

Message Discussion Guide

Trusting God, Confessing Sin, and Banking on Mercy

The Church at Brook Hills,

Dr. Bart Box

September 5, 2010

Lamentations

This guide is to help you facilitate discussion with your Small Group. Use it as a resource to lead your group in discovering and owning the truths of God's Word. There may be questions you do not want to use and there may be instances where you just want to focus on a particular point or truth. Some questions may bring out emotions and cause people to dwell on their relationship with God. Your role is to facilitate this experience not to complete the discussion guide. Use this as a flexible teaching tool not a rigid teaching task list.

Connect . . .

Use one or both of the following options to introduce the discussion time to follow.

Option 1

Encourage learners to answer the following questions:

What do you think of when you hear the word "hope"?

Do you think hope is essential to abundant life in Christ? Why or why not?

Explain that today we will look at why, as Christ-followers, we can always have true hope.

Option 2

Invite several learners to describe a time when they felt hopeless. Encourage them to share why they felt hopeless and what gave them strength during that time.

Explain that today we will look how one man reacted to hopelessness in the face of suffering, and how we too can find hope in the midst of any situation.

Review the Message . . .

The Crisis in Lamentations

- Sin brought about suffering that was...
 - Tragic.
 - Just.
 - God-given.
 - Severe.
- Suffering brought about questions that were...
 - Profoundly intense—"Are we forsaken?"
 - Eternally significant—"Can we be forgiven?"

Discussion

- Remind learners that the prophets had long told Jerusalem that God's judgment for their sin would be coming. In 586 BC, the Babylonians completely overtook Jerusalem and took most of the remaining inhabitants captive.
- Enlist a learner to read Lamentations 1:8-10. Why was the destruction of Jerusalem a just act by God? Why was it necessary?

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- Enlist two learners to read Lamentations 1:1-6 and 4:1-11. How do these passages describe the circumstances of Jerusalem? What does the severity of God's judgment indicate about His view of sin and disobedience?
- Read Lamentations 3:37-38. Who was responsible for this severe and tragic suffering?
- Looking at Lamentations 5:20-22, what questions did these circumstances cause God's people to ask about Him? What do these questions reflect about their view of God and their view of themselves?

Application . . .

- Are we often hesitant to acknowledge God's involvement with just discipline, particularly when it involves suffering? If so, why?
- What does our lack of fear of God's judgment reveal about our attitude toward sin? Toward God? Toward ourselves?
- How can God be loving and also responsible for suffering as a result of discipline?
- If God were not in control over all circumstances (including circumstances of discipline), would He still be God (and worthy of our obedience)?
- Why does discipline so often turn our anger against God instead of against sin in our lives?

The Comfort in Lamentations

- The writer found comfort in...
 - The fresh mercies of God.
- Rooted in...
 - The unfailing love of God.
 - The unceasing faithfulness of God.
- Which gave rise to...
 - A settled hope in the provision of God.
 - A deep confidence in the character of God.
 - An urgent desire to repent before God.

Discussion

- Enlist a learner to read Lamentations 3:16-24. Contrast the lack of hope that the writer expresses in Vs 16-18 with the realization of why he can have hope in Vs 21.
- How did the writer consciously remind himself of the truths of God? What are the implications of his personal history?
- Who alone was the writer's hope based on? Why is it important that his hope wasn't based on a future change in circumstances?
- What does the writer's description indicate about God's character?
- Read Lamentations 3:31-33. What does verse 33 reveal about God's heart concerning the suffering of His children?
- How does this truth comfort the writer?

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- Enlist a learner to read Lamentations 3:39-40. What did the reflection on God's character drive the writer to do?

Application . . .

- What are circumstances in our lives that can cause us to lose our hope?
- When our souls are weary and hopeless, what are important actions that we must maintain for our spiritual health?
- What must we be doing before suffering comes to prepare ourselves for it?
- How can we "set our minds" to remind ourselves of the reasons we can live with hope?
- How does seeing God's mercy as something that is renewed every day bring us comfort and peace in our daily lives?
- Why is it important to know that God does not delight in the suffering of His children? If we believe this lie, how does that impact our view of God? Of life? What is so dangerous about this kind of view?
- Can we have true hope without a realization of the seriousness of our sin?
- How is our hope in God related to the humble view of ourselves as helpless sinners before Him?

The Christ of Lamentations

- Christ has endured the penalty of sin in the place His people.
- Christ has ensured the mercies of God for the sake of His people.
- Christ has entered the presence of God on behalf of His people.

Discussion

- Enlist a learner to read Romans 5:6-8. How was God's ultimate love demonstrated to the world?
- Read Ephesians 1:3-7. How was God's ultimate mercy shown to the world?
- Enlist a learner to read Hebrews 7:25. How does Christ demonstrate that He is for us? Why is this good news?

Application . . .

- Why is Christ the only source of eternal hope?
- Why can we always find hope in Him despite the circumstances of our life?

The Challenge from Lamentations

- Trust in the character of God.
- Confess the depth of your sins.
- Bank on the mercies of Christ.

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If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9)

Application . . .

- How does confidence in God's unchanging character help us to live each day?
- What does it look like to live with full conviction of God's new mercies every day? His unfailing love? His constant faithfulness? What areas of our lives should be affected by living with these truths engrained in our hearts?
- How can we approach suffering with hope?
- How can we thank God for discipline?