LEARNING PERSEVERANCE FOR LIFE

nough

2

from the books of JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS



to





NDIVIDUALS







Faith Enough to Finish

Small Group Study Guide

Based on the Book "Faith Enough To Finish" by Jill Briscoe - ISBN 978-1-4964-2959-9 Permission to appropriate text and concepts given by the author.

2022 • St. John's Lutheran Church of Orange • All Rights Reserved. Any reproduction of this material by any means, in whole or in part, is prohibited without written permission from St. John's Lutheran Church of Orange. 154 S Shaffer St, Orange, CA 92866 714-288-4400

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes are taken from the NIV: THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION[®], NIV[®] Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.[®] Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.



St.John's Lutheran Church of Orange | www.stjohnsorange.org

CONTENTS

Small Group Essentials	2
How to Use this Book	2
1 God Is God Enough	5
2 His Hope in Your Heart	11
3 His Plan in Your Life	15
4 Your Roots In His River	21
5 His Man On Your Team	27
6 His Tears On Your Face	31
7 His Strength For Your Days	35
lce Breakers	40

Small Group Essentials

THE FOUR KEYS 🔍

Four key ingredients should be a part of every small group:

A The Word of God: Whether we study straight from the Bible or study the Bible through devotional books/guides, we are committed to growing from the Word of God in Christ.

4 Growth: We are here because we want to grow and see our lives transformed to be more like Christ. As part of this growth we commit to pray for each other. We seek to encourage each other and hold each other accountable in the steps of our discipleship process: CONNECT - GROW - SHARE.

Acceptance: As members of this group, we seek to accept each other unconditionally as Christ does each of us, seeking to build strong friendships rooted in Christ.

& Confidentiality: Everything shared in this group stays with this group. Gossip and slander are unacceptable. Like Christ, we seek the best for each other.

How to Use this Book

If you are participating with a small group. Here is a suggested format.

Prior to each meeting, ask the group members to read the lesson and come prepared to discuss in small group. Small group discussion will consist of reading the lesson, scripture, watching the video content (optional), and discussing questions. Some leaders choose to ask their group members to answer the discussion questions prior to each week's meeting.

Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer, Read the Four Keys (10-15 Min.)

We encourage you to spend a few minutes getting to know each other and reviewing the Small Group Essentials listed above.

Read the Lesson (5-10 Min.)

Read the lesson aloud with the group. It's a good idea to have each group member take a turn reading a paragraph or two until you have read through the lesson.

[OPTIONAL] View the Video Content (5 Min.)

Watch the optional video, and then discuss what insights were gained, or what caught the attention of the members in the group. www.stjohnsorange.org/faith2finish

Questions and Discussion (45 Min.)

Discussing all the study questions for each session is not expected or required. Your group may have robust discussion on just a few of the questions, or they may move quickly through many.

Prayer Requests and Closing Prayer (10 Min.)

Take time to use the prayer prompts and also note any praise reports and prayer requests from the group. Please pray for your group members during the week.

Week One God Is God Enough

💭 Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer

Q Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (*watch optional video content*)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Not long after we built a new middle school building here at St. John's, affectionately known as the Chapman Building, I was in a funk. We had not been able to run a successful capital campaign in a generation. We had not had a successful building project, which was completed on time and under budget, until this one. But even so, this project had taken its toll on me. Working to raise the money, to coordinate with the Project Management Team, and lead the parish all the way through to the dedication of the new building was the most draining peroid of my life up to that point.

I went to the chairman of the congregation and told him I needed something that would nourish my heart and that I needed just to get away. Through a friend, I found a small event in St. Louis led by Jill Briscoe. And that seminar led me to a moment of refreshment, renewal, and a rethinking of my faith and life. Jill's voice belies her London home, and her tones were so soothing. Even more, her words touched my heart and led me to a restorative place.

During the last couple of years, we have been through so much and it's been draining. Through the world-wide pandemic episode we have had to wrestle with masks, look at one another with dread, and socially distance in a way that has led to soaring rates of depression and drug use among younger people. The early 2020s have been a draining time with rioting, the fever-pitched elections, and the horrible impasse we seem to be at as a nation. Finally, the rebuilding of our economy, our institutions, and even our own lives seem to be taking too long. Do we have the faith to finish?

