

Despair//Homewreckers #6//Lamentations 3:1-26

I've got a great announcement. We're officially opening the Cary Campus at Cary High School on August 28! Our Cary campus has been meeting over the summer—couple of hundred people, and they'll be launching out at the end of this month. A campus, in case you're new around here, is a meeting of the Summit Church at a different location. They have a live worship band and a local pastoral team, and the teaching is video-cast. J.D. in 2DHD.

- **New campuses create more space for people.** For the third year in a row, we have maintained a nearly 30% growth rate. This is one of the ways we've maintained that.
- **New campuses also create spaces for more leaders.** It's always encouraging to see people who have been on the sidelines move to the frontlines when we launch a campus.
- **And of course, most importantly, more local campuses make it easier to reach the local communities you come from.** It's easier to invite someone to your church when it's local. It's easier to be in community when you are local. Bottom line: I want everyone in the Triangle to have a chance to hear about Jesus. So, we say "Stay where you are; serve where you live; let's be the church in your community."
- (Whenever we talk about this, people always say, "Well, why don't you plant churches instead of campuses that watch you on video?" In the last 12 months, we have planted 3 churches; one in Denver; one outside of Nashville; and one right here in Raleigh, and sent out 80 of our members as a part of those plants. So, back off.)

Well, as we are growing larger in attendance, we want to make sure that we are growing smaller at the same time, how we do that is small groups. Christian disciple happens in community. Period.

- The role of small group leader is vital around here at the Summit Church. It's kind of the first pastoral layer. This Sat morning, we've got a chance to gather current, new, interested small groups together for training and equipping. If you're a leader, you know you need to be there. If you've ever thought you might want to be a leader, this would be a great event for you to attend, too. RSVP online.

Intro: We're on the last week of the Homewreckers series. Let me review real quick where we've been: The first two weeks we looked at what God's word had to say **about our jobs** (because it's hard for our homes to be right when our attitude toward our jobs are off); then we looked at **fear, self-centeredness** and **bitterness** as home-wreckers. Last week Trevor dealt with tragedy as a homewrecker.

My final topic in this series is one that was not part of my original list, but I really felt compelled to talk about. And that is despair.

Despair is this overwhelming, suffocating sense that life is going nowhere.

- You've finally given up on your marriage. You think it is what it is, and you might as well resign yourself to it. You get a little glimmer of hope. You were excited about this series. But everything seemed to cave back in.
- Or your job is going nowhere. Your dreams are shattered.
- Or you think that you're never going to get victory over a particular temptation or a habit. You've fallen to it for millionth time.
- Or maybe you're lonely. And you don't have any prospects.

You just feel hopeless. It was bad today; it will probably be worse tomorrow. **Sometimes you can't quite put your finger on what it is.** Like a dark cloud over your life. Like you're cursed. It leaves you with this sense of **spiritual vertigo**. You don't know which way to go or what to do.

Now, whenever we talk about things like this, people want to know, "What about medication? Is it ok to take medication?" Well, first, I'm not a licensed counselor, and even if I were it would be impossible to make a general statement that applies to everyone. Our head counselor here, Brad H, has written a great blog available on our website this weekend giving some guidelines to help you think about medication.

- What I will say is this: God made us as a body-soul union, and sometimes what is happening in the body affects how you are feeling in your soul. Everybody knows this: You ever find that if you haven't gotten much sleep, you don't act very sanctified? You start snapping at everybody. The answer is not just to go do your quiet time. The answer is to get some sleep.
- But here's the thing: While conditions in the the body can aggravate spiritual conditions, but it usually doesn't create them. (**Illus.** Brad H on steroids: minor irritations become big deals). Your body chemical ratio can aggravate emotion. Chemical imbalances can pour nitrus on a fire, but they usually don't start the fire. Our body is not what creates idolatry, selfishness and unbelief.
- That's why we say that medicines can help alleviate pain, but they can't give hope. Hope comes from somewhere else.

