

BIBLE STUDY HELPS

TITLE: Good

TEXT: Lamentations 3:19-33

TARGET: SESSION IN A SENTENCE

We have hope in Christ Jesus when facing gloom, despair, or agony.

LOOK UP: FOCUSING THE GROUP

Display: "Gloom, despair, and agony on me"

Introduce: Does anyone remember where these song lyrics were sung? It was sung on multiple episodes of the old TV Show "Hee-Haw" (1969 -1992). The song was written by Buck Owens and Roy Clark. While the verses varied for each episode the refrain remained the same, "Gloom, despair, and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair, and agony on me." (**Note:** For fun, think about playing the song: <https://dai.ly/x2vra2j>)

Discuss: Have there ever been times when you could relate to these lyrics? Things just seemed to be getting worse and worse. You wondered what else could happen?

While the Hee-Haw song makes light of the troubles we face, it's not usually a laughing matter. As we consider those who have lost everything recently in the Maui wildfires or other tragedies over the past few months, some might be questioning why and wondering if they have been abandoned.

The book of Lamentations is an expression of the pain that accompanies tragedy and loss. The prophet Jeremiah was led by God to capture his pain as he lamented over Jerusalem's suffering. Not only had both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah fallen, but Jerusalem itself, God's Holy City, had been completely destroyed. The formerly great city sat devastated and alone, with no one to offer comfort. Jerusalem had experienced splendor, but sin had led to its ruin (Lamentations 1:12-22).

Jeremiah describes what led to this destruction in chapter 2. The Lord's anger because of the sin of God's people led to His demolishing Judah's cities, and the temple's destruction in Jerusalem (Lamentations 2:1-8). Additionally, Jeremiah lamented as he watched the people's suffering while Jerusalem's enemies rejoiced. Suffering and death loomed everywhere (Lamentations 2:18-22).

Jeremiah again highlighted God's role in Jerusalem's disaster in Lamentations 3:1-18.

Read: As I read Lamentations 3:1-18 aloud, consider times when you have felt this kind of gloom, despair, or agony.

Discuss: Had you been in Jeremiah's shoes, what would your view of God be at this point? What would you do next after expressing this kind of gloom, despair, and agony?

While Jeremiah's lament is full of "gloom, despair, and agony," Lamentation 3:19-33 reveals the hope one can find in God's love and mercy. Additionally, the passage reminds us of how we should respond when experiencing "gloom, despair, and agony." Finally, this passage will teach us something about the character of God and His empathy toward those who are experiencing "gloom, despair, and agony."

LOOK IN: UPACKING THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Remembering God's Faithful Love and Mercy Gives Hope When Facing Gloom, Despair, and Agony (Lamentations 3:19-24)

¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my homelessness, the wormwood and the poison. ²⁰ I continually remember them and have become depressed. ²¹ Yet I call this to mind, and therefore I have hope: ²² Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness! ²⁴ I say, "The Lord is my portion, therefore I will put my hope in him."

Guide:

- What was Jeremiah's emotional state at this point? (depressed) Is it wrong to be depressed by your circumstances?
- What did Jeremiah "call to mind" that helped him overcome his depression?
- What did remembering give Jeremiah? (hope)
- What action did remembering the Lord's faithful love and mercy prompt Jeremiah to take? (Put his hope in God)

The word *depressed* comes from a word that means "sink down" and here denotes falling into despair. The Hebrew wording implies an intensity to the prophet's recollections and stresses how these sufferings plagued his mind. As Jeremiah reflected on the afflictions in verse 19, he would *continually remember them* and that left him *depressed*.

At this point Jeremiah had to remember something else or his emotional state would have continued to spiral downward. What he remembered was God's faithful love and mercy. The expression *I call this to mind* can literally read, "I cause this to return to my heart." **Not only did remembering God's faithful love and mercy give Jeremiah hope, but he also made a conscious action to put his hope in God. His conscious action was due to him remembering that "the Lord is my portion."** The word *portion* denotes the part of an inheritance one receives. The relationship of God's people with Him far exceeded anything they might receive on earth.

Option: As believers, we, too, are recipients of the Lord as our portion. Listen to the following verses. Consider the inheritance (portion) we have in Christ and how these passages give us hope when we are experiencing gloom, despair, or agony.

- Hebrews 9:15 – *"Therefore, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called might receive the promise of the eternal inheritance, because a death has taken place for redemption from the transgressions committed under the first covenant."*
- 1 Peter 1:3-4 – *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."*
- Romans 5:1-5 – *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ² We have also obtained access through him by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. ⁵ This hope will not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."*

We must remember that the circumstances in which Jeremiah found himself was not of his own making. Jeremiah was calling people to repentance. He had remained faithful to God, yet he faced the results of judgment just like everyone else. When we face the difficulties that are caused by the sins of others, we should remember that we must continually remain faithful to God. He is our hope, even when the sins of others impact our lives.

