One of the things people often say about grief is that time heals. While there's some truth to that, anyone who has actually walked through grief knows it's rarely that simple. Grief doesn't move in a straight line. It moves in circles. You can have a day where you feel like you're doing okay. You're moving forward. You're functioning. And then something small happens: a song comes on the radio, you smell something familiar, you see an old photo, and suddenly the grief is right there again. It feels as fresh as the first day. You revisit the same emotions again and again.

In many ways, grief is less like walking down a road and more like circling the same ground over and over. You return to the same questions. The same memories. The same ache. It's slow. It's repetitive. It doesn't resolve quickly.

When God Feels Like the Enemy

That's one of the things we see in the Book of Lamentations. The whole book is written as poetry built around the Hebrew alphabet. Last week, Josh showed a slide explaining how chapters 1 and 2 work with each verse corresponding to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. But in chapter 3, the structure intensifies. Instead of one verse per letter, each letter is repeated three times. That is why this chapter has sixty-six verses instead of twenty-two.

In other words, the poem slows down. The writer lingers. He circles back through the same emotions again and again. In many ways, the structure itself mirrors the experience of grief. When you're hurting, you don't rush through it. You revisit the same memories, questions, and pain. Lamenting takes time.

Lamentations is written out of a moment of deep communal grief. Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was gone. The city that once represented God's presence and promise was reduced to rubble. The people were not just dealing with political defeat; they were wrestling with the deeper question underneath it all: "Where is God in this? It feels like God is the enemy." Sometimes grief works like that. Sometimes grief isn't just personal, it's communal.

Like many of you, I'm no stranger to grief and loss. About ten years ago, when I was leading our Student Ministry, we lost one of our youth leaders in a car accident. He was young and about to become a father. He was loved by the students. The kind of leader who showed up week after week and invested in the kids' lives.

When the news came, it didn't just affect one person; it hit the entire community—students, leaders, families, and CPC as a whole. It felt like the whole ministry was grieving together.

I remember those days so clearly. As a leader, I had to help our students process what happened. We gathered, prayed, and cried together. We tried to make sense of something that didn't. Many asked the same question as the people in Jerusalem: "Where is God in this?" It was communal grief. We were all carrying the weight of it together.

At the same time, there was another layer. While I was helping lead the High School Ministry through that grief, I was also grieving personally. I had lost a friend. Someone I had served alongside, someone whose life had mattered deeply to me and to the ministry. What I've learned about grief is that it doesn't really disappear. It changes shape over time, but it doesn't vanish.

Last week was the ten-year anniversary of his death. And even after all these years, when that date comes around, the grief is still there. Not the same as it was in those first days—but still present. Still real. Grief has a way of moving in circles. That is where we find ourselves in Lamentations 3.

Traditionally, many people have believed the prophet Jeremiah wrote this book. Jeremiah was the prophet who warned Jerusalem for years that judgment was coming, and he was also there when the city was destroyed by Babylon in 586 BC. In fact, Jeremiah is often called the "weeping prophet" because of the grief he carried for his people.

The book itself doesn't name the author, so scholars sometimes debate the authorship, but what's clear is that the voice of this book comes from someone who lived through the destruction of Jerusalem. This isn't a distant reflection. This is someone processing the trauma of watching their city, their temple, and their community collapse. That's exactly where Lamentations 3 begins.

The voice of the book suddenly becomes personal. The writer says, "*I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of the LORD's wrath" (Lamentations 3:1).* Instead of hearing

the voice of the community, we now hear the voice of one person speaking from inside the pain. The grief of the nation becomes embodied in the experience of an individual sufferer.

He doesn't say, "I heard about suffering" or "I have studied suffering." He says, "I have seen affliction. This is lived pain. The writer doesn't pretend everything is okay. He describes darkness, feeling trapped, feeling unheard. It's raw language. And it gets even more striking when you notice the imagery he uses.

If you know Psalm 23, the word rod should sound familiar to you. In Psalm 23, David says of the shepherd, *"Your rod and your staff, they comfort me."* The shepherd's rod was a tool of care. It protected the sheep from predators. The staff guided them back when they wandered. But here in Lamentations, the writer says he feels like he has been struck by the shepherd's rod.

