (simply God using suffering to teach us something). Do you ever wonder why you’re going through what you’re going through? Is there a way to know?

Is there a common denominator for those who have experienced this type of ruin in their lives? In your opinion, what leads to the tragic falls of seemingly honorable friends, colleagues, leaders, celebrities, and even pastors? Is there a warning there for us to heed?

What part do believers play in warning brothers and sisters in Christ of the ruin that comes from sin? Have you ever had to confront a friend, speaking the truth in love? Is it possible that friends who were willing to speak might have sparked a turning away from sin?

THE IDEA: Because this happens in the spiritual realm, we may never know for sure. However, Dr. Smith raises a great point. Does it actually matter which it is? “Our success in the trial is not dependent on us knowing what is going on. The response is the same, we repent of sin and trust him. Trust him with our trials and hate the sin that brings ruin.”
RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

The purpose of these short activities is to encourage students to personalize the truth and begin to develop an application in their lives.

WHAT CAUSED YOUR WORST NIGHTMARE?

Take five minutes and try to imagine the most humiliating, devastating sin-failure you could experience in life. As hard as it may be, imagine what the ‘pit of despair’ would feel like. Think of your family. Your friends. Your job. Your financial situation. Your future. For a moment, sit with the weight of a life ruined by personal sin.

As we all know, big moral failures don’t happen overnight. Without sharing how pitiful your situation would be or what big failure you are imagining, answer this question: is it possible you could find yourself there? Are you immune to sin? If you see yourself as capable of sinning in a way that leads to such ruin, how do you suppose you would have drifted so far? How do we protect ourselves?

HOME 22:6

SING | “Come as You Are”


READ | A helpful devotional on Lamentations:

In the 18th century, silhouettes (shadow profiles traced and cut from black paper) were a popular alternative to costly portraits. The word took its name from the French controller general of finance, Étienne de Silhouette. During the Seven Years War against England, he tried to raise revenues by heavily taxing the wealthy. Victims of his high taxes complained and used the word silhouette to refer to their wealth being reduced to a mere shadow of what it once was.

With the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah lamented over the shadow of what once was a great city and center of worship now devastated by war. “Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow” (Lam. 1:12).

But Jeremiah did not remain in despair. He recognized God’s sovereignty in suffering. Later in this book of sorrow, the prophet reflected: “I have hope. Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning” (3:21-23).

Has sorrow or suffering made your life feel like a dark silhouette of what it once was? Remember, God’s mercies are new every morning. He is compassionately working in your life for His glory and your blessing.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,
But His smile quickly drives it away;
Not a doubt nor a fear, not a sigh nor a tear
Can abide while we trust and obey. —Sammis
To see beyond earth’s shadows, look to Christ the Light.
PRAY | Thank God for sparing you from utter ruin because of your sin. Ask God to keep you from a perpetually sinful life which can destroy your soul and your life.

SOURCES
1 https://odb.org/1998/02/16/what-good-is-affliction/
4 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 1
5 Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1213-1214
6 http://www.preceptaustin.org/lamentations_devotionals
START HERE  (5 Minutes)

Utilize one of the following tools to ignite the interest of your students. Tell a story, spark a discussion, or show a clip.

TELL A STORY.

Athletics - football in the fall, basketball in the winter, baseball in the spring and summer - provided the competition with opponents and the camaraderie with teammates that I enjoyed as a teenager. What I did not like about competitive athletics, however, was the conditioning - repetitive calisthenics, endless drills, and habitually running.

A word that I came to dread in each of these running experiences was "Again." Meaning we would run, all out to the point of exhaustion, thinking that was the last one only to hear our coach say "Again."

Perhaps, you have forgotten that experience in your own life or maybe you have never had the pleasure. In the movie Miracle regarding the 1980 United States Olympic hockey team’s triumphant victory over the Soviet Union, Coach Herb Brooks handpicked a group of undisciplined kids and trained them to play like they had never played before. He broke them to make them. Following a tie with the Norwegian National team, Herb Brooks made his players stay on the ice and sprint "suicides." He made them do it over and over, repeating the word "Again." (The video clip from the movie Miracle would be appropriate to show here or you can tell the story.)
READ • REVIEW • REFLECT • RESPOND

Tom Landry, former head coach of the Dallas Cowboys, said, "The job of a coach is to make players do what they don’t want to do, in order to achieve what they’ve always wanted to be."

As other coaches have said, "No pain, no gain."

Similarly, to become a spiritual champion requires doing things that we don’t want to do, in order to achieve what we’ve always wanted to be - like Jesus. Spiritual growth will not occur without pain. Sorry. It’s just a reality.1

SPARK A DISCUSSION.

Let’s get a little debate going. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?

Every important part of your personal development in life has come AFTER a period of disorientation.

In other words...

If we’ve grown in any way in this life, it’s been because there was a time before it that was uncomfortable or challenging.

Today Jeremiah will describe the full extent of Israel’s discomfort. They will have to experience this pain, this disorientation if they are to grow in their following of God.

SHOW A CLIP:

Does God get upset when we disobey?
https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Training/Post/View/181947

Today Jeremiah will describe the full extent of Israel’s discomfort. They will have to experience this pain, this disorientation if they are to grow in their following of God.

THE IDEA:

Today Jeremiah will describe the full extent of Israel’s discomfort. They will have to experience this pain, this disorientation if they are to grow in their following of God.

THE IDEA:

Of course we will come to find out that this statement is mostly true. Some philosophers in the group might come up with some noble characteristic we were born with, that has developed without any challenge or hardship. But most will agree that actually, as we look back, almost everything meaningful in our lives came with something that, at first knocked us off balance.

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

See Teacher Guide (p.4) for ways to creatively read the text.

Today’s Text: LAMENTATIONS 2

1 How the Lord in his anger has set the daughter of Zion under a cloud!
   He has cast down from heaven to earth the splendor of Israel;
   he has not remembered his footstool in the day of his anger.

2 The Lord has swallowed up without mercy all the habitations of Jacob;
   in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of the daughter of Judah;
   he has brought down to the ground in dishonor the kingdom and its rulers.

3 He has cut down in fierce anger all the might of Israel;
   he has withdrawn from them his right hand in the face of the enemy;
   he has burned like a flaming fire in Jacob, consuming all around.

4 He has bent his bow like an enemy, with his right hand set like a foe;
   and he has killed all who were delightful in our eyes
   in the tent of the daughter of Zion; he has poured out his fury like fire.
5 The Lord has become like an enemy; he has swallowed up Israel; he has swallowed up all its palaces; he has laid in ruins its strongholds, and he has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.

6 He has laid waste his booth like a garden, laid in ruins his meeting place; the LORD has made Zion forget festival and Sabbath, and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.

7 The Lord has scorned his altar, disowned his sanctuary; he has delivered into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces; they raised a clamor in the house of the LORD as on the day of festival.

8 The LORD determined to lay in ruins the wall of the daughter of Zion; he stretched out the measuring line; he did not restrain his hand from destroying; he caused rampart and wall to lament; they languished together.

9 Her gates have sunk into the ground; he has ruined and broken her bars; her king and princes are among the nations; the law is no more, and her prophets find no vision from the LORD.

10 The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.

11 My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out to the ground because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because infants and babies faint in the streets of the city.

12 They cry to their mothers, “Where is bread and wine?” as they faint like a wounded man in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mothers’ bosom.

13 What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter of Jerusalem? What can I liken to you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter of Zion? For your ruin is vast as the sea; who can heal you?

14 Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not exposed your iniquity to restore your fortunes, but have seen for you oracles that are false and misleading.

15 All who pass along the way clap their hands at you; they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem: “Is this the city that was called the perfection of beauty, the joy of all the earth?”

16 All your enemies rail against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth, they cry: “We have swallowed her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; now we have it; we see it!”

17 The LORD has done what he purposed; he has carried out his word, which he commanded long ago; he has thrown down without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you and exalted the might of your foes.

18 Their heart cried to the Lord. O wall of the daughter of Zion, let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite!

19 “Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the night watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children,
who faint for hunger at the head of every street."

20 Look, O LORD, and see! With whom have you dealt thus?
Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care?
Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old;
my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword;
you have killed them in the day of your anger, slaughtering without pity.

22 You summoned as if to a festival day my terrors on every side,
and on the day of the anger of the LORD no one escaped or survived;
those whom I held and raised my enemy destroyed.

REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Jeremiah is writing shortly following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. For more information on the historical context, see the historical context guide on page 5.

LITERARY CONTEXT
2. Note where chapter 2 fits within the chiastic structure of Lamentations.

Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ch 1)
   God’s Judgment (Ch 2)
      Jeremiah’s Response (Ch 3)
      The Lord’s Anger (Ch 4)
The Remnant’s Response (Ch 5)²

REDEEMPTIVE CONTEXT
During this dark period of Israel’s history both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have been sacked and taken to exile. Though the future looks bleak for Israel, God’s people will dwell in the land once again. They will even worship in the temple again. The sin of Israel was massive and resulted in great carnage. However, their hardhearted stubbornness and propensity toward idolatry could not thwart God’s covenant faithfulness to his people. Through the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s people would defy the odds, rebuild the city walls and pledge their allegiance to Yahweh in God’s City once more. Ultimately, the carnage of sin which is the Old Testament could not thwart God’s faithfulness. It was into the carnage that Jesus ultimately came just a few hundred years later to proclaim the true kingdom. For more information on the redemptive context, see the Redemptive Context Guide on page 8.
(1) The Reality: God’s Judgment (v1-9)

Look at verses 1-9. Jeremiah gives the reader a clear picture of reality. God’s judgment has come. God is the initiator of the actions in chapter 2. Take a look at the 22 actions verbs Dr. Smith has extracted below from the first 9 verses of Lamentation 2.

