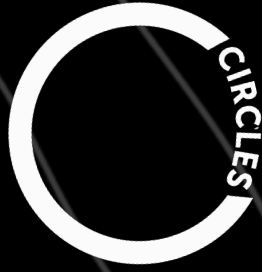


**WHAT TO DO WHEN LIFE  
HURTS**



## CIRCLE 01/03: THE STRUGGLE

### **READ: Lamentations 3:19-22**

I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope." Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed...

Have you ever felt like your whole world was falling apart right in front of your eyes? You receive a tragic message, your family falls apart, or all your friends disappear when you need them most. Sometimes life feels like a battle, and you feel like you're losing. This was the experience of someone in the Old Testament named Jeremiah. He was a prophet to the nation of Israel during one of the most difficult events in their history -- the first destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is known as the "weeping prophet." Let's explore why.

The Babylonians were on the warpath. This evil empire violently rampaged through ancient Palestine, destroying every city in its path. When they arrived in Jeremiah's hometown of Jerusalem, their pillaging was paused. It wasn't due to remorse or ethics. It's because there were walls. The bloodthirsty armies were unable to overtake Jerusalem due to the stone fortress that surrounded the city. Thus, they made a plan to use the walls as weapons. The Babylonian army sealed up the entrances and exits before throwing napalm and explosives over the city walls. Like ancient bombs, little fireballs turned a thriving city into a full-fledged furnace. Explosion after explosion, homes burst into flames and people burned alive. The Babylonians cremated an entire city.

Jeremiah was out in the wilderness and noticed smoke rising on the horizon. He ran towards the hills to look down into the valley. His heart skipped a beat when he laid eyes on his hometown. Jerusalem was burning to the ground. He could hear the screams of his friends and family. He could smell the death and devastation. The tragic reality hit him as he thought, "My life is never going to be the same." The weeping prophet collapsed onto his knees and cried out to God.

During his breakdown, he wrote the book of Lamentations. The Hebrew people simply call this book Eicha, which translates to "How?" The ultimate question is, "How could God let something like this happen?" Jeremiah wrote Lamentations to explore the character of God in the midst of conflict and the meaning of life in the midst of misery.

Each chapter is a poem designed to help the Jewish people make sense of their suffering. While your city may never be burned to the ground, we have all asked the same question of God -- "How?"

How did God let this happen to me? How did God let this happen to my family? How can I carry on despite the rejection, neglect, and sorrow? How can so many bad things happen in the world? Lamentations is an invitation for us to ask these questions too. We have all experienced loss, hopelessness, sadness, and remorse.

This passage gives us a three step process to processing pain.

### **One: Admit the Pain.**

Jeremiah makes it crystal clear when he writes, "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me." The weeping prophet admitted his afflictions that made him feel disturbed. He's not just hurt; he's bitter. It's refreshing to see this kind of emotional honesty and vulnerability in Scripture. This doesn't look like an upbeat song of celebration. It's a heartbreaking poem about tragedy. Jeremiah lays it all out there. There is no attempt to sugarcoat his situation because his suffering is bitter.

We often refuse to admit it hurts when we confront pain. We like to suck it up or swallow the feelings. But, we can learn a lot from Jeremiah. Fight that urge. Swallowing pain makes you sick. Don't ignore it. Honestly grieve your pain because you grow when you grieve.

### **Two: Bring it to God.**

If you were to read the whole book of Lamentations, the first two and a half chapters would be absolutely depressing. It's just question after question and doubt after doubt. It's really tough to read. However, something amazing happens in the middle of the short book. Despite all the darkness on these pages, some light breaks through in verse twenty-one. This simple verse acts as a hinge of hope. Jeremiah cries out the name of God. Through tears, he says, "therefore I have hope" (Lamentations 3:21).

Where does Jeremiah find hope? In the name of God. Despite all the pain, God's name still shifts his mindset. When he cries out to God, the prophet is overwhelmed by the goodness of God. This doesn't change his surroundings, but it does give context to his suffering. We should follow the prophet's process. Even when things seem grim, call out to God. There is power in his name. There is peace in his nature. When you don't have the words, proclaim the name of God. The name of God is a hinge of hope -- bridging the gap of what is bad to who is good.

Please bring your hurt to God. I know it can be hard, but invite Him into your process. The Bible teaches that God grieves with you and that He draws near to the broken-hearted. Bring your brokenness to God. He will help you put the pieces back together.

### **Three: Consider the Good**

Jeremiah concludes that he can have hope. It's not because his situation has changed. It's not because he discovered a time machine. It's not because it was all a bad dream. Jeremiah can have hope because he knows that God is good. Jeremiah is making a proactive choice to consider the good that can come from his conflict. Whenever we face pain, we should look for glimpses of goodness.