This study, 'Faith Enough to Finish,' leads us to Jeremiah the prophet. In his time, Jeremiah was speaking the Word of the Lord from a very difficult perspective. At this time in history the Babylonians had defeated the Assyrians and were now moving toward Israel and Judah looking to conquer. God's people had been scattered in their faith. They had mixed their belief in the Lord with Canaanite religions and now... did they have the faith to finish?

Key words from Jeremiah became the words of a familiar hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." As Jerusalem was being clobbered Jeremiah wrote, "

²² Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him."
²⁵ The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; ²⁶ it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. ²⁷ It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young." [Lamentations 3:22-27]

Perhaps in our day and time we need to find the restorative hope of Jesus and the faith to pick up and, with great confidence, live our lives in Him. During our time in this study, we will explore the following themes:

God is God Enough	His Man on Your Team
His Hope in Your Heart	His Tears on Your Face
His Plan in Your Life	Faith that Perseveres
Our Roots in His River	

It's so important for us to be reminded of the sufficiency of God for us. God is God enough. God is not good to us just 50% of the time and we need to somehow figure out the other 50%. Rather, God is good all the time. And that means that God is God enough in my good times and in my very difficult times. God is God enough through major illness. God is God enough in divorce. God is God enough in grief, addiction, recovery, and in all things. God is God enough. I do think it's important to note that God is not just God enough for the circumstance, but God is God enough for you. God is God enough for all people.

We have been through so much over the last three years. Recently, I heard a pastor talk about latent grief in our society. He said we need to collectively grieve the losses we have had over the last three years. We lost our community and the ability to live together. I will always remember at the height of the pandemic, that roads, restaurants, and parking lots were empty. So many thought it would be no big deal, but the reality is that we all suffered a loss of community and connection which calls us to rely on God in a new and more intense manner.

We have obviously grieved the loss of loved ones and had to find creative ways just to be able to mourn, or even to visit loved ones before they died. I will never forget the story of a wife who dropped off her husband at the hospital and then his procedure went awry, and he died. She received a call from the hospital, and they asked where to mail his things. Not only was the loss bitter, but the opportunity to grieve was short circuited by the circumstances. The graveside service had to be socially distanced and limited to a small handful of people. Perhaps we do have some latent grief we need to handle as community and as Christians.

Other things need to be brought to light and reckoned as well. We struggled with the George Floyd riots and all the ramifications that surrounded that historic event. At some point we started talking more about race as a divider than Christ as a divider. I can go on and on. It's been a time of upheaval and a reordering of so many pieces of life that mean so much. Family life, church life, political life, and economic life have been significantly impacted in countless ways.

Jeremiah lived and prophesied at a difficult time as well. The Assyrians had been defeated by the Babylonians and they were on their way westward to wipe out any nations that were in their way. The people of the Lord had memories of Kings Saul, David, and Solomon, but those days of conquering and of great economic and political power were gone. The kingdom was fragmented in so many ways, most notably their faith life had been mixed with the religion of the region which was crass and gross and led people away from the Lord. It was a time of reordering.

The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. God called him to prophesy and speak the Word of God in such a painful time. Jeremiah's words were a reminder that in the midst of any turmoil, "God is God Enough."

The main concern I have as a pastor is that I will be able to lead our congregation to have the faith enough to finish the chapters in our lives. How do we write those chapters well and see the sufficiency of the Lord and His abiding love for us? The story of Jeremiah encourages us with plenty of strength and support. Lamentations 3:22-23:

"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."

Even as his nation is being devastated by war, Jeremiah writes, "God is God enough." In this fall study, we will be saying this over and over. "God is God enough... for me."

The sufficiency of God is that He knows what we need. After all, He knew us before we knew us. In Jeremiah Chapter 1 God proclaims, **"Before I** formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart" [Jeremiah 1:5]

We realize that we have been formed by the same potter who shaped Jeremiah. Our lives are designed and set free in the love of the Lord Jesus. He has a purpose for our success and failure. He has purpose in our pain and our moments of suffering. He is God enough when life is very difficult, and He reminds us of that repeatedly.