In other words, the same shepherd whose rod comforts in Psalm 23 now feels like the one who has disciplined him, and that tension is exactly where the writer is living. He believes God is still the shepherd, but right now the experience feels painful, confusing, and even overwhelming. The Bible does something remarkable here. It doesn't silence that feeling. It gives it a voice.

Sometimes we think faith means putting on a brave face or moving quickly to the positive. But biblical faith doesn't require pretending; it invites honesty. What follows in these verses is one of the most honest descriptions of grief, loss, and confusion we find anywhere in Scripture.

The writer describes his life as walking in darkness rather than light. *"He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light; indeed, he has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long" (vv. 2-3).* What's striking is that he attributes his suffering directly to God. Over and over he repeats the phrase, "he has." He has driven me. He has turned his hand against me. He has made me walk in darkness.

From his perspective, God doesn't just feel distant; God feels like the one behind the suffering. God feels like the enemy. That's difficult language for us to hear, but it's also incredibly honest. The Bible doesn't sanitize the emotional life of faith. It gives us words for those moments when life feels confusing and when God himself feels hard to understand. The writer goes on to describe his suffering with vivid physical images.

> **He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones. He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and hardship. He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead. He has walled me in so I cannot escape; he has weighed me down with chains. Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer. He has barred my way with blocks of stone; he has made my paths crooked. vv. 4–9**

One of the most painful lines comes in verse 8, where he says that *"Even when I call out or cry for help, he shuts out my prayer" (v. 8).* It's the language of someone who feels trapped—physically exhausted, emotionally worn down, and spiritually unheard. Then the imagery grows even more intense. *"Like a bear lying in wait, like a lion in hiding, he dragged me from the path and mangled me and left me without help. He drew his bow and made me the target for his arrows" (vv. 10-12).*

Notice something important: the writer isn't turning away from God. He's still speaking to God about God. That's what lament does. Lament doesn't hide confusion or pretend everything is fine. Lament brings the confusion straight to God. The suffering here isn't just physical, it's emotional and social as well. The writer says he has become the laughingstock of his people. Life tastes bitter. His dignity feels gone. He even says, *"He [God] has broken my teeth with gravel; he has trampled me in the dust" (v. 16).*

By the end of this section, the writer reaches a devastating conclusion. He says he has been deprived of peace. His endurance has perished. And then he says something incredibly honest: "My hope from the Lord has faded." That is the lowest point of the chapter. Peace feels gone. Strength feels gone. Hope feels gone.

Many of you know this feeling; many of you are currently living it. You pray. You cry out. Heaven feels silent. I love this quote from Mark Vroegop, "Lament is the language of those stumbling in their journey to find mercy in dark clouds." Faith sometimes sounds like grief before it sounds like hope. The Bible does not ask us to pretend. It invites us to bring our confusion, pain, and despair honestly before God. The path to hope often begins with honest lament.

The good news is that if you are at the bottom, God can meet you there. Just a few verses later, the writer will say, *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:" (v. 21).* The turning point won't come because circumstances suddenly change. It will come because the writer remembers who God is. Before hope can be rediscovered, Scripture gives us permission to sit in this place of honest lament. Because sometimes faith doesn't sound like confidence, but sounds like grief that is still being brought before God.

The Turning Point—Remembering

Yet right at the lowest point of the chapter, when hope and strength feel gone, the writer does something unexpected. He shifts his focus. The turning point doesn't come

because his circumstances suddenly improve. Jerusalem is still in ruins. The grief and loss are still real. The questions are still unanswered. But something changes in the way he thinks. He begins to remember.

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me" (vv. 19-20). Notice he doesn't pretend the pain isn't there. He doesn't minimize it or move past it quickly. He acknowledges it. He names it. He says, "I remember it." The grief is still present and still weighs heavily on his soul.

