



LAMENTATIONS DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

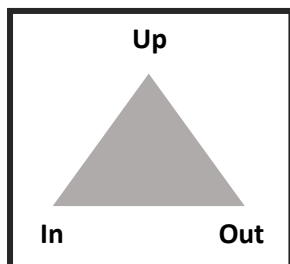
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENTATIONS

The author of Lamentations is a little unclear but there is strong evidence from both inside and outside the book that points to the prophet Jeremiah as the author.

The original Hebrew name of the book, '*ekah*', can be translated '*Alas!*' or '*How?*' I think this sums up the book well, giving the sense of weeping or lamenting over disastrous events. Somewhere along the line, translators substituted this with the title '*Lamentations*' because of its strong feeling, memories and meaning. It's this idea of lamenting that makes many people think the weeping prophet Jeremiah penned it.

Not only does the author of Lamentations witness the results of the recent destruction of Jerusalem (as suggested in chapter 1), he also seems to have witnessed the invasion itself. He was present for both events, making him a class scribe!

Tough wee book to write on ... hope you enjoy.

Phil

Read

Lamentations 1

Live

“How deserted lies the city once so full of people!” These are the opening words of Lamentations, using the tragic imagery of a lonely widow bereaved of her husband and children. It is a bitter lament of her present sorry state in pain and despair. As the author describes the tragedy of Jerusalem’s fall, one would rightly ask, ‘Why did this happen?’ The answer is simple. It was because of the great sin of the people in the city over many generations. The story of Jerusalem’s fall and demise is mingled with confessions of her sin.

I think it is interesting that the writer isn’t inquiring about the reasons behind this distress and ruin but is just astonished at it. He is saddened at the state of Jerusalem, which a little time ago was thriving with people and trade. The historian Josephus tells us there were eleven hundred thousand people in the city before the invasion and all were either killed or carried into captivity. Sin is horrible. In the end it always produces death and destruction. Don’t mess around with it. Rather, be ruthless when it turns up in your life!

It is important that we note a valuable principle here – no matter how great someone has been in the past, all that can change quickly with a change in conduct. Great reputations have been destroyed almost overnight by sin and stupidity. I have noticed in my years and experience that heartache and regret are often the cousins of rebellion. Sin does have its price tag, don’t let anyone ever tell you any different! God is rewriting our stories and as we get older. His story keeps getting bigger and bigger and should become more and more liberating in our lives. If we are ever going to boast, we should boast in God’s righteousness and be humbler in our weaknesses.

Pray

Father, I want to finish my race knowing and living, sharing and serving the gospel of Your grace. Please strengthen my heart daily with Your love. Though I know and love You in part, You know and love me perfectly. I’m so thankful that You continue to fill my heart with more of Your glory and Your grace. I’m a work in progress. May I ever stay on the Potter’s wheel until You take me home or You return. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The Lord, who formerly was on their side, their God and guardian, their protector and deliverer, is now against them. I'm reminded of Hebrew 10:31 *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* This section in Lamentations deals with the destruction of the temple and the heartbreak connected with that event. In the day of God's anger not even His footstool is spared, which, according to 1 Chronicles 28:2, is the temple of God. Obviously, it was because of their sin that God behaved as an enemy towards them, bending His bow and stretching out His right hand to slay their young, male and female.

I find it inspiring and amazing that even though the Old Testament was divinely designed to consist of specific ordinances, God was far more concerned with His people's lives than the material ordinances and trappings of the temple. James 2:23 records Abraham as being called a *"friend of God"*. When I was a boy, I used to love this and wonder what it must be like to be known as a friend of God. I used to think the same of Moses who, Exodus 33 tells us, spoke to God like a friend, face to face. Then one day I was reading the Gospel of John and I found this truth in John 15:15, that God no longer calls me a servant because a servant does not know what his master is doing; rather, He calls me His friend.

Oh, what an awesome privilege – you and I, under the new eternal covenant are friends of almighty God! I think of the end times when the Friend of all will become the Judge of many. I want Him to be my friend. How about you? Whether I have a little or a lot, am well known or forgotten, I want to be content and alive in Jesus, operating to the fullest potential of my calling and destiny.

Pray

Father, there are some aspects of this life of grace for which I need constant reminders. Contentment is one of them. So many times I'm complaining and being discontented. Help me today to relish Your mercy and grace. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The prophet mixes his own griefs and afflictions with those of the nation. It is right to be troubled and overwhelmed by God's wrath. As bad as things are, we are indebted to the mercy of God that they are not worse. We should sit down and think about what is going *for* us, as well as what is *against* us.

