

Four Things To Do When Tragedy Strikes

*Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!
My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.
But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*

*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.”
(Lamentations 3:19–24)*

Big Idea:

The scripture comforts as the Spirit accompanies them in our personal readings but especially in corporate worship. In response to God’s mercy revealed in this passage, here are four actions to take:

I. Pour out your feelings to the Lord (vv. 1-20)

As Jeremiah remembers the horror and the trauma of the Israelites being carried away into exile in Babylon, he pours out his feelings to God. In fact, he speaks in ways that shock us because of their irreverence. First, he calls God a liar. The images in vv. 1-3 are a several of the promises of Psalm 23. Second, he says God has abandoned him (vv. 4-9). In the first 20 verses of the chapter, he speaks of God as a former acquaintance, not as one he knows. The images of vv. 7-9 are similar to Psalm 88 where the psalmist ends with the words, “darkness is my only friend.” Third, Jeremiah calls God a murderer, comparing him to wild animals (vv. 10-11), an archer (vv. 12-13), and one who has “made my teeth grind on gravel...I have forgotten what happiness is” (vv. 16-17). Fourth, he calls God a joke, a ridicule among his own people (vv. 14-15). Finally, Jeremiah says he feels like he is losing his mind. His thoughts of suffering are intrusive (vv. 19-20). As a loving Father, God allows us to express our feelings (even giving us the words to express them in scripture) because he atones for any sinfulness in them in Christ. And once we have spent our energy crying out to God in anger and confusion, we can collapse in his arms.

II. Profess the faith of your fathers and mothers (vv. 22-27)

The importance of repeating the truth about who God is in weekly worship is demonstrated in the way that Jeremiah, after having railed against God so intensely, ultimately returns to who God is. His perspective turns to hope in the Lord once he remembers God’s steadfast love and mercy (vv. 22-24). It is in light of God’s love, even while acknowledging the existence of suffering and evil, that Jeremiah is able to repeat three times in vv. 25-27 that God is good. Specifically, he likely remembered the passage that reveals the heart of God’s character: The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and

transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

III. Pursue the peace of the kingdom to come (vv. 28-39)

Next, Jeremiah seeks to align his heart with God's heart and the purposes of God's kingdom. First, he releases vengeance to God (vv. 28-30), recognizing that God does not approve of injustice and will someday bring it to a definitive end (vv. 37-39). He also remembers that God's purposes for his people are always in love. God does not afflict from the heart. He only chastises out of love (vv. 31-33). Jeremiah would later write to the people in exile in Babylon, exhorting them to "seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:7). As Christians, when we encounter tragic events that tempt us to forsake the place we are and pull away to somewhere else, we remember the prophet's words that as we seek the welfare of the city God has called us to, we will find our welfare in it.

IV. Pray with Jesus' prayers

Each of these steps in responding to tragedy point us to Jesus. Jesus prays for us with raw feelings (John 11; Matthew 26:3-46). Jesus has experienced every tragedy we face in this life, and he is with us in it (Heb. 4:15). Jesus is himself the faith of our fathers and mothers. He is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Heb. 13:8). And Jesus died as an outsider to the city of man in order to bring the city of God (Heb. 13). Jesus did not pull away from our problems but came to earth and got involved to redeem and restore all things. He came to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

Discussion Questions:

1. What are you feeling about the tragedies in our city? Have you poured those feelings out to God? If not, what might have kept you from doing so? How does this passage give you permission to do so?
2. What is a gospel truth that has given you hope over the past couple weeks?
 - A. If you are having trouble thinking of any reason for hope, read some of the following passages organized according to the most prominent emotions many are feeling right now:
 1. Fear - Psalm 56
 2. Sadness - Revelation 21:1-8; Psalm 147:3; 2 Cor. 1:3-4
 3. Anger - Deut. 32:35; Ezekiel 33:11; Psalm 73
 4. Doubt - Psalm 131; Romans 8:18-39
 5. Despair - Genesis 18:25; Revelation 22:20-21
3. What is the next good thing you can do to pursue the peace of God's coming kingdom in light of that hope?
4. How have you grown in your knowledge of Jesus over the past week?