So, open your Bibles to **LAMENTATIONS**. You're like lamma-who? Lamentations is just a fancy word for a collection of "laments." Lamentations are the laments of the prophet Jeremiah. The book of Lamentations is a collection of 5 poems.

- **The book is a work of art in Hebrew.** How many have your Hebrew Bibles? You have 5 poems, each written as an acrostic of the Hebrew alphabet (every verse starts with a new letter; so each chapter has 22 verses, because that's how many letters are in the Hebrew alphabet.)
- The exception is chapter 3 which is a triple-acrostic, which means each letter has 3 verses associated with it, which is why it is 66 verses. It's the most important chapter.
- What Jeremiah is probably trying to show you is that he's describing sufferint to you from A-Z.

You say, "Well, why is Jeremiah suffering?" Jeremiah lived during a time when Israel was being punished for their sin. They had hardened their hearts to God so many times that God was doing what He promised in letting them be exiled from the land.

Jeremiah witnessed multiple, violent deportations of friends and family to Babylon, the destruction of Jerusalem and the tearing down of the Temple. Furthermore, God had appointed Jeremiah to prophesy to God's people that this was the judgment of God, they were not to resist it, and they should repent. *That's a popular message.* The people responded by putting him in jail and Jeremiah spent most of his time in a dungeon.

Lamentations 3:1-26

¹ I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; ² he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light;

- Driven: the word means "like an animal," with a whip. Not "all the way my Savior leads me," but I feel like I'm being driven mercilessly.
- Darkness. No light. I read a book this past year called *The Endurance* which was about the failed mission of Ernest Shackleton to be the first human to cross Antarctica. He took a crew, was to sail as far South as he could, and then walk across the South Pole. The plan had to be abandoned at the beginning because the ship got caught in polar ice and crushed. For over a year, they fought to just stay alive in

subzero temperatures. The book I was reading said that the worst thing they faced was not the cold or starvation but the darkness. At the South Pole the sun goes down in Mid-May and doesn't come back up until August. Total darkness for two months. People who have made this journey say there is no desolation as complete as the polar night. Darkness all the time. No light. **That's how Jeremiah feels. No light. No hope.**

³ surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long.

- Now, who is He talking about? God.

⁴ He has made my flesh and my skin waste away; he has broken my bones; ⁵ he has besieged and enveloped me with bitterness and tribulation; ⁶ he has made me dwell in darkness like the dead of long ago. ⁷ He has walled me about so that I cannot escape; he has made my chains heavy; ⁸ though I call and cry for help, he shuts out my prayer;

- You ever feel like that? God is not listening.
- Here's the thing. Jeremiah knows that is not true. He'll show you that in a minute. But that is how he feels. A lot of you have gone through dark chapters and thought these things and shut yourself up by saying, "I'm not allowed to feel this way... Real Christians don't ever feel like this." The prophet Jeremiah was a *real* Christian.

⁹ he has blocked my ways with blocks of stones; he has made my paths crooked.

- Every time I see a way out and start to make headway He CRUSHES it.
- **You ever feel like that?** When I listened to Trevor's message last week, this is what I thought. Guy trying to obey the call of God on his life. Moves to NC. Marriage falls apart. Financial hardship. Just when it seems like things are turning around, a child dies in his arms. Again? Darkness. God, why?

¹⁰ He is a bear lying in wait for me, a lion in hiding;

- What's your favorite image of God? Is it this one? Bear waiting to maul you?

¹¹ he turned aside my steps and tore me to pieces; he has made me desolate; ¹² he bent his bow and set me as a target for his arrow. 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. Bitter herb. In the NT, called "gall." Represents desolation; God's wrath.¹

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; (PAUSE. I can't even remember good times.)

¹⁸ so I say, "My endurance has perished; so has my hope from the LORD."

- Jeremiah, the prophet of God.
- You guys encouraged yet?

I need you to learn something very important. God chose to include this in the Bible, because there are times you feel this way and you should probably quit denying it.