He has thrown down Israel’s glory v.1  
He did not acknowledge his footstool v.1  
The Lord has swallowed up v.2  
He has demolished v.2  
He brought them to the ground v.2  
and defiled the kingdom and its leaders v.2  
He has cut off every horn† of Israel withdrawn his right hand v.3  
He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire v.3  
He has strung his bow like an enemy v.4  
He has killed everyone who was the delight to the eye v.4  
He has swallowed up Israel. V.5  
He swallowed up all its palaces and destroyed its fortified cities v.5  
He has multiplied mourning and lamentation v.5  
He has wrecked his temple v.6  
The LORD has abolished appointed festivals and Sabbaths in Zion. v.6  
He has despised king and priest v.6  
The Lord has rejected his altar repudiated his sanctuary v.7  
he has handed the walls of her palaces over to the enemy. V.7  
The LORD determined to destroy the wall v.8  
He stretched out a measuring line and did not restrain himself from destroying. v.8  
He made the ramparts and walls grieve;  
He has destroyed and shattered the bars on her gates. v.9

What was amazing about these losses was that were all the Lord’s doing. To be sure, they were the result of Judah’s sin. But the reality still had to be faced: God had turned against His own people. He had not simply allowed his own city to be defeated – he had helped to destroy it…in a strange twist on the Old Testament motif of the divine warrior, God was not fighting for his people but against them.³

When we see a city broken, a people broken, we intuit that they are victims of their own bad decisions. The law of the harvest: they are reaping what they have sown. Paul applied the law of the harvest to the Galatians when in Galatians 6:7,8 he wrote,

Don’t be deceived: God is not mocked. For whatever a person sows he will also reap, because the one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit.⁴

The judgment of God is as real as the air we breathe. There is a two-fold warning here for New Covenant believers. First, the Old Testament provides a clear picture of the righteousness which God’s character requires and the type of wickedness he will not tolerate. What type of people
does God deal with in this way? This is a proud, disobedient, idolatrous people who have a habit of forgetting the mighty and faithful acts of their covenant God. This is a “may it never be said of us” moment for the church. Secondly, it is a clear reminder that God’s patience will not extend for eternity. A real, final, and painful judgment awaits those who refuse him. Look again at the verbs above. New Testament Christians recognize that to be decimated and taken from your land would be considered a light sentence compared to eternal judgment.

(2) The Reaction: The Silence of Judah (v10-17)

10  The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have thrown dust on their heads and put on sackcloth; the young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.

It is quite astounding what has happened here. The text paints a picture of devastation, utter disappointment.

Have you ever had a quiet moment like this in your life? A moment when everything has come crashing down and there’s nothing more that can be done? It’s over. And you sat in the quiet?

Jeremiah is weeping. This pathetic scene is almost too much to bear: children crying to their mothers for food while they die in their arms (v.11). Jeremiah concludes that it is helpless. There is none that can heal her. The nation is terminal; Jeremiah is the doctor who looks to the nation and says, “I’m so sorry, there’s nothing else to be done.” There is nothing left. Nothing.5

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THE JUDGMENT OF GOD & SUFFERING
DR. STEVEN W. SMITH

What are we to make of this? How do we explain God’s action? First, remember the uniqueness of this situation. This nation is the (singular, definite article!) chosen people of God. They are unique. They were to have a love relationship with God like a bride to her groom. In so doing God would use them to be a blessing to the nations and fulfill all his covenant promises. Their rejection of their groom/God was serious because their responsibility to their God was great. Knowing this instructs us not to attach divine motives on national or natural disasters when they occur. Israel is unique and so is her relationship with God.

“Believers suffer consequences for their sin, and sometimes God uses those consequences to discipline them, but they never suffer punishment, because Jesus was punished fully in our place so all that is left for us is mercy. God is molding your character in love, not punishing you in judgment.”

-JD Greear
LESSON 2

READ • REVIEW • REFLECT • RESPOND

The quiet sobering reality of the moment must have been too much to bear. Their children were now starving (v10-12). Their devastation was so great that they were beyond comforting (v13). They had listened to the false prophets, who sought to weaken the seriousness of their sin. (v14). Though God had clearly dismantled the nation by his own hand, their enemies boasted among them. (v15-17).

(3) The Response: Prayer (v18-22)

As has been true throughout Israel’s history, they are evidently mindful enough of God that in times of trouble they cry out. In slavery in Egypt, they called out for a deliverer. In their servitude, they cried out to God and God provided judges. And while it seems quite tardy considering God’s thorough warnings, here in their exile they cry out.

In prayer, ironically perhaps, they are suggesting that the One who is destroying them is the only One who can save them. The One who is the enemy is now their only hope and salvation. And thus, we see this beautiful cry come from this destitute wasteland.

“For God to use you greatly He must first wound you deeply.”
- A. W. Tozer

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND CORPORATE DISCIPLINE
DR. STEVEN W. SMITH

The inevitable question is, what about now? This is a theodicy for a people, for a community. If God’s anger is provoked with a people, a community of believers, today, does he react in the same way? Does the coming of the Christ insulate us from corporate discipline?

First, Israel as a nation is unique. While mentioned above the reality is that Israel is the one and only people of God. There is no nation like her nor will there ever be one comparable to her. As a Gentile Christian I know that I am grafted into this nation and therefore find mercy before God (Rom. 11:11-31). So again when disaster happens we should be very slow to assume we know God had a motivation for allowing this.

Second, remember that the ways of God are higher than ours. Meaning, to the point of the book of Job, we are not created with the capacity to understand all that happens in the world. While this does not scratch our itch of intellectual curiosity, I find it satisfying to know that even with the greatest education, the greatest minds could not understand why evil happens in the world. It is beyond our capacity to grasp.

However, thirdly, it does seem that God specifically warned the churches of the New Testament that He reacts in demonstrable ways to disobedience. Some examples would include: God killed Annanias and Saphira for lying about their gift. Acts 5:1-11; taking the Lord’s supper without discernment may bring illness and even death. I Corinthians 11:27-32

So what about a local church? The final book of the Bible includes seven examples of God addressing specifically the needs of a congregation.

If for no other passages in Scriptures, pastors should be motivated to lead their people in purity against the backdrop of these warnings…

The summary in Revelation 3:19 [of the exhortations to the seven churches] is stunning and breathtaking: “As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent.” As many as God loves. Does God discipline communities of faith? Yes, the ones he loves.
CONCLUSION

There is a dark night when the discipline of the Lord falls on us. When tragedy happens, we respond humbly because we don’t know why it happens, and soberly examine ourselves.7

REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)

The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

Have you ever experienced a time as a believer when you felt strongly that God was disciplining you? How did you know this was God bringing correction and not simply a challenge brought about by the brokenness of the world?

Hebrews 12:7-8 says, “It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons...” So when God brings corrective measures into our lives, how should this encourage us? And what does it mean if a person lives in perpetual sin and hears not the corrective nudging of the Holy Spirit? And continues unaccountably in sinfulness?

Can you think of a time when God allowed your life to be disoriented? If you are on the other side of this experience, can you see more clearly now how God was working in your life? How so?
RESPOND TO THE TEXT *(5 Minutes)*

The purpose of these short activities is to encourage students to personalize the truth and begin to develop an application in their lives.

**A MODERN LAMENT**

It’s difficult to imagine sometimes how God’s people could drift so tirelessly, so relentlessly away from God and his statutes. And yet those who recognize the full extent of the selfish and idolatrous nature of humankind realize that even we as a church are susceptible this kind of subtle or even overt apostasy. So what would a modern day Lamentations Chapter 2 sound like? As a group, let’s describe the state of a church who has fallen into such ruin as we see in Israel during this time.

Describe the church BEFORE God brought about his corrective discipline. What types of things would a church do to bring about the judgment of God?

Now, describe the church AFTER God brought about his corrective discipline. Since we (as the New Testament people of God) are not a nation, we might not be enslaved by a foreign people group. But how might we experience this judgment?

**HOME 22:6**

**SING |** Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior

*lyrics: https://hymnary.org/text/pass_me_not_o_gentle_savior

*video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCQkJcGVh5s*

**READ |** Lamentations 2

**PRAY |** Survey the sin and destruction in your own life, repent, be grateful for God’s loving correction, and cry out for his forgiveness and daily guidance.
SOURCES

4. Dr. Steven W Smith
5. Dr. Steven W. Smith
6. Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 2
7. Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 2, p.277
Tell a story.

Thomas Chisholm was born in a simple log cabin in Franklin, Kentucky, in 1866. Lacking a high school education or any college training, he became a school teacher at the age of 16 and later entered the newspaper business.

The following years found him ordained a pastor, but poor health forced him to leave the ministry. After a time of recuperation, he moved to New Jersey to work as an insurance agent.

A prolific writer of poetry, he sent a collection of his poems in 1923 to his good friend William Runyan, a musician associated with Chicago’s Moody Bible Institute, who also worked for a hymnal publishing company. While on a trip to Baldwin, Kansas, Runyan leafed through the poems sent by Chisholm and was immediately taken in by the depth of meaning and lyrical beauty of the words found in the poem “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” Years later, Runyan recalled, “This particular poem held such an appeal that I prayed most earnestly that my tune might carry over its message in a worthy way.” Out of a simple prayer, Runyan’s melody took shape, and the completed hymn was published by Runyan that same year.

Due to Runyan’s association with Moody Bible Institute, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness” became a favorite with the students and faculty alike and has become the Institute’s unofficial college song.
Though we will discuss Lamentations 3 this morning, for the sake of time we will read a selected portion of Lamentations 3 and not the entire chapter.

**Today’s Text:** LAMENTATIONS 3:13-24

13 He drove into my kidneys the arrows of his quiver;
14 I have become the laughingstock of all peoples, the object of their taunts all day long.
15 He has filled me with bitterness; he has sated me with wormwood.
16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes;
17 my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is;
18 so I say, “My endurance has perished;
so has my hope from the Lord.”
19 Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!
20 My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.
21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:
22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,
“therefore I will hope in him.”

REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Jeremiah is writing shortly following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. For more information on the historical context, see the historical context guide on page 5.

LITERARY CONTEXT
1. Jeremiah uses an acrostic structure in the 66 verses of Chapter 3.
2. Note where chapter 3 fits within the chiastic structure of Lamentations.
3. Chapter 3 serves as the “pivot” of the book, moving from the reality of destruction and judgment and into Jeremiah’s (and Israel’s) response.

Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ch 1)
   God’s Judgment (Ch 2)
   Jeremiah’s Response (Ch 3)
   The Lord’s Anger (Ch 4)
   The Remnant’s Response (Ch 5)

REDEMPTIVE CONTEXT
During this dark period of Israel’s history both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have been sacked and taken to exile. Though the future looks bleak for Israel, God’s people will dwell in the land once again. They will even worship in the temple again. The sin of Israel was massive and resulted in great carnage. However, their hardhearted stubbornness and propensity toward idolatry could not thwart God’s covenant faithfulness to his people. Through the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s people would defy the odds, rebuild the city walls and pledge their allegiance.
to Yahweh in God's City once more. Ultimately, the carnage of sin which is the Old Testament could not thwart God's faithfulness. It was into the carnage that Jesus ultimately came just a few hundred years later to proclaim the true kingdom. For more information on the redemptive context, see the Redemptive Context Guide on page 8.

CONTENT

In week three of our study of Lamentations, you might think to yourself, “What more is there to say?” It is clear by this point what Lamentations is all about. And it may be obvious why believers don’t readily choose Lamentations as the next book of bible study. The situation is bleak. The writer does not soften the pain. When the patient and forbearing God finally drops his gavel against his stiff-necked people, it is nearly unbearable.

Chapter three continues this theme. But unlike the other chapters, Jeremiah begins to reveal how he will respond to this situation. Are these circumstances beyond redemption? Does all hope and progress and faith disintegrate in the face of punishment? Since much will be made of the hopeless estate in the other weeks, this week we will focus in on Jeremiah’s response, a glimmer of hope in a dark book.

I love rising early. The peaceful calm in the morning is, to me, the best time of the day. Everything else can wait. In the morning all that will come is still coming. Dark anticipation; in the hours before dawn everything is hope and expectation for the very reason that I know the sun will rise. The certainty of the sun makes predawn glorious. And Jeremiah awakes to the thought that he is not in a black hole, he is in a black night that reminds him of the coming light. Those of us groggy in our suffering, waking before God’s light, don’t despair. The darkness is the evidence of the light in the same way that every morning is preceded with light. It’s the rhythm of our Father.3

What is interesting is the contrast between v18 and v21. Look at how this progresses.

16 He ground my teeth with gravel
and made me cower in the dust.
17 I have been deprived of peace;
I have forgotten what prosperity is.
18 Then I thought, “My future is lost,
as well as my hope from the Lord.”

The thing that comes to Jeremiah’s mind is that there is not future, no hope. And yet in v21,

21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:

Here we see the importance of the mind and the will. This is the power of thoughts. Remember the old saying “what goes down the well will come up in the bucket”? In times of desperation, whatever we have hidden in our hearts and minds will come to the forefront. When it seems as though God is all-anger, all-justice, all-punishment, will Jeremiah remember that God loves him? That God loves his people?
(1) In times of desperation, remember.

Jeremiah calls something to mind. It brings him hope.

*When all hope seems lost, is there some truth to cling to in your heart? Are there passages of Scripture that you call to mind to reorient yourself?*

*Is this what would be said of you in your times of desperation? “This is not going well. This is incredibly painful. I feel alone and afraid. It feels hopeless. But, this I call to my mind and I have hope.”*

(2) In times of desperation, remember God’s character.

*What exactly does Jeremiah remember?*

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;  
23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.  
24 “The Lord is my portion,” says my soul,  
“therefore I will hope in him.”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE TEXT</th>
<th>THE QUESTION (From Hopelessness)</th>
<th>THE ANSWER (To Hope)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;</td>
<td>Has God finally removed his love from us after all we have done?</td>
<td>No. His love for you will never cease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his mercies never come to an end;</td>
<td>Even God must have a breaking point. After all of this, have we finally exhausted all of our second chances?</td>
<td>No. His grace and mercy toward you endures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>they are new every morning;</td>
<td>There is no evidence here of God’s mercy. Has his mercy departed from us permanently?</td>
<td>No. As certainly as the sun rising tomorrow, his mercy will come for you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>great is your faithfulness.</td>
<td>The promises of old have expired. We didn’t uphold our end. Has God rightfully canceled the contract?</td>
<td>No. God’s promises never fail. When we cling to him, he will never fail us. Even in this bleak moment, the surety of his character stands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Lord is my portion,”</td>
<td>We have nothing. What more is there to live for?</td>
<td>If all we have is the Lord, we have all we need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“therefore I will hope in him.”</td>
<td>There is no future here. Is there anything on the horizon in which I can place some trust?</td>
<td>We hope not in the circumstances of this world. We hope in God, because he is faithful.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jeremiah remembers that God loves them, that God has a track record of compassion and mercy for his people. He remembers that God is faithful.

Now, having read Lamentations, do you have a richer appreciation for Nehemiah?

What did Nehemiah do when he saw the destruction of Jerusalem?

“The IDEA: He prayed.”

“Faithfulness is not relative, subjective, or contingent. You cannot be kind-of faithful. It’s like being a little pregnant. Either you are or you are not. And either you are faithful or you are not. Yet Jeremiah declares, “Great is your faithfulness!” Because God is always faithful he is more than faithful. Great is our fickleness. But great is his faithfulness.”

- H.B. Charles Jr.
On this side of history, we already know that God is not done with Israel. He promised them land, seed, and blessing. One day soon, God will raise up Zerubbabel, Nehemiah and Ezra to rebuild and restore the land, but most importantly, restore the hearts of the people. They had to go through Lamentations to get to Nehemiah.

(3) In times of despair, remember that God is all you need.

The fact is, whether we are facing the consequences of our sin, fallout from the sinful and broken world in which we live, God’s corrective discipline on our lives, or some combination of all, we are not guaranteed earthly rescue. The cancer may not disappear. Your marriage may not ultimately reconcile. Those whom you have harmed may not forgive you. On this side of heaven, the pain may not subside. But the message of the Gospel is that we have everything we need in Christ. So in times of desperation, we don’t hope because we’re sure things will turn out the way we draw it up. No. We hope because regardless of how things turn out, Christ is with us. We hope because the one who sustains us through the pain holds the world in his hands.

“The Lord is my portion, therefore I will hope in Him.”

Jeremiah says,

55 I called on your name, Lord, from the depths of the pit.
56 You heard my plea: Do not ignore my cry for relief.
57 You came near whenever I called you; you said, “Do not be afraid.”
58 You championed my cause, Lord; you redeemed my life.

Is this not the prayer of the redeemed? Look at the shadows of the Gospel in this passage.

We recognized our sin, our wretched state and our status as enemies of God. We were at the depths of the pit. But God came near. Jesus left heaven to ransom the slaves. He said, “Do not be afraid.” He championed my cause. He redeemed my life. In the truth of the Gospel, regardless of circumstance, there is always hope.

There was a time when the very Son of God was under the wrath of God. There was a time when Jesus felt as if He was the hunted, the prey. Like a lamb led to the slaughter ( Isa. 53:7). Jesus was the lamb. The Father was the one with the knife. This is because the very wrath of the Father was pursuing Him. He knew no sin, yet He did not even open His mouth.

And it is in this moment of suffering and abandonment that Jesus turned to the Hebrew song book and quoting Psalm 22, cried out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken
me?” And, like Jeremiah, the direction of God’s power changes. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah is eternally vindicated by God. The same pattern of suffering and song was in the life of our Lord. The same pattern of cosmic balance of light and dark was, in the moment when the world went dark, held up for us as a model of our own lives; when our lives move from light to dark, to light again. And we sing.  

CONCLUSION
In times of despair, call to mind God’s faithfulness and there you will find hope.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)
The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

Have you ever heard someone say that the whole Bible is about Jesus? What in the world could Lamentations have to do with Jesus? If you and a friend were walking through Lamentations together, how would you say Lamentations 3 reminds us of the Gospel?

Let’s try to be as honest as we can. Do you resonate with Jeremiah’s statement— the Lord is my portion? If all you had was Jesus would you be ok? Would you have hope? If you were completely honest, are there things in your life that you suspect, if you were to lose them, you’d lose all hope?

Would you be willing to share with the group just how you manage to battle against the hopelessness we sometimes experience in this life? When you begin to think like Jeremiah writes (my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; My endurance has perished; so has my hope…) share with us your journey back to thinking clearly about God and returning to hope in him.
RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

The purpose of these short activities is to encourage students to personalize the truth and begin to develop an application in their lives.

DID YOU GROW UP SINGING “GREAT IS THY FAITHFULNESS”? Perhaps now, after this lesson, you can understand the biblical backdrop, the biblical depth behind some of these familiar lines.

Take a moment and read through the lyrics.

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.
Summer and winter, 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.

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!

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!

Go around the room and have each person share. If you turned one of these lyrics into a piece of art for your home, which line would you choose? Why?

As a fun response to this lesson, suggest going as a class or with a couple friends to Board and Brush (boardandbrush.com) in Little Rock and creating a sign using your lyric. Perhaps you could incorporate a verse from Lamentations 3. It could serve as a reminder of our Lamentations study.

HOME 22:6

SING | Great is thy Faithfulness

lyrics: https://hymnary.org/text/great_is_thy_faithfulness_o_god_my_fathe
modern version: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xXcYooI1yI

READ | Lamentations 3 along with Psalm 103 and look for the parallels

PRAY | Imagine you were at the pit of despair. As a family, talk about the things that you face, or may face some day that will bring about this kind of hopelessness. Talk about the destruction of sin, the consequences of our sin and others’ sins. Talk about the brokenness of the world. Now list the things that are true about God that would remind you of the hope you have even in difficult times. Pray and thank God that come what may in this life, we have all we need in him.
SOURCES

1 https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/the-history-of-great-is-thy-faithfulness
2 Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1207
3 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 3, p.288
4 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 3
Tell a Story.

“Trust me!”

