

Disaster and Suffering?
A Personal and Small Group Experience

The anniversary of September 11th and the recent and continuing wildfires in central Texas have taken my thoughts once again to the relevant, important and challenging topic of human suffering, disaster, evil etc.- all in a world that is supposedly run by God—a good God!

I will not pretend to answer these questions in a short study or a sermon but I do believe it is good for us to listen to how the people of God have wrestled with the topic before.

The book of Lamentations is not one of those places you turn if you want a quick fix to help you feel better about life—it is far more real than that. It is an authentic reflection of one of God's prophets, Jeremiah, processing the reality of God in the presence of intense suffering, evil and chaos. When we listen to scripture we really do not get quick fix answers to these tough questions—we rather get honest authentic contemplation and God-companionship as we work through life.

I am asking you to read, contemplate and discuss Lamentations 3:1-33! I think it might be helpful to get some background on the book by reading an introduction to Lamentations in a study bible. I particularly find helpful Eugene Peterson's introduction to Lamentations in "the Message" translation. It is in PDF format @ www.pointofgracechurch.org under resources -September 11, 2011. You may also pick up a copy in the commons at Point of Grace.

As you read Lamentations 3:1-33:

- Let Jeremiah shape your view of the reality of suffering and hardship
- Contemplate where and how Jeremiah finds hope,
- Process together how Jeremiah does not try to cover this tough subject with pious platitudes and quick fix comments but rather authentically wrestles with the realness of suffering and the realness of God.
- To what degree does this authentic wrestling speak to our current generation that seems to be so suspect of "in-authenticity"?
- Seek out the words and phrases that bring hope and life in such a way you can authentically grasp. Specifically share these statements of hope and promise that work for you at this point on your life.
- Finally, process Matthew 5:13-16 discussing how times of hurting and suffering are opportunities for God's people to really "show up" putting His heart on display!

Where is God?

"Connecting With God" Weekly Guide

This booklet is a resource to help you "Connect with God" this week. He deeply desires ongoing personal connection with you. You are that important to Him.

This Page has some scripture verses for you to meditate on each day this week. Notice the helpful hints section – these are great things to consider when personally engaging with God through His Word.

The Center Pages contain the notes and outline for the message given on Sunday. The message is also available as an audio download from www.pointofgracechurch.org

The Back Page has a study written specifically for a small group of people (or an individual) to drill down deeper into a particular aspect of the week's theme. Small groups can review memorable points of the week's message and then work through the study concluding with a time of prayer.

Scripture & Meditation Guide - September 12-17

Helpful Hints:

- 1) Find a quiet place along with 15-20 minutes!
- 2) Focus on God for a few moments asking His Spirit to speak to your heart and offloading your heart of stifling, burdens, guilt, worry etc.!
- 3) Listen to Him by reading a section of scripture then rereading it several times, dwelling on "words and phrases" which grab your heart's attention. As you read and reread keep asking God, "What do You want me to hear?" "Why this word at this time?" "How are You inviting me to respond? Keep talking it over with Him—chew!"
- 4) Pray (and journal) everything that is on your heart and mind as you are ready!
Worship Him, Bless Him, Thank Him, Ask Him, Trust Him

Monday: Psalm 23

Tuesday: Lamentations 3:18-26

Wednesday: Lamentations 3:25-33

Thursday: Psalm 62

Friday: Isaiah 40:21-31

Saturday: Matthew 5:13-16