- God could have edited this out. In fact, He could have chosen to not include this book at all. God could have been like, "No, we're not including that." A book called "Lamentations" where a prophet doubts Me and yells at Me? Let's include another book by Zephaniah. His stuff is a lot more cheery with the whole "dancing over you with love?" People like that. Or, Solomon's wisdom is pretty is pretty hot right now and we can't keep his sex manual, *Song of Solomon*, on the shelves, so let's put another one of those in the Bible. That will drive Bible sales up."

¹ Prov. 5:4; Amos 5:7; Jer. 9:15; Rev. 8:11. Cf. Matt 27:34

No, God put this book in there for you who suffer, because He knows how you feel. And it's ok to express that. In fact, I'd tell you that you need to express it.

- I have friends who faced disappointment and looking back on it I realized that they were in a culture where they were not allowed to express their confusion and rage and so even though they kept their mouth shut that disappointment and confusion stayed in their heart and soured into unbelief. It's like a weed that they trimmed off the fruits by keeping their mouth shut, but never dealt with the roots! Hebrews 12:15 says a root of bitterness grows in us that defiles our whole life.

God can handle your doubts. He can answer your questions. In fact, I'd tell you that real faith often grows through this process of questioning and being unable to see.

- As I've often told you, doubt is a foot poised... So, see, pick up your foot.
- Jeremiah is saying, "God is cursing me. My hope is gone from God. God is like a bear who mauls me." He knows this is not true, but he's being honest about how he feels.
- Some of you, your faith is so shallow because you've never really struggled through these things. You have a domesticated God who gives you purpose and makes you feel warm and fuzzy but you don't crave Him; you don't stand amazed at Him; you don't passionately follow Him. Deep, struggles like this one are one way of God changing that.
- **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.
 - Me with hell. God let me see His size and majesty. Hell is what hell is because God is who God is. It made me worship.
- Point: Some of you need to write your own lamentation! I mean, literally. Write it.
 - And not some sanitized, positive-encouraging Christian-radio version of it, but a raw version, like Jeremiah's. (Seriously... this a Christian *song*. Can you imagine *this song* on Christian radio? *Positive, encouraging...* Then: God is like a bear who mauls and dismembers me... he won't hear my prayers...)
- So, write it out. Then go out somewhere and read it back to God. Scream it back to Him. Grieve over a shattered dream. A messed up marriage. A lost child. Allow yourself to feel the emotions and sadness and put them into words. And remember that God is listening to you.²

It's not over. ²¹ **But this I call to mind,** (this is one of the most profound transitions in the Bible. "This I call to mind." There is a choice being made) **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."** ²⁵ **The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.** ²⁶ **It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.**

There are 2 partially correct answers Christians gravitate to in the midst of suffering.

- There are people who in the midst of suffering will say, "Well, **God is enough.**" Life is hard; it's probably not going to get any better. It's bad today; it's going to be worse tomorrow. The Christian life is pain and suffering. Jesus said we'd have tribulation. But don't worry, when you've lost it all, rejoice in God. Those of you who are the more Reformed type, go to seminary. This is how you tend to talk.
- Others of you, you gravitate more toward answers like, "Hang on, God is working. He'll turn your tragedy into triumph." **It's like the story of Joseph.** You might be in prison now, but that's just

² Winston Smith in *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way*, p. 6

temporary. Just like God had something good for Joseph later in his life, He's got something for you, too. He is preparing you for something great. He's using the prison to prepare you for the palace. You guys that are a little bit more on the charismatic side think like this.

Both answers are partially true. But both are incomplete. This text addresses both.