This does not mean that what you're facing is good. Not at all. Suffering breaks God's heart. He's a good Father and doesn't want his children to struggle. What you are going through isn't good, but that doesn't mean God cannot bring good from it.

Look for the positive ways God can use your pain. He can use it to allow you to help others. He can use it to reveal your resilience. He can leverage your situation to make you stronger. Whatever you're going through, consider the good outcomes that may arise.

We can sum up this passage with a simple principle: **Life is hard, but God is good.**

This statement doesn't just sum up Lamentations. It sums up the whole Bible. It sums up the whole universe in a few words. When life is hard, remember that God is good. Because of His goodness, He will see you through this. God will refuse to let you get stuck in suffering. God is in the business of redeeming rough circumstances. See your struggles through the lens of salvation. God may use your pain to help others. God may use your experiences to make you stronger. God may give you a testimony that helps change someone else's life.

Because of God's goodness, He will see you through this.

## **TALK IT OUT**

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: Does it surprise you that the Bible includes such a dark and depressing narrative like the beginning of Jeremiah's story? Why do you think that is?

Q2: Look at these three steps for processing pain. Which of these steps is the most challenging for you? Why?

Q3: When we are encouraged to "consider the good," that means we want to look for positive outcomes in negative circumstances. Explain a time you saw something good come out of a bad situation.

Q4: What advice would you give to someone who is struggling through a difficult season?

Q5: What are some practical ways we can connect with God when we are struggling?

## **READING PLAN**

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

Ephesians 2:8-10

1 Corinthians 15:10

Romans 6:11-14

John 1:16-17

Titus 2:11-14

Romans 5:6-20

Psalm 131

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

## CIRCLE 02/03: **THE SOLUTION TO SUFFERING**

Sea otters are like river puppies. They are adorable little creatures with playful spirits and social spunk. They swim together, they play together, and they hunt together. Sea otters are pack animals, which means they depend on each other for survival. This is especially important during storms that make the water rush beneath them.

Sea otters sleep while floating on top of the water. To prevent themselves from getting separated or isolated from their families, they sleep holding hands. Seriously, how cute is that? (Google "sea otters holding hands," the pictures will make your heart smile.) This practice isn't just cute. It's essential for their survival. They cling together in order to survive the storms.

When life feels like a storm and your experiences feel like a strong current, what do you cling to?

### **READ: Lamentations 3:22-24**

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

The prophet Jeremiah wrote these words while writing Lamentations. In part one, we discussed that Jeremiah's entire life burned down before his eyes. From the hills outside Jerusalem, he watched in horror as the Babylonians set fire to his city, friends, and family. Jewish life was never going to return to normal, so he mourned and lamented while writing this book. He wanted to give his people poems to help them process the utter devastation they experienced.

While these verses seem happy and upbeat, they are in stark contrast to the rest of the book. This little passage shines like a diamond in the rough. It's a glimmer of light in the middle of a mess. What's the reason for this surprisingly optimistic passage? He began reflecting on the nature of God in the previous verse. This acted like a hinge of hope. After proclaiming the name of God, his perspective began to shift. What did Jeremiah cling to during crisis? God's character.

Cling to God's character when you face a crisis. When life is uncertain, He is steady. When you feel abandoned, He is close. When you feel unlovable, He loves you. When friends fall away, He is with you. When life is hard, God is good.

Here are three powerful truths that Jeremiah clung to as he pushed through pain.

### **God's love is everlasting.**

In Lamentations 3:22, Jeremiah celebrates, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases." The Hebrew word there (Hessed) is defined as "loyal love." This is the kind of love that will fight for you, go to bat for you, and take a bullet for you. This is not a Hallmark movie brand of love; it's a warrior love. This is the kind of love parents have

for their children and soldiers have for their nation—multiplied by billions. It's not some fluffy Valentine's Day kind of love, it's a fight for you kind of love.

That is how God loves you. God's love is everlasting because of the cross. Jesus didn't just die for your sin; He died for you. He saw that your relationship was damaged, so he took on the death you deserved to save you. That is sacrificial love. Jesus wanted to protect you so badly that he took on the suffering of your sin with his own body to make it happen. His sacrifice ensured you would spend forever with him. That's a life-changing love.

### **God's mercy is massive.**

Jeremiah celebrates that "God's mercies never come to an end" (Lamentations 3:22). This Hebrew word is one of my favorites in the entire Old Testament. Mercy is translated from the word "Rahah." This word is closely related to the word for "womb." It speaks to God's compassion for you. I love the contrast here. We just looked at God's warrior-like love and it is positioned right next to his mother-like compassion for you.

Let's imagine a girl going through an unexpected breakup filled with scarring statements and broken promises. God's mother-like "Rahah" compassion is consoling her through the hurt while God's father-like "Hessed" is in his truck going to give that boy a piece of his mind. One is comforting you and the other is fighting for you.