But then he makes a deliberate choice. *"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope" (v. 21).* That phrase is incredibly important. Hope, in this moment, is not something he feels naturally. It's something he chooses to remember. He intentionally brings something to mind, something about who God is. This is the turning point! What we see here is a pattern that shows up again and again in Scripture. The movement isn't—pain, fix, hope—that's usually what we want. We want the pain to be resolved first. We want the situation to be fixed, and then we will feel hopeful.

That's not what happens here. The movement in this passage is—pain, memory, hope. The writer intentionally calls something to mind. He remembers something about who God is. What he remembers is: *"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" (vv. 22-23).*

Even in the middle of judgment, even in the middle of devastation, he remembers that God's steadfast love has not disappeared. The Hebrew word here is *hesed*—God's covenant love—his faithful, committed love toward his people. The writer realizes that the very fact they are still alive means God's mercy is still at work.

Then he says something deeply personal: *"I say to myself, 'The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him'" (v. 24).* In the ancient world, your portion was your inheritance, security, and future, but the writer says, "Even if everything else has been taken away: even if the city is gone, the temple is gone, and life feels uncertain, God himself is still my portion."

That changes everything because hope, in this passage, is not built on circumstances getting better. Hope is built on remembering who God is, even when grief remains, questions remain, and the ruins are still all around. The writer begins to realize that while everything else may feel unstable, the character of God has not changed. His love is still steadfast. His mercy is still new every morning. His faithfulness is still great. Sometimes that's where hope begins, not when life suddenly makes sense, but when we remember who God is in the middle of it.

Learning to Wait with God

Remembering God's character begins to shift the writer's perspective, but it doesn't immediately remove the pain. The circumstances haven't changed. Jerusalem is still in ruins. The grief is still present. But remembering who God is begins to reshape how the writer responds to suffering. Instead of spiraling deeper into despair, he begins to talk about waiting on the Lord.

In verse 25, he says, *"The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him" (v. 25).* That statement is striking because it comes in the middle of devastation. The writer isn't saying life is good right now; he's saying God is good to those who continue to seek him.

Then he adds something that feels counterintuitive to most of us: *"It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord" (v. 26).* Waiting is rarely what we want in moments of grief or confusion. We want answers. We want relief. We want the situation to be fixed. But the writer says there is goodness found in waiting, because waiting keeps us anchored in trust rather than control. Sometimes waiting is not passive; it's one of the deepest acts of trust we can offer God.

One of the things I remember most from those days after we lost our youth leader was how much I wanted answers. As a leader, you feel this pressure to help people make sense of things. Students were asking questions. Parents were asking questions. Honestly, I had the same questions myself. I remember wishing there was something I could do to fix it, to somehow move everyone past the grief faster, to bring clarity to something that didn't make sense. But there wasn't anything to fix. There wasn't a quick explanation that made the loss feel okay. All we could do was gather, pray, cry, and take the next step forward with God together.

Looking back, I realize that season taught me something about waiting. Waiting doesn't mean nothing is happening. Waiting is one of the ways God loosens our grip on control and strengthens our trust in him.

He continues. *"It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young" (v. 27).* A yoke was the wooden frame placed on an animal so it could pull weight and learn how to work. It was a tool of training. The writer is saying that hardship, as painful as it is, can become a teacher. Suffering has a way of shaping humility, endurance, and dependence on God in ways comfort rarely does.

Then he describes the posture that suffering can lead us into: *"Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope" (vv. 28-29).* These images describe humility and surrender, sitting quietly before God, and acknowledging our limits.

In the ancient world, putting your face in the dust was a way of expressing deep humility. It was a way of saying, "God, I am not in control."

Even as the writer talks about suffering and humility, he doesn't lose sight of God's heart. In verse 31, he reminds us, *"For no one is cast off by the Lord forever."* The suffering may be real, but it is not the final word. Verse 32 continues, *"Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love."* The writer is holding two truths together at the same time: God may allow suffering, but God's ultimate posture toward his people is compassion.

Then he says something incredibly important in verse 33. *"For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone."* In other words, God does not delight in human suffering. He is not cruel or indifferent. Even in discipline or judgment, God's heart is not one of pleasure in pain but of purposeful love.

