



grow. pray. study.

September 8, 2019 *When Hope Seems Lost*

Scripture:

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me. *Psalm 13*

He lifted me out of the slimy pit,
out of the mud and mire;
he set my feet on a rock
and gave me a firm place to stand.
He put a new song in my mouth,
a hymn of praise to our God. *Psalm 40:2-3*

Questions in this GPS marked with an arrow bullet point are particularly recommended for group discussion. Group leaders may add other discussion questions, or substitute other questions for the marked ones, at their discretion.

Jesus' realism about life's many hurts

MONDAY 9.9.19 Psalm 147:1-5, Matthew 5:1-4

If you or someone you care about has suicidal feelings, please seek help. Reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, the Crisis Text Line (text to 741741) or The Church of the Resurrection pastoral care—(913) 544-0712 or (913) 544-0799 after office hours.

Based on a single verse (like Psalm 147:1), some people say a "true" Christian can only feel "praise." But if we, or someone we care about, is hurting deeply, that often just deepens the despair. Psalm 147 spoke after Israel's exile in Babylon (see verse 2). And verse 3 said, not that God's people were never sad, but that God tenderly cares for the brokenhearted and wounded. In the first two of his famous "Beatitudes" (from the Latin *beatus*, "blessed") Jesus' named hopelessness and grief as part of human life. But he offered God's good news to the hopeless and grieving.

- Israel's exile in Babylon left scattered people and a ruined Jerusalem. "Against all the evidence the psalm declares that Yahweh is the builder of Jerusalem and the gatherer of exiles, the healer of broken spirits and the nurse who bandages people's wounds....How can you believe such declarations? You can believe them on the basis of the fact that the God of whom the psalm speaks is the one who controls the stars and who cannot himself be put under control." * How easy or hard do you find it to trust that the universe's Creator cares about you when you hurt?
- Jesus would have used the Aramaic phrase "O, the blessedness of..." in the Beatitudes. It meant much more than circumstance-based human happiness. Scholar William Barclay wrote, "'No one,' said Jesus, 'will take your joy from you' ([John 16:22](#)). The beatitudes speak of that joy which seeks us through our pain, that joy which sorrow and loss, and pain and grief, are powerless to touch, that joy which shines through tears, and which nothing in life or death can take away." ** When, if ever, has God given you that deep inner trust? How can you daily build a bond with God that makes that good news an unshakeable part of your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I want the kind of rock-solid blessedness you offer me. Shape my heart to value what you value, to rejoice in the eternal life you give. Amen.

* John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 2: Psalms 73–150*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014, p. 221.

** William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1 Chapters 1–10 (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 89.

Clinging to hope amid awful destruction

TUESDAY 9.10.19 Lamentations 3:16-26

Put these key numbers in your phone or where you can easily find them: the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, and the Crisis Text Line (text to 741741). You can also reach Johnson County Mental Health Emergency Services 24/7 at (913) 268-0156.

In 586 B.C., Babylon's army destroyed Jerusalem and exiled many leading citizens. (You can read about Jerusalem's fall in [2 Kings 25:1-21](#)). Lamentations recorded the anguish of an Israelite (maybe the prophet Jeremiah) left behind in Judah. The writer of Lamentations couldn't see any human hope for the future (verse 18) and had to deal with "suffering and homelessness" (verse 19) in the present.

- The *Common English Bible* renders one of the great words of the Old Testament, the Hebrew *hesed* in verse 22, as "the faithful love of the LORD (Yahweh)." Other English translations use expressions like "steadfast love" or "unfailing love." The writer somehow trusted in God's unending love even in the rubble of a burned, ruined city, no doubt with unburied bodies still in the streets. How have you been able to hold to God's steadfast, unfailing love even in your worst times?
- Commentator H. L. Ellison wrote, "The 'hope' that the writer expresses here does not spring from denying or minimizing suffering and misery. Rather, these are transformed when the mind is turned to God....The very fact of awakening to a new day is a renewal of God's mercy. Humans have passed safely through the night, a foreshadowing of death." * How do you start your day as you come awake? Make a morning habit of expressing gratitude to God for this day's gift of life, even when it's a hard day.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for the gift of this new day. Whatever trials or hardships I may face today, let the morning light remind me that your mercies are ever-present with me. Amen.

* H. L. Ellison, article on "Lamentations" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged: Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, p. 1268.