Jeremiah says that God's mercy is new every morning. When the sun rises, God downloads more mercy into your heart. It will be enough to get you through the day. God's mercy will help you overcome whatever life throws at you. God's got this. The mercy he has given you will get you through.

### **God's faithfulness will get you through.**

Imagine being in Jeremiah's position. He's dehydrated from all the tears. He's numb from all the pain. He's in shock from what he's watching unfold before his eyes. While watching this devastation, he starts talking about the promises of God. His shaking pen scribbles, "Great is your faithfulness. The Lord is my portion" (Lamentations 3:24). With tears in his eyes, he knows that God is on his side.

The Lord is your portion. The Bible doesn't claim that God gives you everything you need. God IS everything you need. What's true for Jeremiah is true for you. God is faithful.

When your city is burning to the ground, God is faithful.  
When your life is falling apart, God is faithful.  
When you feel alone and abandoned, God is faithful.  
When you lower a loved one into the ground, God is faithful.  
God's faithfulness will get you through.

## **TALK IT OUT**

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: When life gets hard, what do people your age tend to cling to? Is that healthy or unhealthy?

Q2: Why is it important to remind ourselves of the character of God when we are suffering?

Q3: Look at these three character traits of God — loving, merciful, and faithful. Which of these is most helpful to you during difficult times?

Q4: How can we help each other remember this message when life gets hard?

Q5: What's one truth that you learned from today's message that you want to remember and focus on next time you are struggling?

## **READING PLAN**

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

1 John 1:15

Hebrews 4:12

James 1:17

John 4:24

Matthew 6:26

Revelation 21:3

Psalms 116:5

Do the following with each passage:

**ASK**— God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

**READ**— the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

**REFLECT**— on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

**RESPOND**— to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.



## **CIRCLE 03/03: THE SOLUTION TO ISOLATION**

If you've ever flipped on an animal documentary, then you know that nature can be scary. In the animal kingdom, there are ultimately two categories of creatures: Prey and predator. The prey constantly live in fear while the predators constantly seek out snacks in the form of weaker animals. At the top of the food chain, we find the Apex Predators. Coming from the Latin word for "peak," apex predators are a species at the top of their food chain. They have the comfort of knowing that no one is trying to eat them. Their whole ecosystem is their personal buffet.

You've heard of "survival of the fittest," but it's actually the "struggle of the weakest." Apex animals never pick on someone their own size. They always target the weakest, smallest, and most isolated critter during their hunt. When watching a nature documentary, you will begin to see a theme in their hunting practice. When an animal is isolated, they are vulnerable. Lions pick off antelope who are separated from their packs. Sharks swallow up sea lions that drifted away from their group. Alligators gaze at a lonely water buffalo on the shore before snatching them up in their jaws.

I know, animals are mean. But this does teach us a valuable lesson. When you are alone, you are vulnerable to attack. One of the most common struggles students face is loneliness and isolation. This is an apex problem, as it leads to a myriad of issues in your life. Isolation often morphs into sorrow, numbness, hopelessness, and despair. There is a better way to live.

You were created for connection. Since the beginning of time when God made Adam, "The LORD God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Genesis 2:18). You were designed by your Creator to walk through life with helpers of your own. When those feelings of support are missing, it's normal to experience loneliness because it's not what God intended for you. Focusing on healthy friendships frees us from loneliness. Yes, it requires some work, but it will be worth it.

### **READ Hebrews 12:1**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

The book of Hebrews was written to, well, the Hebrews. I know, sort of obvious, right? The audience of this letter was the scattered Jewish people living around Jerusalem. The children of Israel were known for their deep roots and cultural pride. What was the crown jewel of their cultural pride? The temple in Jerusalem. It was a monument to their fighting spirit, faith in God, and resilience in the face of resistance. King Solomon rebuilt the massive religious complex after its first destruction by the Babylonians. Whenever a Hebrew laid eyes on the temple, they would inevitably think, "look at how far my people have come."

Things took a tragic turn though. The Roman empire captured Jerusalem and forced them to be subservient to their Kingdom. After dozens of political clashes between

Rome and Jerusalem in late 60 AD, the Jewish people successfully repossessed Jerusalem. Optimism filled their hearts while rage consumed Nero, the Roman dictator. "Payback is coming," I imagine he snarled. Under Nero's command, the entire Roman army stormed the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. They set houses on fire, murdered thousands, and destroyed the temple brick by brick. Nero wasn't seeking revenge; he was sending a message. He wanted the Hebrews to know that they were not welcome or safe there.

While there is some debate about this, we can infer that the letter to the Hebrews was written just after the Jewish massacre and the second destruction of the temple. Due to the terror they faced, isolation was an apex problem for the Hebrew church. Can you blame them? Everyone was scared for their lives after what they witnessed and experienced. They didn't want to attend services, go to dinner together, or get spotted on the street.