The writer then widens his perspective, reminding us that injustice and oppression—crushing people underfoot, denying them justice—are things that God does not approve of. In other words, the suffering we experience in this world is often tangled up in human brokenness and sin, not simply God's desire.

And then he asks a profound question. *"Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it?" (v. 37).* The writer is wrestling with the mystery of God's sovereignty. Nothing ultimately lies outside of God's awareness or authority. And yet he refuses to reduce suffering to something simple or easy to explain.

He ends this section with a searching question: *"Why should the living complain when punished for their sins?" (v. 39).* It is a moment of reflection. Instead of only asking, "Why is this happening to us?" The writer begins to ask, "What might God be doing in us?" In other words, remembering God's character doesn't eliminate suffering, but it changes the posture of the heart. It moves the writer from despair to humility, from accusation to reflection, from demanding answers to waiting on the Lord with hope.

Turning Back to God

If remembering God's character leads us to wait on him, the next step the writer invites us into is something even deeper—honest reflection. Instead of only asking, "Why is this happening?" The writer begins asking a different question: "What might God be inviting us to see about ourselves?" That is why verse 40 says, *"Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord."*

Up to this point, the writer has been describing suffering, but now the tone shifts. Instead of only describing pain, he invites the community, before God, to reflect on their lives. Lament isn't just about expressing grief; it can also become a doorway to repentance. The writer calls the people to examine their hearts, to be honest about their sin, and to turn back toward the Lord.

He continues in verse 41, *"Let us lift up our hearts and our hands to God in heaven."* That image captures the posture of repentance, both inward and outward. Their hearts are lifted toward God in humility, and their hands are raised in prayer. *"We have sinned and rebelled and you have not forgiven" (v. 42).* The writer isn't minimizing what has happened. He recognizes that the destruction of Jerusalem was not random. It came after years of ignoring God's warnings and turning away from him.

The writer then describes the weight of God's judgment in stark terms. He speaks of God covering himself with anger, pursuing his people, and even shutting out their prayers. He describes the community feeling rejected, mocked, and overwhelmed by fear. The devastation they experienced, the destruction of their city, the loss of their security, still hangs heavily over them.

But then something changes. The tone becomes deeply personal. The writer says, *"Streams of tears flow from my eyes because my people are destroyed" (v. 48).* The suffering of the community is not just an abstract idea to him. It breaks his heart. His grief becomes prayer. He says his eyes will keep weeping until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees. This is the posture of intercession. The writer is not only lamenting for himself; he is carrying the grief of his people before God. The pain of the community becomes the burden of his own heart.

He describes how overwhelming that grief feels. He says the waters closed over his head, and he thought he was about to perish. It is the language of drowning, of being completely submerged in sorrow and despair. Yet even here, the writer continues to bring his pain before God. He does not withdraw. He does not give up praying. Even in the depths of grief, he keeps crying out to the Lord. That is the heart of lament.

Lament does not pretend everything is fine, but it also refuses to walk away from God. Instead, it keeps bringing the pain, questions, and grief into God's presence, trusting that, somehow, God is still listening. As Vroegop says, "Lament is the language that moves us from our sorrow toward the truth of God's promises."

Praying from the Pit

And that leads us to the final movement of the chapter. After walking through grief, remembering God's character, learning to wait, and calling the community to

reflection, the writer brings us back to where lament always leads—prayer.

In verse 55, he says, *"I called on your name, Lord, from the depths of the pit."* The image here is powerful. The writer feels as though he is at the bottom of a deep pit, completely surrounded by darkness. It is the language of desperation. Yet even from that place, he continues to cry out to God. Lament doesn't stop praying when things get difficult. In fact, lament prays most honestly when we feel like we've hit the bottom.

Then he says something remarkable in verse 56: *"You heard my plea: 'Do not close your ears to my cry for relief.'"* Earlier in the chapter, he felt as though God had shut out his prayers, but now he remembers that God did hear him. *"You came near when I called you, and you said, 'Do not fear'" (v. 57).* Even in the depths of grief, the writer begins to recognize that God was not as distant as he once thought. God was present. God heard. God drew near.