God had work for Jeremiah, and He has work for you and me. He said to Jeremiah, "I have put my words in your mouth." And He instructed Jeremiah

to, "tell them everything I command you and do not omit a word." [Jeremiah 1:9, Jeremiah 26:2] Perhaps now is the best moment in current history to have the Word of the Lord on our lips for those we love, those we struggle with, and for a nation that has lost its sense of meaning and purpose. God is God enough and has given us a mission and a Word.

Jeremiah had excuse after excuse. He spoke of being too young, he spoke of family, he spoke of being alone, but God had an answer for each piece. God was God enough for Jeremiah's excuses. God neatly listened and then folded them up and put them away and sent Jeremiah out. God is God enough for each excuse. And in that He provides strength for each moment of our lives.

God is God enough. Enough mercy. Enough grace. Enough compassion and enough loving-kindness to go around. He pours out enough of these blessings for each of us every day. Great is His faithfulness.

My hope is that our study of Jeremiah reminds you that God is God enough and more. The faith God gives us to finish is the same faith that He gave us to start the great adventure of our lives. Life is filled with moments of joyful laughter, miraculous moments that are touched by God's Spirit of grace. We are reminded through Jeremiah that God will turn laments into laughter and sorrow into shouts of triumph. You'll see, for He never changes, and great indeed is His faithfulness!

QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

1. When you reflect on the most difficult life circumstances that you've experienced, what do remember and what are some of the moments of difficulty? What were some of the shining moments that you were reminded of God's faithfulness?

2. Please turn in your Bible to Lamentations 3. If you run your finger down the verses, you can follow the thinking of Jeremiah. Stop at verse 21. How does this work, "yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope?" [Lamentations 3:21] It's easy to be sucked into negativity. How do you/we "call the promises of God to mind?" How can and does this become a way of thinking?

3. How have you experienced Lamentation 3:23? What new mercies have you experienced? Why does Jeremiah say that new mercies are poured out in the morning? Are night owls exempt from new mercies?

4. Lamenting is a lost art in our culture. Studies have shown that the average person can handle 15 seconds of silence. Think of our worship life; if we have silence for an extended moment, people begin to think something is wrong. God's people have lamented for thousands of years. It's ok to lament. What would it look like if we truly lamented and grieved with one another? Would we be able to be more reliant on God if we would embrace the tears when painful realities present themselves rather than running to delightful denial? [Lamentations 3:19-21]

逸 PRAY

As you take prayer requests and pray for each other, take a moment to form your prayers around these phrases...

God is God enough for this circumstance

God is God enough for this time

God is God enough for me

lleek Two His Hope in Your Heart

💭 Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer

Q Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (*watch optional video content*)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Do you remember your daily rhythms when you were in your twenties? Stay out late, wake up about 11:00 am, and then kind of do your thing? There's something that kind of kicks in when we get to our thirties and forties. I'm not sure if it's children or career, but so many of us seem to wake up early and get after it the closer we get to middle age.

I'm reminded of the seasons of life when we feel dry and worn out. If we talk for a moment, or think for a moment, those events and seasons can start to play on the screen of our hearts and minds. We can reflect and think about how God has been God enough for us throughout the ebb and flow of our lives.

Sometimes there are moments in life where we feel spiritually dry and struggle with the sufficiency of God. It's typically when we feel alone, and God feels distant and far away. We look at life and think that hope has left the building. It's in those moments of faith distress that we need to be reminded that God is God enough for us!

Faith distress is a real thing. And it's a real thing that happens to the most faithful of Christians. We are moving along in our lives, doing fine and then we hit a wall. Something, perhaps a habitual sin, has slowly drained us of hope. Or something else, perhaps a sudden illness, puts us in a place where hope vanishes almost immediately.

Faith Distress can show itself in several ways:

- 1. We get God and life mixed up: God is not cruel, however; life can be cruel.
- 2. We struggle in our prayer life and can't find the words.

- 3. We face inner turmoil and peace is elusive.
- 4. We feel disappointed by God, that He has abandoned us, and we have no hope.

All of these, or any one of these can cause faith distress. We need to learn how to recognize these symptoms and use them as opportunities to turn back to the God who is God enough. We need to be reminded of God's great faithfulness when we struggle from faith distress. For God in His love puts His hope in our hearts.

