

WEEK OF MAY 28, 2023

LESSON AIM: **Wait on the Lord to
restore you when you
are downcast.**

UNIT: Lamentations

THEME: God-Given Grief

LESSON TEXT: Lamentations 3:19-33, 39-42, 55-58

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Psalm 25:1-22; Jeremiah 31:16-20; Luke 2:25-32;
Hebrews 9:27-28

STUDY

WAITING

BY MARK SCOTT

In the 1940s, Samuel Beckett wrote a philosophical play entitled *Waiting for Godot*. It was a tragicomedy in two acts. Two men (Vladimir and Estragon) wait for Godot—but he never comes. Many people wait for someone to come who never shows up. Not so with Jeremiah's God. When Israel's tears were sufficient, God would show up—but not until waiting had worked its charm.

As mentioned in an earlier lesson, reading Lamentations is like climbing a small mountain. One climbs up through trials and judgments (chapters 1–2) and goes down the other side through the same (chapters 4–5). But at the top of the hill (chapter 3), the book's perspective is clear. We see how God worked through the tears with his mercy and faithfulness. Memorial Day is about remembering, but Lamentations is about waiting.

What Weighs on Waiting

Lamentations 3:19-20

Many things cause the human soul to be *downcast* (humbled). Jeremiah thinks back to four of them. He remembered his *affliction* (poverty or misery) and *wandering* (restlessness). He also remembered his *bitterness* (wormwood) and *gall* (poison or venom). Such things as these can suck the life out of people. They marshal an attack against waiting on the Lord.

What Helps Waiting

Lamentations 3:21-33

Jeremiah mentioned at least five qualities that help waiting. His *hope* (mentioned three times in the lesson text; it means "to expect or trust") drove him to wait on the Lord. God's *great love* caused the people not to be consumed. Love was placed beside *compassion* (mentioned twice in the lesson text; it means "mercy").

God's *faithfulness* seemed to be at the heart of the book of Lamentations. The word means "steady" or "truthful." Because God is so faithful, Jeremiah could lean into God being his *portion* (inheritance) forever. Learning to *wait quietly* on the Lord offers up the greatest help (i.e., *salvation*). Any trial can be endured when rescue and deliverance are in sight; we can even bear up under a challenging yoke or burden.

People adopt a posture of solitude while waiting, which is not only a good spiritual discipline, but also a great help in waiting. To *sit alone in silence* can be very redemptive. Burying one's face *in the dust* can sometimes

demonstrate a contrite spirit and repentance. In fact, if people let God fight the battles and if they don't retaliate, their silence can overcome the enemy.

The text at this point takes a strange messianic turn. The phrase *let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him* perfectly described the Servant who would come and not return evil for evil (Isaiah 50:6; 1 Peter 2:23). Beyond that, this kind of behavior is expected of the Servant's followers in the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:39).

The heart of God also helps waiting. He does not want to *cast off* people forever. Even though God brought *grief*, he continued to show *compassion* and *unfailing love*. In his heart, God does not want to bring *affliction* or *grief* to anyone. He wants to save the world, not condemn it (John 3:17).

What Waiting Helps Us Do

Lamentations 3:39-42, 55-58

Waiting does not automatically bring healing. But waiting creates the context for healing and allows time for healing. Jeremiah mentioned four ways in which people benefit from waiting. First is examination, for waiting allows for serious reflection. A person logically reasons that they should not complain when they are rightfully punished for sin (though such an intellectually honest response probably is not a suffering person's first thought). Examination and testing make us want to run home to God.

Second, waiting helps us confess. Heart and hands are lifted up to God in a contrite spirit. We say, "*We have sinned and rebelled.*" He may not forgive instantly (though he might—1 John 1:9), but he will forgive in the end. God is bent in the direction of forgiveness.

Third, waiting helps us pray. God always welcomes prayer. He is put off by our distance and our preoccupation with other things. Jeremiah had literal experience with this. He cried to God *out of the depths of the pit*, and God sent Ebed-Melek to his rescue (Jeremiah 38:7-13). Jeremiah heard those words that divinity always says in the presence of humanity, "*Do not fear.*"

Finally, waiting helps us with confidence. This is a hard quality to find in the book of Lamentations. In fact, the other qualities help lead to this. Jeremiah confidently said, "*You, Lord, took up my case; you redeemed my life.*" Waiting is hard for an impatient culture with instant everything. But waiting helps us see God's sovereignty at work. ■

APPLICATION

NEW EVERY MORNING

BY DAVID FAUST

One evening years ago, I tucked my young daughter into bed while she complained about her early bedtime. “After all,” she insisted, “I’m a *night* person, Daddy!”