Awful feelings—but “wait for the LORD”

WEDNESDAY 9.11.19 Psalm 31:9-12, 17-24

The need for resources like the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, and the Crisis Text Line (text to 741741) hardly ever comes “out of the blue.” [Click here](#) to access a family discussion guide to help better equip your family to identify and share emotional experiences with each other. Another helpful learning resource is www.makeitok.org.

Over 50 of the 150 psalms were “laments” like this one—Hebrew poems voicing some type of fear or sadness. This psalm included depression, limited vision, humiliation, anger at foes, and panic. None of those emotions are a reason to give up on life—they’re just part of being human. * The psalmist faced his awful feelings by staunchly trusting a God bigger than he was. (If you have time, read [Psalm 107](#), noting the repeated idea that “God saved them from their desperate circumstances.”)

- In verse 17, the psalmist prayed, “Lord, don’t let me be put to shame.” What internal messages, perhaps under the pressure of external events or other people’s words, trigger your feelings of shame? How can you build an identity as God’s beloved child that can limit shame’s destructive effects on your life? (This is hard work and may require help from a trained counselor or spiritual director.)
- “When Pope John Paul II spoke at Yad Vashem, the holocaust memorial in Jerusalem, he began and ended by quoting from this psalm. He commented, “We are overcome by the echo of the heart-rending laments of so many.” But we are not overwhelmed because we know that “evil will not have the last word. Out of the depths of pain and sorrow, the believer’s heart cries out: ‘I trust in you, O Lord; I say, “You are my God.” ’ ” * What has helped you learn to trust that evil will not have the last word, that you can always trust in God’s love and concern?

Prayer: Lord God, like the psalmist, I want your kind of honest strength. Teach and guide me in building my trust in you as I respond to your calling. Amen.

* For deeper study, see Christian counselor Dwight Carlson’s book *Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?*

** John Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone, Part 1: Psalms 1–72*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013, p. 99.

A LORD (Yahweh) who sees and understands

THURSDAY 9.12.19 Isaiah 40:26-31

Before or beyond the crisis moments in which you need help from the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, the Crisis Text Line (text to 741741) or The Church of the Resurrection pastoral care—(913) 544-0712 or (913) 544-0799 after office hours, there is usually longer-term care needed. [Click here](#) to learn more about the resources available from Resurrection’s Counseling Ministries.

After long years of exile, Israelites now faced a hard, wearing trip on foot from Babylon to Israel. It was tempting for them to think God didn’t see their hardships. The prophet pointed his readers to their God, who created everything, and whose understanding is beyond human reach. He invited them (and us) to trust when we don’t understand. Trust allows us to “hope in the Lord” for renewed strength, and through faith to “fly up on wings like eagles,” to “walk and not be weary.”

- Few feelings are lonelier than the sense that you are alone in your problems and must face them with no support or help. Can you recall times when you have felt like the Israelites in Isaiah 40:27: “My way is hidden from the Lord; my God ignores my predicament”? Are there areas of your life

today that feel that way to you? In what ways can you reconnect with the Creator who “doesn’t grow tired or weary” of caring for you?

- Isaiah wrote, “His understanding is beyond human reach” (verse 28). Trying to control everything can keep us stuck in the very problems we seek to escape. God calls us to “let go”—not to quit caring, but to trust the one whose “understanding is beyond human reach.” How can trusting, really trusting, in a God who’s vastly wiser than you renew your strength by setting you free from the exhausting, depressing need to know all the answers right now?

Prayer: Lord God, when you and your love feel absent from my life, help me trust you and cling to hope. Remind me of what I too easily forget—that you love, value and care for me. Amen.

Jesus learned first-hand how you feel

FRIDAY 9.13.19 Matthew 26:36-38, Hebrews 4:14-16

Did you know?

Resurrection’s web site includes a page you can reach at www.cor.org/suicide. It includes all the resources we’ve listed in this week’s GPS, plus other groups and book titles that help prevent suicide or help people move on with life after the grief of losing a family member or friend to suicide.

When we are hurting, it’s easy to think “no one understands how I feel.” Often, we extend that thought to God. How could the all-powerful ruler of the universe have any clue about how powerless, how helpless, how hopeless I feel? But we find that Jesus, as he faced the cross, experienced the depths of human darkness and helplessness as fully as any of us ever will. He does understand—he lived the experience himself.