Faith Distress may be overcome by:

- Faith Development: I am responsible for mind work. God takes care of the heart work. "This I call to mind; therefore, I have hope." [Lamentations 3:21]
- 2. Tell yourself the truth: **"The Lord is my portion; therefore, I will wait for him."** [Lamentations 3:24]
- 3. Put yourself into silence: **"Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him."** [Lamentations 3:28] We live in a content-driven culture, sometimes it's good to reflect and listen.
- 4. Stay quiet until you sense His grace: **"It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord."** [Lamentations 3:26] This practice brings us tranquility and peace and allows us to focus on the Lord's great love.
- 5. Forgive yourself: God says, **"I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."** [Jeremiah 31:34] The Messiah who Jeremiah looked forward to, and we receive in faith, looks upon us with grace and in His grace calls us to forgive ourselves.

And then life turns. Attitudes and thoughts turn into affirmation actions and the faith to finish takes hold in our behaviors. Some of these affirmative behaviors are:

- Genuine faith that believes in the ultimate goodness of God: "The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him." [Lamentations 3:25]
- Genuine faith stops whining. God hates whining. When His people murmur against Him and one another it makes God angry. [1 Corinthians 10:10]
- 3. Genuine faith cheerfully perseveres. **"weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning"** [Psalm 30:5]

God is God enough. He is enough for your life. He is enough for our nation and world. God is God enough and great is His faithfulness. For in His faithfulness, He has put His hope in your heart.

Some would offer that we are going from dry season to dry season. Perhaps you're currently feeling like you are living in a drought of life. There are sure

moments that seem like they will never end and never be okay. Yet the promise of God reminds us that God is God enough for each moment and each circumstance. And even more, God is God enough for you! He puts His hope in your heart!

That hope is not a rarity, rather that hope, the hope that comes from Jesus is almost a state of thinking and feeling for Christians. When His hope is in our hearts, there is a resiliency and a tenacity that sees us through those moments of faith distress and replaces distress with hope. I remember a former pastor at St. John's years ago speaking of hope. I don't remember the text, the Sunday, or many details of the morning. What I do remember is Pastor Constien standing with silver in our pulpit at the early service. I remember that it was a very hot day before we air-conditioned The Sanctuary. Pastor drew his message to a quiet point, drew a breath, raised his hand, and with his deep smooth voice he shared, "hope is simply faith that looks forward."

When we live out our faith in the easy and difficult days, when we see life's challenges and distresses through the eyes of faith, and we press forward, we live in hope every day. God is God enough. God puts His hope, His future, in our hearts. He did so for Jeremiah, and He does so for us.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Faith distress is a real thing. Most if not all Christians have gone through it. So many times, young Christians find their first bout of faith distress and then turn quickly away. If you're comfortable, share a moment you went through faith distress and what you were thinking and feeling?

2. Please think about and discuss this sentence: "I am responsible for mind work, and God is responsible for heart work."

- 3. Read Lamentations 3:19-33 and match each verse to one of the following:
 - a. Belief in God's goodness
 - b. Willingness to stop whining
 - c. Cheerful perseverance

Which of these are you willing to work on or are working on now?

4. Hope is a good thing. Take a moment in your group to go around and share some of your hopes. Remember, hope is faith that looks forward. What are you looking forward to and what does it do to your heart to share your hopes?

魚 PRAY

Pray for future things, what are your hopes and aspirations? What are you hoping for that seems impossible? Are there pieces of your life that you have hoped for and can lift in gratitude to God? His Hope in your heart!

Week Three His Plan in Your Life

 Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer
 "Take my life and let it be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee, Take my moments and my days, Let them flow in ceaseless praise." —LSB 783
 De the matching of the provided the provi

Q Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (watch optional video content)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

When I turned five-years-old, I invited all of the neighborhood kids to my birthday party. The only problem was that I wasn't having one. No party had been planned. When my parents saw children arriving at the door bearing presents, they quickly figured out what had happened. My loving parents promptly worked out a plan and created a party beyond what I deserved. They sent someone for ice cream and scrambled together some games. Later we had firm conversation about how things go better when they are planned in advance.