Ever hear yourself saying these words to those you lead? We live in a world that is skeptical of trusting anyone. A recent Gallup poll suggested that Americans don’t trust anything, from used car salesmen to Supreme Court justices. The poll also included banks, television news reports, the police, public schools, and just about everything else. Probably for good reasons, 56% of those surveyed don’t trust church leaders either. In 1973, “the church or organized religion” was the most highly rated institution in Gallup’s Confidence in Institutions measure, and it continued to rank first in most years through 1985. Since then the number is at its lowest ever.

Most leaders have no idea how critical trust is to the health of their church’s future. In the introduction to the book The One Thing that Changes Everything, author Stephen Covey writes:

“There is one thing that is common to every individual, relationship, team, family, organization, nation, economy, and civilization throughout the world—one thing which, if removed, will destroy the most powerful government, the most successful business, the most thriving economy, the most influential leadership, the greatest friendship, the strongest character, the deepest love . . .
“That one thing is trust….”

Today we will see whether or not the leaders of Israel had any responsibility in the downfall of the nation. Did Israel trust its leaders? Can we trust the leaders in our lives?

SPARK A DISCUSSION.

What makes a Godly leader?

In our day there is no shortage of stories of spiritual leaders who have fallen into deep and destructive patterns of sin. They’ve lead double lives. They’ve even used their positions to harm vulnerable followers.

How do you know when a spiritual leader is trustworthy? Let’s make a list as a class of the characteristics of a Godly leader who can be trusted. TEACHER TIP: We cannot simply say that the person must be a great teacher and a great scholar because history teaches that these things do not necessarily correlate to an honorable life.

You might start the discussion by asking, “I know this spiritual leader in my life is trustworthy because ______________________________________________________________________.”

SHOW A CLIP:

https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/116482

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

Today’s Text: LAMENTATIONS 4
1 How the gold has grown dim, how the pure gold is changed!
The holy stones lie scattered at the head of every street.  
2 The precious sons of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold, how they are regarded as earthen pots, the work of a potter’s hands!  
3 Even jackals offer the breast; they nurse their young; but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.  
4 The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives to them.  
5 Those who once feasted on delicacies perish in the streets; those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps.
6 For the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom, which was overthrown in a moment, and no hands were wrung for her.
7 Her princes were purer than snow, whiter than milk; their bodies were more ruddy than coral, the beauty of their form was like sapphire.
8 Now their face is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; their skin has shriveled on their bones; it has become as dry as wood.
9 Happier were the victims of the sword than the victims of hunger, who wasted away, pierced by lack of the fruits of the field.
10 The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people.
11 The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger, and he kindled a fire in Zion that consumed its foundations.
12 The kings of the earth did not believe, nor any of the inhabitants of the world, that foe or enemy could enter the gates of Jerusalem.
13 This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous.
14 They wandered, blind, through the streets; they were so defiled with blood that no one was able to touch their garments.
15 “Away! Unclean!” people cried at them. “Away! Away! Do not touch!” So they became fugitives and wanderers; people said among the nations, “They shall stay with us no longer.”
16 The Lord himself has scattered them; he will regard them no more; no honor was shown to the priests, no favor to the elders.
17 Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save.
18 They dogged our steps
    so that we could not walk in our streets;
our end drew near; our days were numbered,
    for our end had come.
19 Our pursuers were swifter
    than the eagles in the heavens;
they chased us on the mountains;
    they lay in wait for us in the wilderness.
20 The breath of our nostrils, the Lord’s anointed,
    was captured in their pits,
of whom we said, “Under his shadow
    we shall live among the nations.”
21 Rejoice and be glad, O daughter of Edom,
you who dwell in the land of Uz;
but to you also the cup shall pass;
    you shall become drunk and strip yourself bare.
22 The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished;
    he will keep you in exile no longer;
but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish;
    he will uncover your sins.

REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Jeremiah is writing shortly following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. For more information on the historical context, see the historical context guide on page 5.

LITERARY CONTEXT
1. Jeremiah uses an acrostic structure in the 22 verses of Chapter 4.
2. Note where chapter 4 fits within the chiastic structure of Lamentations.

Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ch 1)
    God’s Judgment (Ch 2)
    Jeremiah’s Response (Ch 3)
    The Lord’s Anger (Ch 4)
The Remnant’s Response (Ch 5)
REDEMPTIVE CONTEXT

During this dark period of Israel’s history both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have been sacked and taken to exile. Though the future looks bleak for Israel, God’s people will dwell in the land once again. They will even worship in the temple again. The sin of Israel was massive and resulted in great carnage. However, their hardhearted stubbornness and propensity toward idolatry could not thwart God’s covenant faithfulness to his people. Through the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s people would defy the odds, rebuild the city walls and pledge their allegiance to Yahweh in God’s City once more. Ultimately, the carnage of sin which is the Old Testament could not thwart God’s faithfulness. It was into the carnage that Jesus ultimately came just a few hundred years later to proclaim the true kingdom. For more information on the redemptive context, see the Redemptive Context Guide on page 8.

CONTENT

(1) The Result of the Siege

In verses 1-11 of chapter 4, Jeremiah depicts the misfortune of the city by comparing it to its former glory and also by using various word pictures. Note the parallelism in v1-6 with v7-11.

Parallelism in Lamentations 4:1–11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERSES 1-6</th>
<th>VERSES 7-11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The value of the sons of Zion has become despised. (v1-2)</td>
<td>The value of the princes has become despised. (v7-8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The little children and adults suffer. (v3-5)</td>
<td>The little children and adults suffer. (v9-10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion: The calamity is God’s punishment. (v6)</td>
<td>Conclusion: The calamity is God’s punishment. (v11)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now take a look at the way in which Jeremiah juxtaposes the old glory of Jerusalem with the current state.

Pictures of the Destruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE REALITY</th>
<th>THE PASSAGE</th>
<th>COMMENTARY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jackals (v3)</td>
<td>Even jackals offer the breast; they nurse their young;</td>
<td><strong>Jackals</strong>, found throughout the Mediterranean area, traveled in packs. They were associated with areas of desolation and destruction (cf. Isa. 35:7; Jer. 9:11; 10:22; 49:33; 51:37; Mal. 1:3). Yet even jackals nourished their offspring while the cries of the children of Jerusalem for bread and water went unheeded by their parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ostriches (v3)</td>
<td>but the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.</td>
<td>Mother ostriches seem unconcerned about their young, for they lay their eggs in the sand where they may be trampled...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Infants (v4)  the children beg for food, but no one gives to them.  Infants and children were dying of thirst and starvation (cf. Lam. 2:19)

Princes (v5)  those who were brought up in purple embrace ash heaps.  those who used to eat well were now destitute, and princes (those nurtured in purple, royal clothing) were lying in ash heaps, probably in sickness (cf. Job 2:8)

Sodom (v6)  greater than the punishment of Sodom But Jerusalem’s punishment was worse than Sodom’s because (a) Jerusalem’s punishment was protracted while Sodom’s was short (in a moment), and (b) Jerusalem’s came despite assistance from Egypt while Sodom had no assistance (without a hand ... to help)

Princes (v7-8)  Now their face is blacker than soot; they are not recognized in the streets; Their fine complexions and healthy bodies did not escape the ravages of Babylon. They too saw their skin darken (become blacker than soot) and grow taut (shriveled) as their bodies became racked by hunger and emaciated (cf. 5:10)

Women (v10)  The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; The gnawing pangs of hunger (cf. 1:11, 19) finally drove compassionate women into cannibalizing their own children (cf. comments on 2:20)

Anger (v11)  The Lord gave full vent to his wrath; he poured out his hot anger... Jerusalem was experiencing God’s wrath (cf. 2:2, 4; 3:1) and fierce anger (cf. 1:12; 2:3, 6) for her sin

(2) The Reason for the Siege

Why was the wrath of God being poured out on Jerusalem and Israel?

(a) First... This was for the sins of her prophets and the iniquities of her priests, who shed in the midst of her the blood of the righteous. (v13)

Corruption and sin had permeated the land through its leaders.

The application from this text is very simple, there is a high price of disobedience that we cannot see right now. It is so monumental. But the vista of future consequences is blocked by the pleasantness of today. Present pleasure blocks the view of future consequence. We feel immune to the cancer of sin; we are anesthetized with so many distractions. Here is Judah’s lesson. No one is above God’s law. Any one of us can fall. Any person, any civilization, any movement.5

(b) Second... in our watching we watched for a nation which could not save. (v17)
Evidently, instead of trusting God, they trusted Egypt as a close ally against Babylon. This is depicted here as a major mistake.

(c) Third… The breath of our nostrils, the Lord’s anointed, was captured in their pits… (v20)

The punishment of your iniquity, O daughter of Zion, is accomplished; he will keep you in exile no longer; but your iniquity, O daughter of Edom, he will punish; he will uncover your sins. (v22)

The closing lines of Lamentations 4 show Jeremiah’s unwavering hope in God’s promises. Remember Lamentations 3? “This I call to mind and I have hope.” Jeremiah seems to hold so tightly to his belief in God’s faithfulness to his covenant (Deut. 28-30) that he declares that this is not the end of the story. It is as if Jeremiah says, “Edom, you rejoice now, but your time will come.” And, “Israel, you weep now, but God will restore you in his time.”

**WHAT DO WE DO WHEN LEADERS FAIL US?**

There are so many natural responses that are wrong.

Justifying their sin because we are friends.

Ignoring their sin because I am affiliated with them in some way.

Not dealing with a public sin publically.

Using their sin as an excuse for our own sin.

Failing to learn the lesson that all of us are vulnerable.

Failing to see ourselves as a candidate for the same sin.

Failing to use the moment of failure to warn us about our own sin.

Failing to hold leaders accountable for their actions.

Failing to restore the fallen leader with grace.

After the dust settles, we could simply wallow in despair and self-pity. But this is where the Gospel enters.

There is so much about the Gospel in this passage, it’s hard to know where to start. This is a metaphor for life. People who disobey God are set on a certain path of destruction. Like the rogue nation, they cannot change trajectories. So, God offers a way of escape from His pending judgment. God saves us from God. This is the good news of the Gospel. God’s wrath hangs over everyone in the world. All sins will be punished. Yet as the hand of judgement is falling, Christ stands up. He takes the blow for us. 