- About Matthew’s painful portrayal of Jesus’ garden agony, scholar N. T. Wright wrote, “When we ourselves find the ground giving way beneath our feet, as sooner or later we shall, Gethsemane is where to go. That is where we find that the Lord of the world, the one to whom is now committed all authority ([Matthew 28:18](#)), has been there before us.” * In his humanity, Jesus’ feelings led him to say, “It’s as if I’m dying.” How can that help you trust that he knows firsthand whatever you are going through when the ground gives way beneath your feet?
- Apparently the letter to the Hebrews spoke to people disowned by their families and facing the Roman Empire’s fury. The writer said Jesus “got” their discouragement and fear. “When we have a sad and sorry tale to tell, when life has drenched us with tears, we do not go to a God who is incapable of understanding what has happened; we go to a God who has been there....It makes God *able to help*. He knows our problems because he has come through them.” ** In what ways does Jesus’ experience-based understanding make you more confident that he can help you when you hurt?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, in my darkest moments, help me remember you agonizing alone in the darkness of the garden. With my heart linked to yours, remind me that I am never alone in the darkness. Amen.

* N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 2: Chapters 16–28*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004, p. 161.

** William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letter to the Hebrews (Revised Edition)*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, p. 44.

When your world falls apart

SATURDAY 9.14.19 Psalm 46:1-7

One last time (please take this seriously): If you or someone you care about has suicidal feelings, seek help. Reach the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (800) 273-8255, the Crisis Text Line (text to 741741) or The Church of the Resurrection pastoral care—(913) 544-0712 or (913) 544-0799 after office hours.

Hurricanes like Dorian, tornados, earthquakes and tsunamis make us painfully aware that what we call “solid ground” can, in fact, fall apart. But most of us feel a much greater daily impact from health problems, broken relationships, financial crises, and deadly accidents. Individual and family “worlds” fall apart regularly. How can you “hold things together” when your world is falling apart? By yourself, it’s awfully hard. That’s why, repeatedly, even lament psalms turned to this assurance: “God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble.”

- Verse 4 might sound like a travel guide until we realize that no river flows through the earthly city of Jerusalem. “God’s city” wasn’t one limited earthly location—it was an image of God’s caring for all of God’s people. The river pointed back to creation ([Genesis 2:10](#)) and forward to God’s ultimate victory ([Revelation 22:1-3](#)), as it does in the stained glass window in Resurrection’s Leawood sanctuary ([click here](#) to see the window, with the river running through all of the earth’s sacred history). What have you found that helps you let the river of God’s steadfast love pour energy, comfort and power into your life? How can you ground your spiritual life firmly in the world of this psalm, where “God is in that city. It will never crumble” and “God will help... when morning dawns”?

Prayer: Lord God, when my heart fills with joy, please, receive my praise ([Psalm 100](#)). When I’m in the darkest valley and my heart breaks, please, be ever near me ([Psalm 23](#)). When I’m anxious and afraid, please, protect and cover me with your wings ([Psalm 91:1-6](#)). When I stumble, please, forgive and restore me ([Psalm 51](#)). When I’m angry at your perceived neglect, please, remind me to trust your *hesed*, your steadfast love ([Psalm 13](#)). Amen.

Family Activity: As a family, share ideas about how you can work with God to bring comfort and care to others. Discuss each person’s unique gifts and abilities. How can you use those to comfort others? How can you combine those same gifts with those of other family members to care and help? Use construction paper to create the symbol of a heart. On it, write or draw the gifts of each person. Also write or draw about how to use them to comfort people who are sad or lonely. Pray together, asking God to help guide you to use your ideas and gifts. Thank God for giving them to you. Display your family’s “heart” as a reminder to comfort and bring hope to others.

Prayer Requests – cor.org/prayer *Prayers of peace and comfort for:*

Jane Hansen and family following the death of John Pemberton (Father), 8/23/2019

Bret Boule and family following the death of Paul Boule (Father), 8/26/2019

Tammy Smith and family following the death of Betty Newell (Mother), 8/31/2019

Don Giles and family following the death of Emilie Giles (Wife), 9/1/2019

Michele Russell and family following the death of Craig Russell (Other), 9/2/2019

Nancy Judd and family following the death of James Judd (Husband), 9/2/2019

Chris Wood and family following the death of Melissa Wood (Wife), 9/3/2019

Jim Ryan and family following the death of Larry Ryan (Father), 9/3/2019