In the midst of the chaos of the world today, it is comforting to know that our Heavenly Father has a plan for each one of us—a plan that was in place even before we were born. One of the great wonders of life is that we have an all-knowing, all-powerful God who knows us as individuals. He loves us and cares for us. He puts each of us here for a purpose.

God knew Jeremiah before he was born, and He already had a plan for him. Jeremiah 1:5 tells us, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."** Jeremiah was to be the one to tell the people what God wanted them to know. Typically, this was not what the people wanted to hear. Jeremiah initially resisted God's plan, claiming that he was too young and did not know how to speak. His days were filled with rejection and pain, yet he persisted in following God's plan for his life. God had a plan for Moses, even when an evil Pharoah was killing the Hebrew babies. God's plan involved baby Moses floating on the river in a little basket, guarded by his sister until the servant of the Egyptian princess rescued him and he became part of the royal household. Just like Jeremiah, Moses had his doubts about his own qualifications to lead his people. He too, tried to evade God's plan for his life by pointing out that he was a poor speaker. In Exodus 3:11, Moses says to God, **"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"**

The Bible gives us numerous examples of how Biblical people reacted to God's plan for their lives. Some resisted God's plan: Jonah hid. Sarah laughed. Others immediately obeyed: Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac, his one and only son. Noah endured ridicule when he followed God's direction to build the ark and make it a floating zoo. Mary trusted God's plan for her, no matter how incredibly unlikely it seemed that she would have a baby who would be the Savior of the world.

God's Plan for Me

God had a plan for Biblical figures and prophets, but what about us? In a frequently quoted text, Jeremiah 29:11 tells us, **"For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."** This is what the Lord said to the Babylonian exiles. We can be confident that God also has a plan for His people today.

God's plan for us here on earth is not for us to earn salvation but rather to respond to salvation. God's plan is for us to have a relationship with Him. He calls us to a relationship with Him rather than to a religion. A relationship with God leads us to discover His plan for our lives. God's plan for us is not necessarily dramatic. It may be the humbling day-to-day tasks that consume us. Many go through life without seeking God's plan. They have no life-map, no compass, no blueprint, no over-arching guidance for their lives. In order to know God's plan for us, we must seek Him through prayer and through His Word. [Romans 12:2]

But what about our own plans for our lives? Our parents had a plan for us. Our teachers had a plan for us. As we matured, we developed a picture of how we wanted our lives to go. It has been said, modifying a Yiddish proverb, that "if you want to make God laugh, tell Him about your plans" (Allan Konigsberg). How does our plan for our lives mesh with God's plan for us? God will lead us where He wants us to be, but we must talk to Him daily to see where He wants us to go. According to J. C. Ryle, "Faith is the bridge between where I am and where God is taking me."

God knows me! God knew me before I was born! That is both a daunting and comforting thought. God knows everything about me. David writes in Psalm 139:2, **"You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my** **thoughts from afar."** Even though He knows me with all of my faults, God has a plan for me.

I had a plan. I planned to be anything but a teacher. My mother and father were both Lutheran teachers. My first plan was to be a missionary, until someone told me that then I could never get married (Not true, of course!) My next plan was to be a stewardess but I was not tall enough to meet the requirements. My third plan was to be an artist but I wasn't very good at art! I ended up being (you guessed it...) a teacher. God had a plan for me that superseded my own plan. Reflecting back on my life, I would not have changed that for anything.

Plan versus Purpose

Perhaps it is helpful to consider the difference between a purpose and a plan for our lives. God's purpose for us is that we should have a relationship with Him. God's plan is how we execute that purpose. Proverbs 19:21 states, **"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."** We live within God's purpose as we live out His plan day-by-day in lives of service.

We speak about being called, being given a specific invitation to serve God in a specific way. A fundamental truth of life is that we are all called by God, and we are His.

We are all called in two ways:

Call number one: our salvation. How God has saved us.

Call number two: our vocation. How God will use us on this earth.

The word 'vocation' specifically refers to one's spiritual calling. We can think of our vocational call as God's voice giving us his plan for our life on this earth. A vocation is not necessarily a job. It may simply be how we use the gifts God has given us, by encouraging, listening, helping, hosting, or supporting.