²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

- Portion is a word that the Jews used to refer to their allotment of land, the inheritance passed down in a family from generation to generation.³ The 'promised land' that God gave to Israel; this is our "portion of it." I'm reading Leviticus, and this is used a lot. This was your family's treasure; it was their prize, their portion from God.
- Jeremiah is saying, "I don't have any land. The Babylonians took it. But God Himself is my portion." God Himself is my treasure and my prize.
- Think of the blessing of God as a pie:
 - This part represents health; a good marriage; prosperity in my job. God Himself is my portion.
- **Habakkuk 3:17–19 (ESV)** ¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength;
 - There's nothing wrong with praying for the blessing of friendship, or love. But you know what? God is better than that blessing. Earthly marriage is just a shadow of the heavenly love we craved. The arms that we longed for in marriage were His arms. The tenderness and affection and security we longed for was found in the God who gave Himself for us at the cross. I want to be married, but if I'm not, or not in a good one, then God is my portion. And God is better than marriage.
 - There's nothing wrong with praying for the blessing of money. But you know what? *Jesus is better than money.* He provides more meaning and more security than all the money in the world. God never crashes or dips below 10,000. And God promised to provide for all of our needs.
 - In the pie of God's blessing, God is the best piece. God Himself is the best of all His blessings, so God is my portion.

So, Jeremiah says, "The Lord is my portion. His steadfast love never ceases. Therefore I will hope in Him." **God is enough.**

But it also says...

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. ²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD

- Here is the other side: I know that God is bringing salvation into the earth. He is a tender Father who, when I got up this morning, thought of me with new mercies. And I trust He is working good in my life.
 - When I put my kids down...
- A lot of Reformed people, "Oh, life stinks. Tomorrow will be worse. But you have God now, and it will all be better in heaven."
 - Yeah, but I also look for God's goodness in my life now. I love this phrase from the Psalms, "*I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*" Psalm 27:13⁴ It's not just

³ Deut 32:9; 4:20.

⁴ Cf. Psalm 88:10–11

at death I'll experience God's goodness. It's on the earth! His goodness is not just for the grave, but also for the living. Psalm 88:10 says that **God doesn't just work wonders for the dead, and it's not just the departed who experience God's goodness, and His steadfast love is not experienced only in the grave.** I expect to see it here.

- I expect to see God's goodness in my family. I don't say, "Oh, well, my wife is probably going to leave me. My kids are going to grow up and reject God and the church will probably turn against me... but it's ok I still have God." Now, if those things do happen, I do still have God, and God is enough.
- But I look to the mercy of God and His kindness in my life now. In my marriage. In our church. The Lord is compassionate and merciful. He loves to show favor and kindness. Like any Daddy.
- I know heaven is awesome. But I want to see God's goodness now.

Job is a great example of both. Job is a guy whom God took everything from. Lost his job and all his money; his kids are tragically killed; his friends and wife turned on him. But God tells Job, put your trust in me. And if you read all the way to the end, two things happen to Job. **Through the depth of his pain, he really gets to know God and God's grace and God's sufficiency; but God ALSO pours out more blessing on him than he had at the beginning**—restores his relationships and his fortunes so that he ended up with, on earth, more than he started with.

- His mercies are new every morning.

You say, "Well, if I could just see what is God doing in this dark hour, I could make it." I (won't go long on this since Trevor did such a good job last week on this, and I don't a lot of time left, but here is what Scripture say God is often doing in our pain)

- **He's pursuing His agenda** (which is bringing salvation to the earth).
 - We can see, from this vantage point, what Jeremiah couldn't see. Through this exile, Jesus would come.
 - God is doing the same with us. He is pursuing His agenda of world salvation, and just like it was with Jeremiah, and Jesus, and Paul, that process includes our suffering.
 - The way Paul said it was "death in us brings life in you."
- **He's purifying your heart**
 - Sometimes He'll tear down your kingdom so you can see whether or not you're into your kingdom, or His. I've had this happen... God shatters a dream to purify a prayer. Am I really living for God's Kingdom? **Illus.** Life as a movie. Sometimes God will wreck your movie so you can ask yourself...
 - Sometimes He just wants to show that you care about a lot of things more than you care about Him. **The first commandment...** He should be foremost in your thoughts and actions; you are to burn with love for Him more than anything. But that's not you. God for many of you is an afterthought. A thought you have on Sunday. Throughout the week you are consumed throughout the week with things that have a lot more weight in your heart than He does: your job; your money; your hobbies; your family; your friends. You come to church. You tithe. You're a pretty good parent. But God is not your soul passion. So God sometimes removes an idol to put Himself in that place. It's love.
- **He's preparing you for ministry**
 - This is what Trevor explained so well last week
 - Paul talked about this... He said in 2 Corinthians 1 that his ministry had been plagued by trouble at every turn. He said that the reason was so that he could know God more (I knew God in pain), demonstrate God's power better (God created so many difficulties in my path that when I finally got victory, it would be obvious to me and everyone that God had