I love that God's compassions fail not. I can gather fresh manna every morning. Things here on earth are perishing, but what God gives is forever. This passage draws me to Psalm 23 where we are reminded that His goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our lives ... and when that's done, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Pretty cool, I think! Where there is life, there is hope, and instead of complaining that things are bad, we should encourage ourselves with the hope they will be better.

When things go wrong for us, sometimes we are quick to reflect on other people's ways and blame them, but our duty is to search and try our own ways that we may turn from evil to God. Our hearts must go with our prayers. If inward impressions do not answer to outward expressions, we mock God and deceive ourselves. In Lamentations, these were the people who bore the name and the testimony of God.

This chapter allows an insight into the heart of Jesus as He looked over Jerusalem and wept. His words ring, *"I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her brood under her wing, BUT you would not."* I think also of Gethsemane where He cried, *"Father, if there be any other way..."*. God is zealously working all things together after the counsel of His will, working in all things for His glory and for our good. No one and nothing can deter or distract God from bringing to completion His good work of redemption.

Pray

Father, my prayer is from this chapter today... *"I called on Your name, LORD, from deep within the pit. You heard me when I cried, 'Listen to my pleading! Hear my cry for help!' Yes, You came when I called; You told me, 'Do not fear.' Lord, You have come to my defence; You have redeemed my life."* In the strong name of Jesus. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is tough stuff. The fall of Jerusalem was awful. The temple was looted, houses were burned, walls were tumbled. Zedekiah was captured, his sons slaughtered in front of him, and then his eyes gouged out by the Babylonians. Many thousands were butchered; other thousands were led away as captives, either to be sold or to die of starvation and abuse. Animals could nurse their young but it seems Jerusalem's starving women could not.

Why did God not just destroy Israel which had become worse than Sodom? It was only because God had promised Abraham and the patriarchs that He would bring in the Messiah. In a sense, God was stuck with Israel until that promise was fulfilled in the birth of Christ. In a way, their punishment was greater than Sodom's. Sodom's was instantaneous; Israel's lasted seventy years, beginning with this unspeakably tragic siege. Verse 9 reminds of how it is better to die instantly than to suffer for a long time starving to death. I'm sure many of the people prayed for a sudden death.

As the chapter closes, we see a chink of light as her punishment will end. Jerusalem is well aware of why this is happening to her. We have a way of knowing how we are doing with God, don't you think? When it's not going great, it is a good practice to remember what it was like when it was! There are winter seasons in my life when I feel like the lover in Song of Solomon running through the streets unable to find God. In times like these, it is good to remind myself of those times of deep intimacy and love. This is what Jeremiah is trying to do in today's reading, reminding us that the winter will end and soon the summer will come. I await the day when God's constant presence will be my greatest reward. Paul reminds the church at Corinth, *"Then I will know as I am fully known."* I love this!

Pray

Father, I remind myself today of those early days when I first knew You. Nothing could have deterred that energy, love, and commitment I had. Alas, life and circumstances have dulled my flame to a flicker. Restore and rekindle me today. In Jesus' strong and redeeming name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In this chapter, the people pray to God for mercy and grace. It's a national prayer, probably written by Jeremiah on behalf of the busted-up people of God. In its conclusion, it rises above all the sorrows in a magnificent appeal to Him whose throne is forever and ever. The final appeal is for God to "*turn Israel*" unto Himself. I love this and think it should be the prayer of every local church in the world. Their cry is for God to look upon them and deliver them.

Today's chapter kicks off with begging God to remember what's happened to the people of Jerusalem (though I don't think He had forgotten). This is the Promised Land that Joshua had led them into, and now it is in disgrace, overrun by a bunch of random Babylonians. The children of Israel are orphans with no fathers and the women are widows. The whole family structure has dissolved. The people don't even have access to basic items they need to survive.

For the first time, the author questions God, "*Why have You forgotten us completely? Why have You forsaken us these many days?*" It was the prophet's prayer for the suffering nation. We know if they turn to God with sincere hearts, He will quickly return to them in mercy. Troubles may cause our hearts to fail and our faith to fall, but the way to be reconciled to God is open. Let us, in all our trials, put our whole trust and confidence in His mercy and confess our sins, pouring out our hearts before Him. It is good to know that all will be well in the end. With all that in mind, fear, love, serve and trust in the Lord. Thank God today for being the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, the God of limitless patience and incomparable compassion. Instead of giving me what we deserve, He has given me Jesus who is my perfect righteousness and eternal redeemer. WOW!

Pray

Father, I confess to You what You already know – my sin and deepest regrets, my inner thoughts and wrongful desires. I pray like the psalmist, "*Restore unto me the joy of my salvation and renew a right spirit within me.*" In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