And, if the judgment or discipline we are facing is due to our own sin, we still have hope. We should come to Christ in repentance and remember that the God who judges is also the God who faithfully offers forgiveness and mercy.

Discuss: Based on this passage, what should you "call to mind" about God and Christ when things seem to be falling apart around you or you are experiencing God's judgment because of your own personal sin?

Jeremiah not only remembered God's faithful love and mercy; he also knew that waiting for and seeking God would give him strength to continue.

Waiting and Seeking God When Facing Gloom, Despair, and Agony (Lamentations 3:25-30)

²⁵ *The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the person who seeks him.* ²⁶ *It is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord.* ²⁷ *It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is still young.* ²⁸ *Let him sit alone and be silent, for God has disciplined him.* ²⁹ *Let him put his mouth in the dust—perhaps there is still hope.* ³⁰ *Let him offer his cheek to the one who would strike him; let him be filled with disgrace.*

Jeremiah had hope; therefore he could wait and seek the Lord. The Hebrew word translated *wait* is similar in meaning to the word translated "hope" in verses 21 and 24. Those who waited expectantly on God's intervention would experience His goodness even through their pain.

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Guide:

- What other actions did Jeremiah describe one should take while waiting? (Quietly, sit alone, be silent, put his mouth in the dust, offer his cheek to one who would strike him, be willing to be disgraced)
- How do these actions describe the actions Jesus took on our behalf for our sin?
- What alternate actions might a person take while waiting?
- How does waiting in this manner help one seek the Lord?
- What does “waiting” look like for the believer?
- What does “seeking” look like for the believer?
- In what ways is God good to those who wait and seek?

The Lord had judged His people, but they could still trust Him. Those who would wait quietly and seek the Lord would one day see His salvation. All these actions demonstrated humility. Jeremiah suggested that *there is still hope* for those who will show such humility.

Believers must patiently trust God to strengthen their faith during hardships. God hears our prayers and will intervene. However, He will work in His timing in accordance with His perfect purpose. If our hardships are due to God’s discipline, then we must accept our actions, not justify them, and we should feel shame for our sins. It should humble us and drive us to seek and wait on Him as He disciplines us and as the earthly consequences of those sins play out. We can’t go on as if nothing had ever happened.

Jeremiah gained strength in waiting humbly and seeking God. We can find strength as well when we wait on Him to work out things. No matter how dark things might seem, we can trust Him to do what’s right for us.

Jeremiah reminds us next that gloom, despair, and agony are only temporary.

Gloom, Despair, and Agony are Only Temporary (Lamentations 3:31-33)

³¹ For the Lord will not reject us forever. ³² Even if he causes suffering, he will show compassion according to the abundance of his faithful love. ³³ For he does not enjoy bringing affliction or suffering on mankind.

Discuss:

- What comfort can knowing that God does not reject you forever if you have sinned bring to a believer?
- How can this passage contrast God’s love and compassion with His discipline for sin? How is God’s judgment of sin and His love explained by Jeremiah?
- How is discipline an expression of God’s love for us?

Jeremiah understood that even when God *causes suffering, he will show compassion*. When the prophet wrote Lamentations, he was witnessing Jerusalem’s darkest hour. The people’s *suffering* came from the Lord through the Babylonians. The word translated *compassion* denotes the deep inner identification with the difficulties of another, along with a desire to provide relief.

God’s compassion was due to His *faithful love*. Additionally, God did not “*enjoy bringing affliction*.” It is not His desire to punish or humble His people, but His holy character requires Him to deal with sin. Like a loving parent who disciplines a child and says, “this is going to hurt me as much as it hurts you,” God had to deal with sin. God’s discipline is perfect, and He will accomplish His desired results. So, believers can accept God’s love through His discipline.

When Jerusalem fell to Babylon in 586 BC, God’s people suffered greatly. Yet, Jeremiah encouraged them to maintain hope. God was still with them, and His presence would give them peace—just as it can do so for us.

LOOK OUT: LIVING OUT THE TARGET

The people of God were still facing more gloom, despair, and agony in the coming days, but they could hold on to hope “*because of the Lord’s faithful love we do not perish, for his mercies never end*.” This chapter provided the inspiration for the song “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” The hymn’s words inspire hope when we face challenging times.

Option: Listen to the lyrics of the Hymn, Great is Thy Faithfulness by Thomas O. Chisholm (1923). As you listen to the words consider how this might help you or help you to help others when experiencing events that bring about gloom, despair, and agony.

1 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.

Refrain:
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!

2 Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest;
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above
join with all nature in manifold witness
to Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. [Refrain]

3 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! [Refrain]

If Jeremiah could affirm God's faithfulness in the darkest hour in Old Testament history, we also can affirm God's faithfulness amidst whatever we face.