From there, the writer begins to speak about God as the one who brings justice. In verse 58, he says, *"You, Lord, took up my case; you redeemed my life."* The language shifts into the imagery of a courtroom. God becomes the defender of the one who cries out to him. The writer trusts that God sees the injustice that has been done and that ultimately God will act.

He continues to describe the wrongs committed against him—insults, plots, and the mocking from his enemies. But instead of seeking revenge himself, he places those injustices into God's hands. He recognizes that the Lord sees everything that has happened.

The writer calls on God to bring justice. He asks the Lord to repay his enemies according to what they have done and to deal with the oppression and hostility they have shown. These verses remind us that lament does not ignore injustice. Instead of taking matters into our own hands, lament entrusts justice to God.

What's striking about the way this chapter ends is that it doesn't resolve everything neatly. The pain is still there. The injustice has not yet been reversed. The writer is still waiting for God to act. But the prayer continues, and the writer is still praying, which brings us back to the truth at the center of this chapter: Hope is choosing to remember God's character while life still hurts.

The writer remembers that God hears. He remembers that God draws near. He remembers that God sees injustice and will ultimately bring justice. Nothing around him has been fixed yet. But remembering who God is allows him to keep praying, trusting, and waiting. Lament, at its heart, is faith that refuses to give up on God, even while the pain is still present.

If hope is choosing to remember God's character while life still hurts, then how do we live that out when we're in the middle of pain? Lamentations 3 doesn't just tell us that hope is possible in the middle of pain; it shows us how to walk through it. The writer moves through a pattern that believers have followed for centuries—lament, remembering, waiting, and prayer.

The chapter begins with brutal honesty, with lament. The writer doesn't pretend everything is okay. He describes darkness, feeling trapped, feeling unheard. It's raw language. But what is important to notice is that he brings all of that directly to God. Sometimes we think faith means putting on a brave face or moving quickly to the positive. But biblical faith doesn't require pretending. It invites honesty.

Lament is the act of bringing our pain into God's presence rather than carrying it alone. That means we can pray things like, "God, this hurts. God, I don't understand. God, I feel overwhelmed. God, why is this happening?" Lament isn't a lack of faith. Lament is faith refusing to walk away from God even when life is painful.

The turning point of the chapter comes in verse 21 after remembering. The writer intentionally remembers something about God. He remembers that the Lord's love has not failed, that his mercies are new every morning, that his faithfulness is great. Hope begins when the writer chooses to bring those truths back into focus. Because when life hurts, our emotions start telling us stories about God that are not always true.

We start believing that God is distant and has forgotten us, or that the situation will never change. The writer models something different. He reminds himself of what is still true about God. Sometimes hope begins the same way for us, not when our circumstances suddenly improve, but when we remember who God has always been.

After remembering God's character, the writer begins to talk about waiting and prayer. Waiting is one of the hardest parts of faith because waiting reminds us how little control we have. We want answers. We want relief. We want things to move faster. But waiting becomes a way of trusting that God is still at work even when we can't see it.

Notice how the chapter ends. The writer is still praying. The pain hasn't disappeared. The injustice hasn't been resolved. But he continues to call on God from the depths of the pit. That's what faithful waiting looks like. It keeps bringing the pain to God. It keeps seeking him. It keeps

trusting that he hears. Because hope isn't pretending life doesn't hurt. Hope is choosing to remember God's character while life still hurts.

Grief has a way of reminding us how fragile life really is. There are moments when circumstances don't make sense, when the pain doesn't resolve quickly, and when we're left waiting for God to move. Lamentations reminds us that faith doesn't require pretending everything is okay. Instead, it invites us to bring our pain honestly before God, to remember who he is, and to keep turning toward him even when life still hurts. Because hope is not built on circumstances suddenly getting fixed.

Hope is choosing to remember God's character while life still hurts. His love has not failed. His mercies are still new every morning. Even in the middle of grief, we can still say with confidence: Great is your faithfulness.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

Catalog No.1499-4FC