But how will we know what is God calling us to do? A friend of mine confessed that, as a child, she fervently prayed, "Please, please, God, don't call me to be a nun." It's important to note that you don't have to be a church-worker to work for the church. A wise man said, "You may not end up where you thought you were going, but you will always end up where you are supposed to be." We may resist God's plan for us even as many Biblical characters did. We may protest that we are too busy, too inept, too weary. We are sinful people, frail but forgiven. God's plan will prevail.

God's plan for each of us becomes clear as we seek His guidance. This is not a guessing game. We trust in the Holy Spirit to show us the way. We must diligently seek God's guidance about the important decisions in life: marriage, career, church. God has not promised us a proverbial rose garden, full of perpetual pleasantness. God's plan will include difficulties, pain, and disappointment. God has not called his children to lives of ease. Jeremiah certainly had his challenges, and we will as well.

But what if I have nothing important to do in my life? The things I do seem so insignificant, and yet they have to be done. I keep up my home. I go to work each day at a regular job. I'm raising my children. I'm supporting my family. How is this God's plan for me? I'm just an ordinary person, does God have a plan for me in the midst of this ordinariness? We need to start from where we are in our journey and go from there. Proverbs 16:3 tells us, **"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and He will establish your plans."**

God's plan for our lives has been likened to a tapestry. Our lives may appear to be full of knots and hanging threads as we view it from the underside, but from above, God sees this beautiful design. The various colored threads are the daily events in our lives, woven together by an all-knowing God into a beautiful design. The knots represent the difficulties in our lives and the finality of unchangeable circumstances. God's plan for your life and mine is clear to Him, even as it may seem murky to us. Thankfully, God is still in charge.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Do you believe that God has a plan for your life? Why or why not?

2. How will you know what God's plan for you is?

3. What happens if your plan and God's plan for you are quite different? Read Jonah 1:1-3. Jonah did his very best to avoid God's plan for him. He just plain didn't want to do it. What are some examples of how we react in the same way? 4. Think of another Biblical person whose plans changed drastically when God took charge.

5. Ask yourself, "What has God gifted me to do? What is God calling me to do that I am not already doing?

逸 PRAY

"Take my will and make it thine, It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart, it is thine own; It shall be thy royal throne." —LSB 783

Week Four Your Roots In His River

Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer
 Lord, open now my heart to hear,
 And through Your Word to me draw near
 Let me Your Word e'er pure retain
 Let me Your child and heir remain. Amen —LSB 908

Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (*watch optional video content*)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Jeremiah 17:5-10

This is what the Lord says: "Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives."

"But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Trees have been important images in Scripture as far back as Genesis 2:15-17 in the Garden of Eden all the way to mention of the Tree of Life in Revelation 22:2-3. Trees work well as an example of parts of our spiritual nature. They need planting, nourishment, and a ready supply of water. Our faith has been planted into our hearts through the Holy Spirit at our baptism. From that point on we need to nourish and tend our faith. God sends his Holy Spirit into our hearts to grow the faith that has begun. Without proper care and tending trees do not fulfill their purpose of holding soil strong in wet weather, providing shade in hot days, bearing fruit and/or seeds to keep the trees available for God's creatures. Our relationship with Jesus must be fed and watered also. Roots are the means through which trees receive the water and various minerals needed for growth. Where are our spiritual roots? What spiritual food do we receive?

We have discussed Jeremiah's messages to his people. He has been persecuted, mocked, physically and mentally harmed, but through it all God's grace and compassion have also been shown. He promises that although they will undergo captivity in a foreign land, after 70 years they will be returned to their homeland.

Our captivity isn't in a foreign land but rather in our own land of national and personal problems in abundance. The covid epidemic still has its claws into our way of life. Our world is a mess in almost every way possible. Yet we know that God is still in control. Difficult as that may be for us to understand and even to accept, when our faith is deeply and securely rooted in Jesus Christ and our relationship with Him, we can find hope and joy in the knowledge that we are His children.

DANGEROUS WATERS

There are many ways of life tempting us in our world. Although we may have been trained and raised in the path of Jesus, we may have wandered away from that. Our spiritual life may have been pushed aside for a life that looks more exciting and full of good times. Perhaps we have become totally immersed in everyday activities of work, recreation, education, health issues, or anything else which gobbles up our time and energy apart from our Lord. He has been left out.