accomplished it), and He did it to me so he could identify with other people in their pain. God taught Paul to love and understand people by breaking Him.

- **A. W. Tozer, "For God to use you greatly He must first wound you deeply."**

God uses pain. Jeremiah can't see what God is doing but he chooses to believe it. Paul compares what God is doing in our lives to a birth.

- Intense pain; screaming. Imagine going through that pain and not knowing where it is coming from or if it will end... but if you know you're giving, it doesn't lessen the pain, but it gives you hope.
- Our pain is like labor. There is a purpose in it. And the pain, Paul said, all this pain is transient (and passing); but the fruit of that pain is eternal!
- Keep your eyes on the hope of God's steadfast love.
- You say, "But I can see it... if you can see a reason for some of it... given enough time and distance, won't you see a reason for all of it?"

So what do you do in despair?

Be honest.

Vs. 21, "*But this I call to mind.*"

- **Write this down: *You can't control what you remember; you choose what you call to mind.***
- You know that this? Self-talk. One of my favorite pastor-theologians, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, old British guy, "*...there is a sense in which what the Scriptures do is to teach us how to talk to ourselves.*"⁵ I have voices of doubt within, but I overcome with the louder word of the gospel.

What am I telling myself? "*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end. They new every morning.*"

Here's a question: How do you know that? How do you know God is not upset at you and maybe punishing you for past sin? Some of you have this feeling God is mad at you.

- The gospel is that Jesus traded places... he took your condemnation. He was one torn whose body was torn by God like a bear;
- He's the one who, on the cross, faced abandonment and unanswered prayers as a punishment for sin. He literally drank wormwood (vs. 19); they gave him vinegar mixed with "gall." He drank the full cup of God's wrath.
- So that all that is left for me is steadfast love.
- The gospel is that God could not love me anymore... because I am in Christ. Christ got the full cup of God's wrath so that not a drop is left for me. When I wake up in the morning, there is nothing there for me but mercy, because the cup of God's wrath is EMPTY.
- Today, when I woke up, I reminded myself as I do every day, that there is no way God could feel *more tenderly* or *more inclined to blessing* than He does, not because of how I lived yesterday but because He sees me as in Christ and He couldn't love and feel more favorably about Christ.
- That's Christianity. Being in Christ. He took your sin. You get His righteousness.
- If you're one of those people who feel close to God when you're doing well; feel distant... you don't get the gospel. Still in "works-righteousness."
 - The gospel is gift-righteousness.
 - Jesus in my place. God's feelings about you don't go up and down because you are in Christ and God's feelings about Christ don't go up and down.

⁵ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression*, 116

So, get up every morning and choose to believe in that grace. Call it to mind. Choose to believe that because Christ has suffered for you, no condemnation remains, nothing can separate you from His love, He will never leave you or forsake you, and surely goodness and mercy will follow you all the days of your life, even when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death He is working all things for your good.

It is impossible to believe the gospel and despair.

One final thing:

I say this trembling... for those of you who are separated from Christ, when you go through tragedy, there really is nothing but despair. Because you have no hope that the grave ultimately cannot take from you.