**CONCLUSION**

When leadership falls, the people are aimless.
REFLECT ON THE TEXT  (5-10 Minutes)

The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

Jeremiah mentions Israel’s King as the Anointed One. What does this reveal about their misplaced trust? (see Psalm 2:2) Are we guilty of making our earthly leaders functional saviors? How so? Can anyone give an example of this?

Dr. Smith says that sometimes we cannot immediately see the consequences of our disobedience. Can you think of a time in your own life when disobedience felt right, felt gratifying in the moment, but it came back to haunt you? How does the delayed nature of consequences make it even harder to obey in the moment?

Some people have a high level of trust for leaders. They think, “This person is top notch. They have it all together. If I stick with them and try to be like them, I’ll be in good shape.” Others have been ‘burned’ by poor leadership. They think, “Everyone has their secrets. If we only knew what happened behind closed doors in this person’s life, we probably wouldn’t follow.” What’s your view toward leaders, in general? How does this text inform us about our own view of leaders?

THE IDEA: This text should remind us that leaders are human. We cannot place our deepest trust in humans. They need our prayers. We need their guidance. And we need God, his Word, and a personal holiness even more.
RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

The purpose of these short activities is to encourage students to personalize the truth and begin to develop an application in their lives.

RECOGNIZING OUR FALLIBILITY AS LEADERS

First, read 1 Cor 12:10

“These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the age have come. So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.”

Evidently, these OT stories are to remind us not that we would never fall into the types of sins they did, but rather to show us that we are all quite capable of the wickedness we see in the Old Testament. So, “whoever thinks he stands…”

Would you be willing to share an occurrence this year when you botched it as a leader? With a friend, a co-worker, a family member, did you do something for selfish gain? Did you put them down to elevate yourself? Did you cut a moral corner to make things easier on yourself?

Or are you a perfectly upright father, brother, mother, sister, employee, boss, friend? Let’s let today be about reminding ourselves that we each have a long way to go, and when people place their hope in us, we will inevitably let them down in some way. Only Christ boasts the title of Perfect Leader.

If possible, ask everyone in the room to admit one thing they’ve missed the mark on this year with someone they have influence with.

HOME 22:6

SING | As you listen to the song “Divine Exchange” by Charity Gayle, glance at the lyrics. This would be a great new song to learn as a family.

On the cross hung my pain
And the guilt and the shame
Jesus bore my suffering
To the grave to make me free.

Oh the blood that was shed
It now flows to cover sin
It washes clean, and purifies
In its healing crimson tide.

Jesus, He took my place in divine exchange Hallelujah!
Grace is mine.
Now I live by faith for the One who saves
He gave all to give me life.

Here’s a great video of the song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOapFgudVY4

PRAY | Pray for the leaders in your life. And pray for your personal leadership. By the power of the Holy Spirit, may we lead to the glory of Christ.

READ | Lamentations 4
SOURCES

1 https://ftc.co/resource-library/blog-entries/building-trust-as-a-leader

2 Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1207

3 Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1219


5 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 4, p.297

6 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 4, p.300

7 Smith, Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations, Lamentations 4, p.294

START HERE  (5 Minutes)

Utilize one of the following tools to ignite the interest of your students. Tell a story, spark a discussion, or show a clip.

TELL A STORY.

Choosing Brokenness

The small band of church leaders had been praying earnestly for revival in their community—a village on the Isle of Lewis, the largest isle of the Outer Hebrides, just off the coast of Scotland. They were particularly burdened for the young people of the island who had no interest in spiritual matters and scorned the things of God.

For 18 months they met—three nights a week, praying through the night, right on into the early hours of the morning, beseeching God to come and visit in revival. But there was no evidence of any change.

Then one night, a young deacon rose to his feet, opened his Bible, and read from Psalm 24: “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart . . . . He shall receive the blessing from the Lord” (vv. 3–5, KJV).

Facing the men around him, this young man said, “Brethren, it seems to me to be just so much ‘humbug’ to be waiting and praying as we are, if we ourselves are not rightly related to God.”

There in the straw, the men knelt and humbly confessed their sins to the Lord. Within a short
READ • REVIEW • REFLECT • RESPOND

period of time, God began to pour out His Spirit in an extraordinary awakening that shook the entire island. Before its impact can be felt in a home, a church, or a nation, revival must first be experienced on a personal level in the hearts of men and women who have encountered God in a fresh way. And the single greatest hindrance to our experiencing personal revival is our unwillingness to humble ourselves and confess our desperate need for His mercy."

SPARK A DISCUSSION.

Imagine a morning in our church when people respond boldly to the Holy Spirit. Suppose Dr. Smith has asked each of us to identify an area of sin in our lives with which we need to part ways. Imagine people coming to the front to publicly acknowledge that they have sinned. People have identified an area of their life that dishonors God and needs to be confessed. It is quite a sight to see so many people responding publicly.

(a) Do you suppose you would respond too? Would you have the courage to stand publicly and acknowledge that there is at least one area of your life that is displeasing to the Lord?

(b) Each person would likely have a different sin struggle, a different confession. In a moment like this, what do you imagine the Lord would be convicting you of?

Would you be willing to share your answers with the class?

SHOW A CLIP:

https://www.rightnowmedia.org/Content/VideoElement/200348

THE IDEA:

Today we will see that lament leads to repentance which leads to restoration. Because God is faithful, he will restore them from their darkest days.

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

Today’s Text: LAMENTATIONS 5
1 Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us; look, and see our disgrace!
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.
3 We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows.
4 We must pay for the water we drink; the wood we get must be bought.
5 Our pursuers are at our necks; we are weary; we are given no rest.
6 We have given the hand to Egypt, and to Assyria, to get bread enough.
7 Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities.
8 Slaves rule over us; there is none to deliver us from their hand.
9 We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword in the wilderness.
10 Our skin is hot as an oven
     with the burning heat of famine.
11 Women are raped in Zion,
     young women in the towns of Judah.
12 Princes are hung up by their hands;
     no respect is shown to the elders.
13 Young men are compelled to grind at the mill,
     and boys stagger under loads of wood.
14 The old men have left the city gate,
     the young men their music.
15 The joy of our hearts has ceased;
     our dancing has been turned to mourning.
16 The crown has fallen from our head;
     woe to us, for we have sinned!
17 For this our heart has become sick,
     for these things our eyes have grown dim,
18 for Mount Zion which lies desolate;
     jackals prowl over it.
19 But you, O Lord, reign forever;
     your throne endures to all generations.
20 Why do you forget us forever,
     why do you forsake us for so many days?
21 Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored!
     Renew our days as of old—
22 unless you have utterly rejected us,
     and you remain exceedingly angry with us.
REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Jeremiah is writing shortly following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586BC. For more information on the historical context, see the historical context guide on page 5.

LITERARY CONTEXT
1. Unlike the other chapters, Jeremiah does not use an acrostic structure in the 22 verses of Chapter 5.
2. Note where chapter 5 fits within the chiastic structure of Lamentations. Since Chapters 1-3 conclude with a prayer, some believe that Chapter 5 should be seen as the closing prayer of Chapter 4.

Jerusalem’s Destruction (Ch 1)
   God’s Judgment (Ch 2)
   Jeremiah’s Response (Ch 3)
The Lord’s Anger (Ch 4)
The Remnant’s Response (Ch 5)

REDEMPTIVE CONTEXT
During this dark period of Israel’s history both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms have been sacked and taken to exile. Though the future looks bleak for Israel, God’s people will dwell in the land once again. They will even worship in the temple again. The sin of Israel was massive and resulted in great carnage. However, their hardhearted stubbornness and propensity toward idolatry could not thwart God’s covenant faithfulness to his people. Through the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, God’s people would defy the odds, rebuild the city walls and pledge their allegiance to Yahweh in God’s City once more. Ultimately, the carnage of sin which is the Old Testament could not thwart God’s faithfulness. It was into the carnage that Jesus ultimately came just a few hundred years later to proclaim the true kingdom. For more information on the redemptive context, see the Redemptive Context Guide on page 8.

CONTENT
At this stage, readers of Lamentations might still be tempted to think, “So, what’s the point of Lamentations?” It is awfully depressing in points and quite thorough in its depiction of despair. Is it only here to teach us the horrors of God’s judgment? The hopelessness that comes as a result of hard-hearted people resolved to go their own way? Look carefully at Chapter 5. It is actually lament that leads to restoration.
(1) **Remember us.**

In verse 1, the writer beckons God to see. “Look at this situation.” Of course, God sees and knows all things (Prov. 15:3). Jeremiah calls out to God on behalf of his people not just to see what is happening, but of course to intervene.

**WHO EXACTLY RULED IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL DURING THIS TIME?**

Through the use of the first person (“we,” “us,” “our”) the people described (in vv. 2–10) the general conditions of suffering brought about by Babylon. The land of Judah had been parcelled out to foreigners. Babylon assumed dominion over the land, and its occupying forces were stationed there (Jer. 40:10; 41:3). In addition, nations surrounding Judah appropriated or annexed some of her land for themselves (cf. Ezek. 35:10).

Most of verses 1-16 contain more of what readers of Lamentations have become accustomed to: the desperate state of things. God is more than aware of their situation.

But notice v7 and v16. The people recognized this as both the expected result after their forefathers led corruptly and dealt sinfully with foreign nations. But they did not blame their forefathers alone. In v16, “woe to us for we have sinned.”

It cannot be overstated how important this progression is. Confession comes before the cure. Repentance comes before revival. Brokenness before beauty. This is the gospel. A person cannot be saved, who knows not that he is lost. Our story is not that we were moderately sinful, wobbling on the line between heaven and hell. And Jesus did just enough to move us over the line. No. You see, we are like the Israelites. Our sin has brought forth all sorts of pain, evil, and consequences. We are the people without a home. We are the hopeless ones afflicted on every side and imploding in despair. And with the same gusto in which we cried out to Jesus, “Take my life, make me whole,” the desperation of Israel has driven them to the same place.