The Hebrews experienced the collective suffering of the siege, so they isolated themselves. Their pain led to isolation, and their isolation led to loneliness. We tend to follow the same cycle. People often isolate themselves when they face pain or experience trauma. Their isolation removes support structures when they need them most, which ultimately makes the loneliness worse and the emotions harder to overcome. The pain will inevitably get worse and the suffering will intensify. The author encouraged the Hebrews to look to the "cloud of witnesses" that were all around them. When we face hardship, we should cling to fellowship.

The author of Hebrews asked a simple question. "How are we going to get through this?" Together. Ask yourself the same question. "How am I going to get through this?" Together, with the support of others.

How do you get through sorrow? With support.  
How do you overcome struggles? With support.  
How do you heal from heartbreak? With support.  
How do you break free from isolation? With support.  
How will we get through this? Together.

When writing Hebrews chapter ten, the author gives us three benefits of community.

### **Connection**

At the core of this passage is a simple call. Seek out connection. The people around you are a "cloud of witnesses" that will help you run the race with precision. The race of life is far easier when we are surrounded by people who will cheer us on, celebrate our progress, and push us forward. When we gather with life-giving friends, we are setting ourselves up to run the race.

If you want to get to where you need to go, then you need to stay the course. You don't want to get off track in life, right? Friends will keep your heart steady when emotions

get uncontrollable. Friends will help you stay on track. I've heard it said, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

You were created for connection. Even when you're feeling lonely, your first step is to seek out community. It may be difficult, but it will certainly be beneficial. Text that friend. Go to youth group. Join a team or a club. Pain will make you want to isolate, but healing happens within connection. Friendships are God's answer for hardship.

### **Protection**

Sometimes the race of life feels like an obstacle course. There are bumps, detours, and pits filled with piranhas. You need people to watch your back while you're running the track. When we focus on connection, we also experience protection. There is protection in packs. When you get bad news, your friends will comfort you. When you go through a hard season, a community will make it easier. When your emotions go wild, your friends will be there to laugh with you.

The apostle encouraged the Hebrews to find safety in community. The phrase "cloud of witnesses" intentionally stirs up feelings of comfort. This is especially powerful when it's written in the midst of Jerusalem's conflict, while the temple's ashes are still smoldering. When life is full of pain and uncertainty, you will be protected by the people around you. While your natural instinct is to withdraw, the best solution is to draw closer.

Whether you are working through tragedy, healing after heartbreak, or battling emotional burnout, you need a community to come alongside you. Don't go through that stuff alone. Today is the day that you need to invite someone into the tough parts of your life, because that connection will lead to protection.

### **Direction**

The author compares life to a race. Community helps us "run with perseverance" towards the checkered flag. When you have good people surrounding you, the race is much easier to run. Friends will help you stay on course. Friends will guide you when things get challenging. Friends will help you up when you've fallen down. We are all on a journey, so it's crucial we stay on course. Community acts like a compass.

It's hard to run a race with a heavy load. There are so many things that try to slow us down. From heartbreak to unhealthy habits to procrastination, good friends will help you "throw off anything" that's holding you back (Hebrews 12:1). Just like when some buddies help you carry a heavy sofa into your new dorm room, carrying the load of life is easier with a crowd. Community will not remove your problems, but it will make them much easier to carry.

Pain makes us withdraw, but Jesus wants us to draw close. When times are tough, we need each other more than ever. If you are feeling lonely or isolated, reach out to some friends or a trusted youth leader. If you notice someone has isolated themselves, reach out to them.

You will grow when you commit to gathering within a Christ-centered community. When you do, I know that it will help get you through. How are we going to get through this? Together.

## TALK IT OUT

*Go through these questions with your circle. Be honest. Be open. Talk through the tough stuff.*

Q1: Why do people tend to isolate themselves when they are struggling? Why is that unhealthy?

Q2: What are some ways that friends help protect us? What has that looked like in your life?

Q3: "Friendship is God's answer for hardship." What does this mean to you? How have you seen this play out in your life or the lives of others?

Q4: What should you do when you notice a friend is starting to isolate themselves?

Q5: What should you look for in the friends, leaders, or communities that you seek out for support? What would make them God-honoring friends to support you through challenging times?

## READING PLAN

*READ THESE PASSAGES IN ORDER EVERY DAY*

Ephesians 6:10-20

Psalms 106:19-23

1 Timothy: 1-7

Matthew 5:43-48

Colossians 3:1-17

Colossians 4:2-6

1 Peter 3:8

Do the following with each passage:

ASK– God to connect with you here. In prayer, start by slowing down and inviting God to be present. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you today.

READ– the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of the words and phrases that intrigue you, reading them a second time if necessary.

REFLECT– on what grabs you. How does this passage personally relate to your own life and experiences?

RESPOND– to the Scripture. Speak directly to God about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.