I once heard a man speak who called himself, "*the happy skeptic*." He talked about how much freedom is in his life now that he doesn't believe in God. He told this group he was speaking to, "Just live your life. Embrace the moment. The only meaning of life is to live it. So live, laugh, love and just enjoy what you have that is in front of you." I thought, "What a poetically, tragically insufficient attitude toward life."

His statement is great, as long as your life is going well." As long as your books are selling well, your family is good. You are fairly healthy. But then when your wife gets cancer... A child taken from you... you are on your deathbed.

- As I've often told you... when you go under the knife for surgery... unless you have a hope that goes beyond the grave and a God who conquered death for you in your heart, you will be all alone.
- And then you face the Judge of all the universe to answer for your sin. And that is ultimate despair.
- "Mountains fall on us."

For those in Christ, there is no condemnation and no despair. You may have some rough chapters in this world, but God's steadfast love will never leave you, He is bringing goodness and salvation to the earth through you, and eternity with Him awaits you.

But for those outside of Christ, you have ONLY condemnation and despair. This world is as good as it will ever get for you. It is fleeting, and passing, and only hell awaits.

Bullpen:

- You can see this, can't you? Can't you look back at your life and see how in some of your darkest hours when you were frustrated and God wasn't answering your prayers, that He was working it for good? And that's only from a few years' distance.
- Here's the thing: if from this short vantage point you can already see God's purposes in some of your suffering, don't you think that given enough time and distance, we'll be able to see a reason for all of it?
- Despair comes when you have no vision of hope in your pain.
 - Trevor last week.
 - Paul compares it to a birth.
 - Paul in 2 Corinthians.

- This is what revolutionizes your life! The gospel is that Christ has...

Many of you go up and down in how close you feel to God. You've had a good week, you feel close. You've had a bad week, you feel distant. Some of you feel distant right now because of some bad decisions you made. That is works-righteousness (performance Christianity) and it shows you don't really get the gospel.

To do:

- ~~Lamentations references~~
- Hambrick quotes
- Dever: show God's sovereignty in it?
- Hope quotes

- You can see this, can't you? Can't you look back at your life and see how in some of your darkest hours when you were frustrated and God wasn't answering your prayers, that He was working it for good? And that's only from a few years' distance.
- Here's the thing: if from this short vantage point you can already see God's purposes in some of your suffering, don't you think that given enough time and distance, we'll be able to see a reason for all of it?
- Despair comes when you have no vision of hope in your pain.
 - Trevor last week.
 - Paul compares it to a birth.
 - Paul in 2 Corinthians.

- You know the answer is going to be that His steadfast love never ceases...
- Before we talk through why that is, let me ask you this: Why did God include those first 20 verse? Why not just start with vs. 21-24? That would be much better for God's PR campaign.
 - God could have edited this out. He could have looked over Jeremiah's stuff and said, "No.. we're going to have lose that... God had lots of choices for what to include in the Bible. He could have said, "Hmm... let's include another book by Zephaniah. His stuff is a little more

cheery with God dancing over us... Solomon's wisdom is pretty hot right now and we can't keep his sex manual, *Song of Solomon*, on the shelves so let's put another one of those in the Bible. That will drive Bible sales up. That's what the people want..."

- God chose to include this because He wants to know He identifies with you in suffering.
- Scripture, you see, is the word of God but it's also genuinely the word of man...
 - So this is Jeremiah expressing the emotions of his heart. And it is the inspired word of God. "God you seem absent. God you seem like you are distant. Like a bear who waits to devour me at every turn."
 - So, before we go any farther, let me make clear: There is a place for you to express these emotions to God. "God, you could stop this. Where are you? Nothing but darkness everywhere." Some of you think, "Real Christians don't say things like this." No, this is what is in your heart, and if you bottle it up, it's just going to putrify into unbelief. God chose to record this so you could know it was OK to express this.
 - Real faith comes out of the struggle of doubt. As I've often told you, doubt is a foot poised... So pick up your foot.
 - I have friends who faced disappointment and looking back on it I realized that they were in a culture where they were not allowed to express it and so even though they kept their mouth shut that disappointment and confusion stayed in their heart and soured into unbelief. It's like a weed that they trimmed off the fruits of, but never dealt with the roots! Hebrews 12:15 says to "beware lest a root of bitterness" grow in you and defile your whole life!
 - God can answer your questions... I believe that with all my heart! But part of faith is learning to ask the question; not in a sanitized, positive-encouraging Christian-radio way, but in a raw way, like Jeremiah does.
 - (Seriously... can you imagine *this song* on Christian radio? This is a SONG! *Positive, encouraging...* God seems like a bear who mauls and dismembers me... he won't hear my prayers...)
 - So... write your own lamentation! I mean, literally. Write out your own grief. Then go out somewhere and read it back to God. Grieve over a shattered dream. A messed up marriage. A lost child. Allow yourself to feel the emotions and sadness and put them into words. And remember that God is listening to you.⁶