(2) **Restore us.**

V19- they will appeal to God on the grounds of his very nature.

Notice they do not seem to think that God is dead. They do not believe that God has been conquered by pagan gods. They know that they have experienced the painful justice of God, which in a strange way reminds them that he reigns.

V21- they ask God to restore them.

21 Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored! Renew our days as of old—

22 unless you have utterly rejected us, and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

Look at Lev. 26:44. “Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God.” God had already promised not to utterly (ultimately, finally) abandon them. So, on the grounds of God’s character and God’s promises, they ask.
There may be some in our class who have never experienced the hope of salvation. The hopelessness and despair present here don’t depict your previous life but your current life. Did you know you can say a similar prayer today? “God who is rich in mercy, I have sinned. God who sent his very son to save the world, You reign. God who has declared that everyone who calls upon you will be saved, restore me.”

There may be some in our class who have drifted from God, losing touch with the vibrant faith they once possessed. The hopelessness and despair present here don’t depict their previous life but their current one. The sin and the brokenness of the world have brought forth a period of discipline. Did you know they can say a similar prayer today? “God who indwells me by his Holy Spirit, show me the areas of my heart which are hardened toward you. God who never leaves me, grant me a greater sense of your presence. God who promises that forgiveness awaits those who confess their sins, forgive me. Restore me.”

CONCLUSION
The effectiveness of a believer is not marked by how little he sins, but how quickly he repents.

REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)
The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

- How is regret different from repentance? How can a person move from regret to repentance? How does regret work in your own life? What are its effects?

As we draw Lamentations to a close, how would you answer this question: Is Lamentations just a book of complaining? What makes lament different and helpful in the life of a believer?

How is your life different as a result of going through Lamentations? What is one idea you will take away from Lamentations that will strengthen your faith?
RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

Let’s finish Lamentations by evaluating our lives in view of the truths we’ve discussed in this series. Give yourself a score of 1-5 in the following areas.

Week 1: Sin brings ruin. Rate your awareness of your personal sin. Are you mindful of your struggles and shortcomings? Or do you tend to ignore them?

1= I’m severely deficient in this area.
5= This is an area I excel in.

Week 2: When tragedy happens we respond humbly because we don’t know why it happens, and soberly examine ourselves. Rate your propensity to turn to God immediately in times of trial.

1= I’m severely deficient in this area.
5= This is an area I excel in.

Week 3: In times of despair, call to mind God’s faithfulness and there you will find hope. Rate your ability to call to mind God’s character and promises in order to remind yourself of the hope you have in Him.

1= I’m severely deficient in this area.
5= This is an area I excel in.

Week 4: When leadership falls, the people are aimless. Rate your ability to place your ultimate trust in God and not in earthly leaders.

1= I’m severely deficient in this area.
5= This is an area I excel in.

Week 5: The effectiveness of a believer is not marked by how little he sins, but how quickly he repents. Rate the consistency in which you confess your sins to God and others.

1= I’m severely deficient in this area.
5= This is an area I excel in.

Take some time as a class to talk about areas of weakness. Pray together over these deficiencies. Perhaps this area of weakness could become a singular takeaway from our study of Lamentations.
HOME 22:6

SING | The Classic Hymn, “Come Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy”

*lyrics*: https://hymnary.org/text/come_ye_sinners_poor_and_needy_weak_and

*modern version*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlpoO0wY0Xk

READ | Check out this Prayer of Confession given at Capitol Hill Baptist in Washington D.C. Perhaps it will stimulate your own prayers of confession.

https://www.9marks.org/article/but-a-portion-of-our-transgressions-a-model-prayer-of-confession/

PRAY | Use the progression we have seen in Lamentation to develop your prayer time.

  Lament: Tell God about the state of things, especially things that are challenging or painful. Tell God about the things that are burdening you.
  Repentance: Regardless of why these things are happening, be sure to confess your sins. Declare to God the areas of your hearts that have gone cold toward him.
  Restoration: As God to make you whole. Ask God to make things new.

SOURCES

1  https://www.reviveourhearts.com/articles/choosing-brokenness/

2  Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1207

3  Dyer, “Lamentations,” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary, 1221

4  Smith, *Exalting Christ in Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Lamentations 5, p.306
GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS:

a study of

LAMENTATIONS

November 11

START HERE  (5 Minutes)

Utilize one of the following tools to ignite the interest of your students. Tell a story, spark a discussion, or show a clip.

TELL A STORY.

Some may remember the story of the heroes aboard a train in Paris in 2015.

On August 21, 2015, Thalys train 9364 was traveling from Amsterdam to Paris when passenger Ayoub El Khazzani, armed with an AKM assault rifle and 270 rounds of ammunition, opened fire. Passengers, including Spencer Stone, Alek Skarlatos, and Anthony Sadler, quickly responded. After Stone tackled El Khazzani, the gunman tried to slit his throat with a box cutter and sliced his thumb to the bone, nearly severing it. Stone then got him in a choke hold and Skarlatos seized the assailant’s rifle and beat him in the head with its muzzle until El Khazzani was rendered unconscious. Skarlatos then swept the other train cars for more gunmen while Sadler and fellow passenger Chris Norman tied El Khazzani’s arms behind his back with Norman’s T-shirt. Meanwhile, passenger Mark Moogalian was severely injured by the initial gunshots and blood was pouring from his neck. Stone, a medic, stuck his fingers into Moogalian’s neck and was able to stop the bleeding until the train arrived in Arras, France where the remaining passengers were investigated before proceeding onto Paris. Moogalian and Stone were treated at a hospital in Lille, France.¹
How do you imagine Moogalian and Stone responded once they recovered?
What emotions do you imagine the others on the train felt once they heard what happened?

SPARK A DISCUSSION.
Start class by asking students to share their Thanksgiving memories. When you think of Thanksgiving, what comes to mind? What memories warm your heart?
Then, move the discussion a little deeper. In your family or extended family, is there a unique time of prayer? We often thank God before meals, but is your Thanksgiving blessing any different? What’s it like in your family?
Name some of the most common things you hear people are thankful for at Thanksgiving.
Today our text will urge us to consider not just the earthly blessings from God but the eternal ones as well.

SHOW A CLIP:
Watch this clip of a man who gets to say thank you to a first responder who saved him from drowning 19-years earlier. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CvszPljU3ds
Title: RAW: Columbus officer reunites with man he saved from drowning 19 years ago.

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

Today’s Text: HEBREWS 12:26-29

26 At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” 27 This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of things that are shaken—that is, things that have been made—in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.
REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Although the title “To the Hebrews” was used in the second century AD and reflects the book’s recipients, it was not part of the original work and likely arose from a genuine insight into the major content of the book (extensive treatment of OT priestly themes to show the superiority of Christ) and its central exhortation based on that content (the readers must not turn away from Christ—presumably back to Judaism). The author never explicitly warns against returning to Judaism, and his exhortations could be taken more generally (i.e., not forsaking Christ or the true God by reverting to paganism). But the author is not explicit about a pagan background either, and there would be less reason to pursue the detailed argument he presents based on the promises and institutions of the OT for an audience that had no prior loyalty to them. His insistence that the readers maintain faith in Christ because of that which God has done in Christ strongly implies that they were tempted to return to that prior system. The only modification of this early view would be that the ethnic background of the readers could certainly have been broader than “Hebrews” only. Gentiles in the first-century Mediterranean world were often drawn to the synagogue and its ancient roots in the OT; from there they sometimes converted to Christianity. Informed loyalty to the OT, such as Hebrews assumes, was not limited to ethnic Jewish converts.

LITERARY CONTEXT

Outline

I. The Superiority of Jesus Christ’s Position (1:1-4:13)
II. The Superiority of Jesus Christ’s Priesthood (4:14-7:28)
III. The Superiority of Jesus Christ’s Priestly Ministry (8:1-10:18)
IV. The Superiority of the Believer’s Privileges (10:19-12:29)
V. The Superiority of Christian Behavior (13:1-21)

In Hebrews 12, the author warns the reader not to reject the one who speaks. When he spoke in the Old Testament, some listened and some rejected. Even now, the author warns, we must persevere in our faith remembering that the material things of earth will pass away and only those who are in Christ shall remain.

CONTENT

(1) THE WHY (Therefore)

Many who have grown up in church have heard a pastor or teacher explain a simple yet insightful tip for students of the Bible. When the word “therefore” appears ask, “What is the therefore there for?” Since the word therefore represents a change in idea, when it appears in the text, Christians ought to explore the text leading up to the therefore. After all, therefore simply means “in light of what was just explained.” So truly it is nearly impossible to determine the meaning of a text containing the word therefore without exploring what’s on either side of it.
V28 begins with the word “therefore.” Because of something, something else is true. In this case, “Therefore, let us be grateful.” For some reason, believers should be grateful. So, what is the therefore there for?

Look at v26-27.

a. God (referring to the time of the giving of the Law in Exodus) shook the earth. (v26)

b. But a time is coming when God will shake both the heavens and the earth. (v26)

c. The shaking of the heavens and the earth will evidently bring destruction to all things that have been made. (v27)

d. The shaking of the heavens and the earth will leave only the things that could never be shaken (eternal things). (v27)

The solemnity of Sinai is recalled. Repeatedly we are told that then the earth shook (Ex 19:18; Jdg 5:4-5; Pss 68:8; 77:18; 114:4, 7). The writer has already spoken of the awe-inspiring nature of what happened when the law was given. Now the reference to the shaking of the earth brings it all back. At the same time it enables him to go on to speak of a promise that involved a further shaking, the one recorded in Hag 2:6. The prophet looked forward to something much grander than Sinai, a day when God would shake ”not only the earth but also the heavens.” The reference to heaven and earth may hint at the concept of the new heaven and the new earth (Isa 66:22). At any rate, it points to the decisive intervention that God will make at the last time.

WILL THE EARTH ULTIMATELY BE DESTROYED OR RENEWED?

