

Pop Verses: Lamentations 3:22-23

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Today our “Pop Verse” is from Lamentations 3:22-23

So far, we have studied pop verses from the New Testament. Now it is time to receive wisdom from the Old Testament. This wisdom comes from the book of Lamentations. If B.B. King had written a book of the Bible, it would have been Lamentations. It contains five poems of cries, regrets and pain. It is filled with “the blues.”

But unlike most blues songs Lamentations does not express heartache over some bad luck or a lost lover. Lamentations expresses the heart-breaking aftermath of Jerusalem being destroyed by evil Babylon. You don’t read Lamentations as much as you feel it. Jeremiah wrote these poems, and you can feel his pain as he cries out to God. His agony is tangible as he expresses his grief over the loss of his homeland. The special places where he grew up were destroyed. Many of his friends had been killed. Everything he knew and loved had been wiped out.

In the verses just before our pop verses, Jeremiah expresses his pain: The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss. –Lamentations 3:19-20

Have you ever felt like Jeremiah? Have you ever felt so much pain that you are bitter inside? Have you ever felt homeless and homesick, desperate for love and connection? Have you ever lost something or someone so special that your grief was almost unbearable? That’s where Jeremiah was. Maybe that is where you are today.

You see, contrary to how some Christians portray the Bible, it is not an antiseptic book, out of touch with the pain and suffering of life. Throughout the Bible we see people crying, yelling to God and others over the pain in life. The Bible is filled with people who feel helpless and hopeless. Jeremiah was no exception. Yet Jeremiah, amid his pain, would say this: Yet I still dare to hope... –Lamentations 3:21

Jeremiah was down but not out. He still had the audacity to hope amid his mess. He still had hope that one day he would find help and healing and relief from his pain. And what gave him such hope amid such agony? How could he find hope after all he had been through? Jeremiah dared to hope because he remembered something crucial. What he remembered are the pop verses for today.

“Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is God’s faithfulness; God’s mercies begin afresh each morning.” –Lamentations 3:21-23

Jeremiah remembered the help of God in the past. He remembered God’s faithfulness to him. He remembered God’s long-suffering mercy. He remembered how God’s love had not failed him. He trusted God. Jeremiah put it this way: I say to myself, “The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!” –Lamentations 3:24

It is easy to read about Jeremiah’s hope and trust in God. It is easy to talk about trusting in God. I believe most of us would agree that God is there to help us. It is easy to agree with it. What’s difficult is trusting it when life gets tough. It is hard to find hope when everything in life seems to be coming apart. Even remembering God’s help in the past doesn’t always cut it when we are faced with unfamiliar problems and hurdles.

Jeremiah had never experienced such devastation before. He had never seen such annihilation, and evil. It was all so foreign and frightening. And yet he still dared to hope and trust in God for help.

Perhaps you are faced with unfamiliar pain and difficulty. Maybe in the past when you got into trouble it was easy to trust God for help because you had been there before. However, perhaps the trouble you are in is new terrain for you and your hope has run out. Maybe it is the loss of a job you’ve had for years. Maybe it is losing someone special. Maybe it is the realization that you are not as young as you used to be and you can’t do some of the things you love anymore. Perhaps life has forced you into some kind of change that is very scary, and you don’t know how to respond.

How can we find the kind of trust in God that empowered Jeremiah to dare to hope? How can we find the confidence to believe that God will help us? How can we find God in our darkness when we don’t feel God at all?

The answer can be found in the verses that follow our pop verses. It's one thing for Jeremiah to say, "God is great and merciful. God is faithful. God will help." But how do we apply it? How do we make that real for us? Well Jeremiah tells us the secret to having such hope and trust in God amid such unspeakable tragedy and pain is that, "The Lord is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him." –Lamentations 3:25

After Jeremiah says that he dares to hope in pain and waxes poetic on the mercies of God being new every morning, he gets down to the business of how hope works. He gets down to the brass tacks of learning to trust God.

He plainly says the Lord helps those who depend on God and search for God. The word "search" really means "crave." In other words, God helps those who ask for help.

That's sounds simple, doesn't it? But let me tell you one of the biggest things we forget. God loves us and cares for us and wants what is best for us. God wants to help us, but God is not going to barge into our lives. That's not the kind of God we have.

Have you ever experienced someone who tried to push their opinions on you? Ever had some insufferable person try to force their agenda on you? I must confess that one of my pet peeves, one of the things that annoys me the most, are people who try to control me or force me into things.

It is not fun dealing with pushy people.

Our God is not a pushy God. God is not going to force anything on you. God's Spirit may gently nudge you but God is not going to push you into anything. That's what Jeremiah means when he says the Lord is good to those who depend on God and search for God.

This doesn't mean that God will not help us unless we grovel and feel terrible about ourselves. It means that God will not show up in your life uninvited. God will help you when you ask God for help and make room for God in your life. God will help when you let go of control and depend on God. Once you do that, you can have hope and confidence that God will help. This is why Jeremiah said this in verse 26: So, it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord. –Lamentations 3:26

Because Jeremiah depended on God and asked for help, he could wait in quiet confidence in the Lord for salvation. "Salvation" simply means "wholeness."

Ask God for help and wait quietly and confidently for God's help. Let me tell you what I have learned: "God may not come early, but God will never be late!" God is always on time. Don't give up! Help is on the way! In the meantime, don't try to guess what God is going to do. Just trust God and stick close to God.

Don't look at everything at once. Just do the necessary things God calls you to do, one step at time. After you have taken several steps, the answers will begin to appear. In those times you will find that your hope and faith will grow.

Throughout my life I have learned this to be true. God is always right on time. Through all my pain and problems and confusion I have learned I can trust God. Even though I can't always see God at work or even feel God, I know I can trust God to see me through my suffering and redeem it.

I have learned that God is bigger than my problems. God is bigger than your problems and like Jeremiah, let us put our trust in God and wait upon God. Let us depend on God and search for God. Amen.