



## Sermon-based Guide

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

# Week of February 28

## *An Honest Diagnosis*

**Scripture:** Lamentations 2:1, 11-12, 18 and Deuteronomy 28:47-50

### Summary

Jeremiah and those for whom he speaks clearly believe that what is happening to them (the downfall of Jerusalem and their desperate current condition) can be directly attributed to God. They are not innocent victims but culpable.

It is God who has judged them and found them wanting. It is the rejection of God's love and God's covenant promise that has led to God's punishment. The Jerusalemites, and the chosen people of God as a whole, have turned from God and turned their attention to "other gods" – other ways of being, other sources of meaning and purpose. They have abandoned both God's moral code and God's insistence that they will not worship anything or anybody else. They have abandoned the abundant Kingdom that God offers for the shiny but empty "kingdoms" of the world.

Lamentations teaches us that God's punishment is the way in which God grabs our attention, disciplines us, and makes us aware of God's singular ruling presence in our lives and our need for God.

This is hard. We don't like to think of God as punishing us. It's hard for us to square the unmerited grace we receive from Christ with the merited judgment that we receive from God.

But what if it is true? At least at some level? What if our sinful actions (both moral and social) lead to God's discipline in our lives? Do we accept that discipline? Do we change, repent (turn around) because of the tough but loving discipline of God? As Christians, do we allow that discipline in our lives to restore us back to following Jesus?

What if when we are confronted with our sins and their consequences, we did what Jeremiah describes the citizens of Jerusalem doing? What if we respond with a posture of mourning and confession that is so strong and visceral it becomes physical? What if we not only wept for ourselves but we wept for others?

How good and right it would be for us to be so clear-eyed and passionate about our need for God, and our recognition of our sin that we wholly give ourselves over to him and to cry out for his mercy.

Necessary caveats:

- God's discipline is never cruel for its own sake – which makes it different than the punishment that many (particularly those in positions of earthly authority) hand out.
- God's discipline is never just a catharsis for God, but its intention is to bring us back.
- And, as we will center on in week five, Jesus ultimately pays for our sins and makes possible that right relationship with God.

### Questions

- 1. Read the scriptures and summary above. Refresh your memory of the sermon by sharing key points and illustrations.**
- 2. What about this topic is challenging you?**
- 3. What did you hear in the sermon that was clarifying or helpful to you?**
- 4. How do you go about an honest diagnosis of your spiritual health? (How do you examine your heart?) How do you see us doing this on a communal level as a church?**