This question is largely irrelevant to our lesson today but it should be noted that there exists some theological debate regarding the destruction depicted here in the text. Some scholars use Hebrews 12 as evidence of God ultimately destroying the earth in order to bring forth an altogether new heaven and earth. Others believe the Scriptures as a whole describe more of a transformation, a renewing of the earth in the end. One writer summarizes the positions helpfully in the link provided in the footnote. He sites J. Richard Middleton to describe the transformation view:

“This passage is a contrast between God shaking the earth at Sinai during the forty years of wandering under Moses and the future judgment but also includes the heavens. Many will think that since verse 27 teaches that the created order will be removed (i.e., destroyed). However, the Greek word that is translated as “removing” in this verse “is metathesis, a noun that can certainly mean ‘removal’ but also can mean ‘change’ or ‘transformation.’” Although this passage can be interpreted to mean destruction, it can also be interpreted to have the meaning of a transformation which is consistent with the renewal that so many other passages in Scripture teach about.”

5
So why is the author telling you (the believer) to be grateful?

In summary, the author reminds us that a time is coming when the temporary things of earth will be destroyed and only the eternal things will remain. The same God that shook the earth in the Old Testament will shake the heavens and the earth and (in the context of Hebrews 12) those who refuse God will not stand.

God in his justice will not allow the wicked to remain. No amount of riches on earth, success in business, social connectedness, or name recognition will insulate the world from this judgment from God. Only those who are in Christ shall remain.

So, what? Therefore, what? Therefore, be grateful.

(2) THE WHAT (Be Grateful)

In light of the fact that no one outside of Christ will stand in the judgment, be grateful for you are in Christ.

The kingdom that the believers have received, the kingdom of Jesus, the saving Gospel message cannot be shaken. It will not be moved.

Are you grateful that because of Christ, you will not face God’s judgment in the end?

Often around Thanksgiving, we consider all the tangible blessings we possess. It is certainly a noble exercise to recount all of the things God has given us. But we often forget to recognize the greater eternal possessions we’ve been given in Christ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPICAL THINGS WE THANK GOD FOR</th>
<th>SOME ETERNAL BLESSINGS IN CHRIST</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A nice home to live in</td>
<td>We need not be anxious about anything because God supplies our every need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wonderful friends</td>
<td>We need not fear death because our eternal destination of hope and flourishing awaits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our physical health</td>
<td>Though God knows the darkest most sinful places in our hearts, nothing can separate us from his love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A promotion at work</td>
<td>The Holy Spirit indwells us, changes us, convicts us, guides us, comforts us, and reminds us of our full inheritance one day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our children and families</td>
<td>Though the wrath of God will fall on the wicked hearts of the world, I am eternally spared from God’s wrath through the blood of Christ.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12:28 a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Alludes to Dan 7:18, the vision of God’s holy people who receive a kingdom forever in connection with the Son of Man to whom God grants everlasting dominion. This has already begun (“we are receiving a kingdom”), but it is not yet fully realized (2:8-9; see note on 2:14). Such a hope calls for us to “be thankful” and “worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.” acceptably. Could be rendered “in a way that pleases” God (anticipating 13:15-16,21).  

(3) THE HOW (Worship with Reverence and Awe)

First, we recognize that God the just will shake the earth and nothing will remain except that which is eternal. Next, we are grateful because in Christ, we will not be shaken, nor destroyed. Finally, gratitude leads to worship.

**What is the believer to do in response to his gratitude?**

This is depicted as the natural response. The greater the rescue, the greater the gratitude. The greater the gift, the greater the gratitude.

Why do you suppose we sometimes tend to be so tremendously grateful when our bodies are healthy or when someone experiences complete healing from cancer? But why aren’t we so quick to express deep gratitude regarding our salvation?

Notice the progression here.

**Know the Truth:** God is just and will judge the wicked. You will not experience this judgment because you are in Christ.  
**Feel the Weight:** I am so grateful for the sacrifice of Christ on my behalf.  
**Respond Accordingly:** I will worship him by giving him my life.

**CONCLUSION**

Although God will rightfully judge sinners and destroy the material things of earth, I am hidden with Christ and free from the wrath of God and am therefore wholly grateful and honored to worship the Savior.
REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)

The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

How does this text reinforce the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith and not by works? If our salvation is in any way accomplished by our own merit, then what is there to be grateful for? Grateful to ourselves? Of course not.

During this Thanksgiving season, how can you be intentional to focus not just on temporary, earthly blessings but on eternal ones?

Take a moment to survey your own life. Are you a grateful person? How do you know? Have you ever caught yourself being an ungrateful person? What tempts you to go down the road of discontentment?

RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

Enemies to a Grateful Heart
Together as a class, try to create a list of all the things that sabotage a grateful heart. Since we are striving to live with gratitude to Christ and others, let’s list as many things as we can that would cause us to be ungrateful.

** Let the class share ideas. Perhaps write a list on the dry erase board.

EXAMPLES TO KEEP DISCUSSION GOING:

- Pride. We think we deserve all the blessings.
- Entitlement. We expect the blessings for some reason.
- Envy. We always think others have it better.
- Earthly Perspective. We fail to take our eyes off of external circumstances to the greater eternal blessings.
- Social Media: We are enticed to believe we always need something more.
- Materialism: A love for attaining more and more.
- Pity: A consistent focus on the challenges or shortcomings in life.
- Failure to Serve: We forget there are others with challenges of their own, often more significant than ours.
- Failure to Read the Word: We forget the truths and promises of God, so we cannot cling to them in gratitude.
HOME 22:6

READ | Try reading one of these Psalms as a way to stir the gratitude of your heart. Perhaps incorporate one of these into your family prayer time.
“O Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; Let us shout joyfully to the rock of our salvation. Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods." Ps. 95:1-3
“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.” Ps. 100:4-5
"Give thanks to the Lord for he is good, his love endures forever." Ps. 118:29
"I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds." Ps. 9:1
"I will give to the Lord the thanks due to his righteousness, and I will sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High." Ps. 7:17

SING | “Before the Throne”
Here is a Music Video with Lyrics: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9JqhYTjHI0
Pay special attention to the last stanza. “One in Himself, I cannot die… My soul is purchased by His blood… My life is hidden with Christ on high… With Christ, my Savior and my God” This is the message of Hebrews 12:26-29.

PRAY | Pray that God would bring forth in you and your family a deep and rich gratitude rooted not just in temporary circumstances but in the work of Christ.

SOURCES
2 NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Hebrews Introduction
3 Macarthur Study Bible, Hebrews Introduction
4 Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Hebrews 12:26
6 NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Hebrews 12:28
GREAT IS HIS FAITHFULNESS: 

a study of

LAMENTATIONS

November 18

START HERE  (5 Minutes)

Utilize one of the following tools to ignite the interest of your students. Tell a story, spark a discussion, or show a clip.

TELL A STORY.

When Dr. Broadus was a boy in a little town he was converted to Christ. He had been attending some meetings, and he went to one of his playmates, Sandy Jones, a red-haired, awkward chap, the next day and said to him: “I wish you would be a Christian. Won’t you?”

And Sandy said, “Well, I don’t know, perhaps I will.” And sure enough, after a little while, one night in the little church, Sandy Jones accepted God. Straightway he stalked across that little meeting house, held out his hand and said, “I thank you, John, I thank you, John.”

Dr. Broadus went out from that little town and became a great scholar, a great exegete, a great theological president. Every summer when he went home to that little town, and he hardly missed a season, I am told, this awkward, red-haired old farmer, in his plain clothes, with red sand on his boots, would come up, stick out his great bony hand and say: “Howdy, John. Thank you, John, thank you, John. I never forget, John.”

When Dr. Broadus died, his family around him, he said: “I rather think the sound sweetest to my ears in Heaven, next to the welcome of Him Whom having not seen I have loved and tried to serve, will be the welcome of Sandy Jones, as he will thrust out his great hand and say: “Howdy, John. Thank you, John.”

1
People who are truly grateful never forget. When the gift is great, the gratitude follows. Today, we look at the implications of gratitude for the church. Are we known as a grateful people? Is the phrase, “thank you God,” ever on our lips?

SPARK A DISCUSSION.

List the top 5 qualities you hope your kids possess when they are older. For those with grown kids, choose the top 5 qualities you hoped for your children as they grew up. Go around the room and name some that come to mind.

Discussion Point: Was grateful one of them? Why is it important to raise grateful kids? Why does this quality sometimes not make our list? What’s so wrong with an ungrateful kid?

SHOW A CLIP:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=exo4s6cWPcM
Title: Whale Rescued from Fishing Net Thanks Rescuers In THE BEST Way

READ THE TEXT (2-5 Minutes)

Today’s Text: COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

12 Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.
REVIEW THE TEXT
(The DIRECT Route 15-20 Minutes or The SCENIC Route 25-30 Minutes)

CONTEXT

HISTORICAL CONTEXT
Paul did not say where he was imprisoned (4:3,10,18; cf. 1:24). Rome is the traditional view. Travel between Rome and the East was not difficult. It would have allowed for an interchange of communication. It is probable that Aristarchus, Paul’s fellow prisoner (4:10), accompanied Paul to Rome (Acts 27:2). Luke (Col 4:14) was also with Paul in Rome (Acts 28:14; 2 Tim 4:11). Ephesus’ proximity to Colossae makes it another candidate. If Ephesians was also written around the same time, why would Paul write to the Ephesians from Ephesus? Paul’s Roman imprisonment still seems to be the best option, and the date of the letter’s composition was probably AD 60-61.  

LITERARY CONTEXT
Outline
I. Personal Matters (1:1-14)
   A. Paul’s Greeting (1:1, 2)
   B. Paul’s Thankfulness (1:3-8)
   C. Paul’s Prayer (1:9-14)

II. Doctrinal Instruction (1:15-2:23)
   A. About Christ’s Deity (1:15-23)
   B. About Paul’s Ministry (1:24-2:7)
   C. About False Philosophy (2:8-23)

III. Practical Exhortations (3:1-4:18)
   A. Christian Conduct (3:1-17)
   B. Christian Households (3:18-4:1)
   C. Christian Speech (4:2-6)
   D. Christian Friends (4:7-18)

As you can see in the outline above, Colossians 3:12-17 falls within the larger section of the letter regarding practical applications. Paul often uses this format of addressing theology (matters of right belief) in the opening sections of the letter, then moving to applications near the end of the letter. In view of the theology presented in Ch. 1-2, Paul explains this is how Christians should live.