***I feel like we, I, make a mistake when we try to give a formulaic understanding. **Illus.** Girl cutting my hair... It is not always a formulaic answer you need. Som

TO KNOW
TO BE USED BY GOD

God is near. God is working.

Need a vision:

- God is not out of control; He does not delight in injustice and He is not unjust.
 - He'd like to stop it.
- God does have a greater plan: revealing the cross

⁶ Winston Smith in *Divorce Recovery: Growing and Healing God's Way*, p. 6

- Out of this God brought the Messiah
- God is working in your life now to reveal the cross
- God has a greater plan in you: the cross in you.
 - “As a drill in the hands of a good dentist, so are our sufferings in the hands of God.” 631
 - “When we get right down to it, there are two responses to suffering: you either deny God’s hand in it (and become self-righteous and bitter), or you discern God’s hand in it (and trust that he is making you more like himself).

Rest in the unchanging character of God

Get up:

- Mercies are new every morning. Entails that assurance. How could that be? Gospel. Forgotten or angry

Shot clock

Waiting

What does “my grace is sufficient” mean?

Bitterness

³⁹ Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins? ⁴⁰ Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD! ⁴¹ Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven: ⁴² “We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven. ⁴³ “You have wrapped yourself with anger and pursued us, killing without pity; ⁴⁴ you have wrapped yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. ⁴⁵ You have made us scum and garbage among the peoples. ⁴⁶ “All our enemies open their mouths against us; ⁴⁷ panic and pitfall have come upon us, devastation and destruction; ⁴⁸ my eyes flow with rivers of tears because of the destruction of the daughter of my people. ⁴⁹ “My eyes will flow without ceasing, without respite, ⁵⁰ until the LORD from heaven looks down and sees; ⁵¹ my eyes cause me grief at the fate of all the daughters of my city. ⁵² “I have been hunted like a bird by those who were my enemies without cause; ⁵³ they flung me alive into the pit and cast stones on me; ⁵⁴ water closed over my head; I said, ‘I am lost.’ ⁵⁵ “I called on your name, O LORD, from the depths of the pit; ⁵⁶ you heard my plea, ‘Do not close your ear to my cry for help!’ ⁵⁷ You came near when I called on you; you said, ‘Do not fear!’ ⁵⁸ “You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life. ⁵⁹ You have seen the wrong done to me, O LORD; judge my cause. ⁶⁰ You have seen all their vengeance, all their plots against me. ⁶¹ “You have heard their taunts, O LORD, all their plots against me. ⁶² The lips and thoughts of my assailants are against me all the day long. ⁶³ Behold their sitting and their rising; I am the object of their taunts. ⁶⁴ “You will repay them, O LORD, according to the work of their hands. ⁶⁵ You will give them dullness of heart; your curse will be on them. ⁶⁶ You will pursue them in anger and destroy them from under your heavens, O LORD.”

Bullpen:

Want to end by giving you hope.

When thinking about this subject, I started to think about texts. There were so, so many! I was reading through the Psalms, and I thought, “That one would work. And that one. And that one.” Paul talks frequently about it.

What I settled on was the book of