Some of us roll out of bed at sunrise and hit the ground running, while others take a while to get going. For night people, “A.M.” stands for “*Already Morning?*”

We all recognize the sounds of morning. Showers spray, hair dryers hum, and school bus brakes squeak. Radios buzz with music, weather updates, and traffic reports. Morning also has unique smells (shaving cream and hair spray, fresh-perked coffee, toasted bagels) and sights (that frightening first glance at the bathroom mirror, your pet’s wagging tail, the dim but brightening dawn skies).

Have you ever wondered what God does every morning?

Every Morning, God Hears Prayer

David said, “In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly” (Psalm 5:3).

We can pray any time, but countless believers recognize the value of spending at least a few minutes with God at the start of each day. Some read the Bible and journal alone at their desks, while others meet for breakfast with a small group to pray and discuss Scripture.

A friend of mine worked in a college cafeteria, and his job required him to get up early every morning. He trained himself to say “Dear Lord” as he rolled out of bed. Then when he went to bed at night, he would say, “Thank you, Lord” before drifting off to sleep, so his whole day was enveloped by prayer.

Every Morning, God Dispenses Justice

Many mornings greet us with discouraging reports about crime in our cities, confusion in our culture, and corruption in our government. Each new day brings another skirmish in spiritual warfare as we take our stand against

the devil’s schemes (Ephesians 6:11). The prophet Zephaniah was dismayed by the rebellion, arrogance, and profanity in Jerusalem. He compared the city’s leaders—including the prophets and priests—to “evening wolves” that spend the night eating their prey (Zephaniah 3:1-4).

If you sometimes feel like a sheep among wolves, remember: the Good Shepherd stands with his flock. Despite all of Jerusalem’s troubles, the prophet affirmed, “The Lord within her is righteous; he does no wrong. Morning by morning he dispenses his justice, and every new day he does not fail” (Zephaniah 3:5). As each day begins, we can take comfort in the never-failing justice of God.

Every Morning, God Provides New Mercies

One hundred years ago (in 1923), Thomas Chisholm wrote the words of a magnificent hymn that proclaims throughout the refrain,

Great is Thy faithfulness!
Great is Thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see.

Chisholm’s lyrics came directly from Lamentations 3:22-23: “Because of the Lord’s great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” Ironically, Jeremiah penned these uplifting words during a time of excruciating sorrow for the Jewish people. He believed that even when circumstances are frightening, God is faithful.

Every morning, God finds innovative ways to pour out his compassion. We should view each new day as an opportunity to catch fresh glimpses of God’s grace. The Lord’s daily mercy makes every morning a little easier to face, even if you’re a night person.

Personal Challenge: Examine your morning routine. What grabs your attention most—your Bible or your cell phone? What fills your mind first thing each day—God’s Word or the daily news? How could you use your mornings more effectively to fix your mind on things above? ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. How did you use last week's Scripture passage to tell someone about God's goodness and grace?
2. For what have you waited on the Lord for a long time?

Ask two people to read aloud **Lamentations 3:19-33, 39-42, 55-58** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What is the general tone of this passage (especially as compared to others from Lamentations)?
4. What kinds of things help us to faithfully wait for God, particularly when we are (or have been) downcast?
 - What "advice" does the prophet give us for waiting on God?
 - What parts do repentance, confession, and prayer play as we wait for God to move in our circumstances?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage? (See especially verses 22-23, 25, 31-33, 57-58.)
6. What do you learn about people through Jeremiah?
7. When have you called on the name of the Lord from the depths of a "pit"? What were the circumstances? How did the Lord respond?
8. Consider a time when you trusted in God's great love, compassion, and faithfulness during a difficult period when you were waiting for him to answer and act. How would you tell that story to a friend or family member to help them trust God more?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."
10. For what in your life today do you need God to come near and say, "Do not fear"?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Jeremiah 1:1-19** as we begin a new unit, Jeremiah (Part 1), with the theme, "Warning: Danger Ahead." You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■