

(Sermons will be preached on Feb 19th, 26th, March 12th, 19th and 26th)

At the first session consider showing the whole group this introductory [video](#). At the last session use the this [video](#) which takes the story through to Easter morning.

To inhabit *Lamentations* I suggest that you use a form of *lectio divina*. Each week read slowly through that week's chapter allowing people time to reflect on what they read, then consider the following questions:

- What has surprised you?
- What has challenged you?
- Have you felt like this and how might these words have helped you to express it in prayer?

Alternatively you may want to use the following notes. Beware of over theologising, so that you are still 'inhabiting' the text rather than 'dissecting' the text. Also, however tempting it might be to rush ahead to 'answers' to the prayers being offered, try and keep focus on the emotions in the chapters with all the uncertainties and ambiguities that are left hanging. The questions focus on pastoral use of the chapters

Christopher Wright suggests the underlying problem in Lamentations is that:

Hope is ... theologically centred in the Poet's faith, but structurally decentred in the Poet's experienced reality. The truth about God's ultimate faithfulness and compassion does not erase that pain or silence the questions it generates. They continue in the unresolved present and into an as yet unknown future, even as the book ends. (Wright: 34)

There are more questions than are needed for one evening. Be selective in what you use, you are not expected to answer all the questions, some may be more relevant in your group than others.

Week 3 Lamentations 3

This chapter is somebody reflecting on what has happened, taking personally what God has done to the people. Verses 21-23 contain maybe the only words that many people know: the words are very scriptural and true. However, the sentiments are so out of character with the rest of *Lamentations* that a question has to be asked as to whether they are used as words of hope or a prayer that is saying something along the lines of 'God this is what you promised, so why aren't you acting like this?'

Note that in this chapter each stanza of the poem is made up of three verses and that this governs the thought process.

Overall structure

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 1-21 | This is effectively a witness statement stating what God has done. |
| 22-24 | A statement about God's covenant faithfulness ('great love' in v22 is hesed, the Hebrew word for love most closely associated with God's promises), but see note in the header on interpreting them. |
| 25-33 | Patience is called for – no quick fix |
| 34-39 | God sees and knows, do we have a right to complain? |
| 40-45 | Repentance called for – followed by confession |
| 46-51 | Pain at what has happened – and patient waiting 'until God sees' |
| 52-66 | A prayer seeking judgment on those responsible |
| Vv1-21 | How easy do you find it to get alongside those who are hurting, how often are you willing to listen to the same story of woe? What helps you to persevere? |
| Vv22-24 | What verses of scripture do you turn to when things have got really tough? Do you use such verses as 'comfort' verses, or ones of protest to God as to why he has stopped acting as he said he would? |
| Vv25-66 | How easy do you find it to be 'patient' with God?

How do you pray for those who have hurt you? |