CONTENT

Last week, we discussed personal gratitude. We asked ourselves about what is going on in our individual hearts that leads to gratitude. This week, we will look at the same topic from a corporate perspective.

(1) WHO WE ARE

God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved. (v12)

Before Paul exhorts the church at Colossae to “put on” these Godly attributes, he reminds them who he is addressing. He is writing to believers, to the church. It is almost as if he intends to tell them to act in accordance with their identity. You, who are the church, the chosen ones, the ones...
justified because of the work of Christ, and the beloved… put on these things.

For the believer, this brief reminder in v12 means a great deal. When we gather on Sunday mornings for worship, for Sunday School, to serve others within the body, we look around and see God’s chosen ones. We share something in common which is more powerful than a biological connection. Each of us was once alienated from God, dead in our sin. But because of God’s mercy to us in Jesus, through his sacrifice on the cross, we have been made new. Our sin was transferred to Christ, and his perfect life was credited to us. In this way, we are holy ones, as Christ has wiped away every blemish before God. Further, we are holy ones in that we are called out to be separate from the world, to dedicate our bodies to Christ for his service, putting off the sinful nature and walking according to the Holy Spirit. When we look around, we are surrounded by those who will live with Jesus forever. We are gathered with the church, to whom death has no sting. This is who we are.

And God says here through Paul that he expects certain attitudes and behaviors from his children.

Remember those familiar words from Colossians 3? Twice we read, “Whatever you do . . . whatever you do . . .” (Colossians 3:17, 23). It’s almost as if the Lord is saying, “Makes no difference what it is, whatever you do . . . ” But then He immediately addresses things that have to do with being. Like being thankful, being considerate, being obedient, being sincere, being diligent. Same pattern—God emphasizes being more than doing.⁴ -Chuck Swindoll

(2) HOW WE ACT

This is quite an extensive list.

As you work through verses, can you identify the action verbs here?

Notice that some verbs are more active than others. To forgive, to teach, to admonish are things that can be completed. And then notice the attitudes. To be and to allow. These commands direct the believer to have a certain attitude or yield to something. Now let’s look at all he calls us to be and do.

We tend to adjust to the level of happiness or prosperity we have. We grow to expect it, to not even notice it. And then we want more. That’s why it’s so hard for people to come down in standard of living. It’s easy to move from a studio apartment to a two-story house, but it’s awful to do the reverse. Few people have a problem going from a 1985 Ford Fairmont to a brand new BMW, but it’s incomprehensible to go the other direction.⁵

“A child of God should be a visible beatitude for joy and happiness, and a living doxology for gratitude and adoration.” -Charles Spurgeon

THE IDEA: put on, bear with, forgive, allow, be, teach, admonish, sing, do.
### LESSON 7

| V12 | Put on a compassionate heart  
|     | Put on kindness  
|     | Put on humility  
|     | Put on meekness  
|     | Put on patience  
|     | Bear with one another  
|     | Forgive each other  
|     | Put on love  
|     | Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts  
|     | Be thankful  
| V15 | Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly  
|     | Teach one another  
|     | Admonish one another in all wisdom  
|     | Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness  
| V16 | Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus  
|     | Do everything, giving thanks to God  

### (3) THANKFULNESS

*Do you see a repetitive quality here? Is there anything mentioned more than once?*

“This is the key to the life of rejoicing. Unsaved people do not rejoice in God, pray to God, or give thanks to God. Religious people rejoice sometimes, pray when they feel like it, and give thanks when things are going well. But Christians rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances. This is not the believer’s response because we are impervious to life’s dangers, toils, and snares. It is our response to life because we are in Christ Jesus.”

V15- Be thankful.  
V16- ...singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts  
V17- ... do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God
"Giving thanks" points to an essential accompaniment of acting in the name of the Lord Jesus—namely, that in everything we do we are to retain a sense of God’s goodness and must thank him.⁴

One of the distinguishing marks of the church is thankfulness. When someone in our city comes across an IBC member, they should come across someone who is thankful (v15). When we gather together for worship, we should be known as a church who sings songs to the Lord with thankfulness in our hearts (v16). And as we go about our daily lives, there is a sense of thankfulness about us knowing that everything we produce, everything we receive, every good thing we experience comes from God (v17).

What is the opposite of thankfulness? How do you know when a person is ungrateful?

“We When you lack gratitude, not only do you rob someone of the glory that belongs to them; you also convince yourself that you could have gotten on fine without them.” -JD Greear

THANKFULNESS & PLAGIARISM

JD GREEAR

I’ve heard Tim Keller describe it like plagiarism. When you plagiarize, you steal credit that belongs to someone else. But that’s only half of the problem. The other half is that you also deceive others into thinking you’re someone you aren’t. If I were to find some lost C.S. Lewis book manuscript in a relative’s attic and publish it as my own, that may impress some folks. But when the publisher comes asking for more, I’m in a bind.

This is the situation thanklessness puts us in toward God. We rob his glory, which is bad enough. But then we also parade around as if we’re self-sufficient. We forget that every breath we have comes from God. And that thankless spirit leads to bitterness, pride, and a host of other sins.⁸

CONCLUSION

Gratitude is an important distinguishing mark of the church of Jesus Christ. We are, as Gospel-driven people, thankful for both eternal and earthly good gifts given by God.
REFLECT ON THE TEXT (5-10 Minutes)

The purpose of discussion questions is to (a) allow the teacher a way to gauge the level of comprehension and (b) allow students to develop bonds around spiritual truth.

*We rarely consider that one of the reasons for a particular spiritual struggle is a lack of gratitude. How do you suppose thankfulness could be a solution that can help us experience God’s best in our situations? Can you think of a personal example?*

*Some say that kids in the next generation are so ungrateful and it’s sort of an epidemic. Do you think this is accurate? If so, why do you think this is the case?*

*Romans 1:21 says, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Evidently, one of the marks of those who are unbelievers is that they refuse to thank God for his blessings. Why is it so important that believers are known as a grateful people? What does this have to do with the gospel?*

RESPOND TO THE TEXT (5 Minutes)

**Enemies to a Grateful Church**

Together as a class, let’s try to create a list of all the things that are enemies to a grateful church. Since we are striving to live with gratitude to Christ and others, let’s list as many things as we can that would cause us to be ungrateful as a people.

**Let the class share ideas. Perhaps write a list on the dry erase board.**

**You will notice these examples below are nearly identical to last week’s exercise. This is because individuals make up the church. If we as a church are ungrateful, it is because we as individuals are ungrateful. Last week, we checked our own heart. This week, we ask about our reputation as a church. If we as a church fell into the error of ungratefulness, what things would’ve ensnared us?**

**EXAMPLES TO KEEP DISCUSSION GOING:**

- **Pride:** We think we deserve all the blessings.
- **Entitlement:** We expect the blessings for some reason.
- **Envy:** We always think others have it better.
- **Earthly Perspective:** We fail to take our eyes off of external circumstances.
• Social Media: We are enticed to believe we always need something more.
• Materialism: Our love for attaining more and more.
• Pity: Our consistent focus on the challenges or shortcomings.
• Failure to Serve: We forget there are others with challenges of their own, often more significant than ours.
• Failure to Read the Word: We forget the truths and promises of God, so we cannot cling to them in gratitude.

HOME 22:6

SING | The Classic Hymn, “To God be the Glory”

To God be the glory, great things he has done; 
so loved he the world that he gave us his Son, 
who yielded his life an atonement for sin, 
and opened the life-gate that all may go in.

Praise the Lord, praise the Lord; let the earth hear his voice! 
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord; let the people rejoice! 
O come to the Father through Jesus the Son, 
and give him the glory; great things he has done.

O perfect redemption, the purchase of blood, 
to every believer the promise of God; 
the vilest offender who truly believes, 
that moment from Jesus a pardon receives.

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done, 
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son; 
but purer and higher and greater will be 
our wonder, our transport, when Jesus we see.

READ | Read this Puritan Prayer from The Valley of Vision.

O my God, 
Thou fairest, greatest, first of all objects, 
My heart admires, adores, loves thee, 
For my little vessel is as full as it can be, 
And I would pour out all that fullness before thee in ceaseless flow.

When I think upon and converse with thee 
Ten thousand delightful thoughts spring up, 
Ten thousand sources of pleasure are unsealed, 
Ten thousand refreshing joys spread over my heart, 
Crowding into every moment of happiness.
I bless thee for the soul thou hast created,
For adorning it, sanctifying it, though it is fixed in barren soil;
For the body thou hast given me,
For preserving its strength and vigour,
For providing senses to enjoy delights,
For the ease and freedom of my limbs,
For hands, eyes, ears, that do thy bidding;
For thy royal bounty providing my daily support,
For a full table and overflowing cup,
For appetite, taste, and sweetness,
For social joys of relatives and friends,
For ability to serve others,
For a heart that feels sorrows and necessities,
For a mind to care for my fellow-men,
For opportunities of spreading happiness around,
For loved ones in the joys of heaven,
For my own expectation of seeing thee clearly.
I love thee above the powers of language to express, for what thou art to thy creatures.
Increase my love, O my God, through time and eternity.

_The Valley of Vision_, pp. 26-27°

**PRAY** | Try using this short format as a way of expressing gratitude to God for who we are as a church.
1. God, we were once a people…
2. God, because of you, we now we are a people…
3. We give you thanks for what you have accomplished for us spiritually…
4. We give you thanks for how you have blessed us with good gifts in this life…
5. Help us to stay ever mindful of your loving hand which is responsible for the goodness and blessing in our lives.
6. Help our church be a church filled with songs of thankfulness which flow out of hearts abounding with gratitude.

**SOURCES**

1. http://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/thank-you-john
2. NIV Zondervan Study Bible, Colossians Introduction
3. Macarthur Study Bible, Colossians Introduction
7. Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Colossians 3:17