Life of the spirit can be something of a roller coaster. For a time, we feel close to our Savior and content with our relationship with Him. We regularly read His Word, pray, and worship with our community. It's like being at the top of that roller coaster. Then something unplanned happens. It could be a friend moving away or dying. Finances may take a deep dive. There is a nasty argument with a spouse. Health issues arise and are exhausting. Problems of every kind overwhelm us. There we are in the dangerous waters of forgetting that we belong to a precious Savior who loves us and desires that we return to Him. Remember that bumper sticker which said, "Feeling far from God? Guess who moved?" That roller coaster has come crashing to the bottom.

In Jeremiah 12:1 he asks God, **"Why do all the faithless live at ease?"** In Jeremiah 15:18 he complains, **"Why is my pain unending?"** We begin to doubt God also. We think that we can get along on our own. We can handle things just fine. We look to ourselves. Maybe we buy more stuff, take a trip, self-medicate, or constantly complain. We may even continue to worship; however our worship is diminished because our lives are centered on ourselves. Joy has disappeared. The Lord says to Jeremiah that a person in that situation is living in a dry and parched land with no company or purpose at all. [Jeremiah 17:5-6] It is indeed a sad and dreary life–far away from the abundant life that God wishes for us. Such is the result of depending on our-

selves and wading into the dangerous water of the world.

ROOTS IN HIS RIVER

The river which produces a beautiful and purpose-driven life is a river of spiritual water. We are blessed with strong and fruitful faith when we put our roots into our relationship with Jesus. When the tough times arrive, and they will for all of us, we want to stand strong and secure with Jesus at our side. He forgives us and strengthens us with His presence. Scripture is full of people who drank freely from the "spring of living water". One example is the Samaritan Woman.

Read John 4:7-26; 39-42. Jesus points to himself as the source of living water. He tells the woman that anyone who drinks the water He has to offer will never again be thirsty. At first, she thinks that's a great idea. No more trips to the well for her. As her conversation with Jesus continues, God is at work within her. Her curiosity moves her to question Jesus and gives him the opportunity to reveal his messiahship to her. Not only does He tell her who He is, He demonstrates His power by telling her of her past life. She shares her conversation with Jesus with her townspeople. They invite Him to stay, they listen to His teaching, and they believe! They will never have spiritual thirst again.

Consuming that spiritual water is a simple, yet necessary task for God's children. The Holy Spirit, given to us upon our baptism nourishes and grows our faith as we expose our hearts to God's Word. In today's world there are countless ways to "steep" ourselves in that spiritual water. With a smartphone we can connect with our own church and easily read our favorite version of the Bible. Meeting with a Bible study group or making time to meditate on our own opens our hearts and minds to the Holy Spirit. We can begin our day with a short prayer or Bible reading. Ending our day with a prayer of thanks and confession turns our attention to our God. Talking about our relationship with Jesus as we have coffee with a friend blesses us both. Making Jesus a part of every day, feeds our faith and roots begin to develop in the river of spiritual water.

When we search God's Word and apply it to our lives, worship Him with our Christian brothers and sisters, pray fervently for His help, and repent of our doubt and worry, that is His living water flowing through us. Our problems may not disappear, but we will become aware of God's powerful presence within us.

LIFE WHEN ROOTS ARE IN HIS RIVER

Wouldn't it be great if simply being rooted in God's Word and sacraments resulted in a perfectly wonderful and happy life? We know however that isn't the case at all. We only need to look to Jeremiah, and we see how true that is. But life can be so much better. It becomes easier for us to live in peace with our family, friends, and neighbors. Forgiveness received by God's grace can flow more easily from us to others. The difficulties we face can cause us to draw more deeply from the power of God within us. 2 Corinthians 12:9-11 "But he (God) said to me (Paul), My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness... That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Our attitude of negative expectations can change into hope for the future as we realize that we are only travelers on this earth and our eternal home is with Jesus in heaven.

We will become more aware of those around us who need encouragement and we are ready to share that. It can be as small as a word or a smile, a phone call or a card. The joy within us will easily overflow into the lives of others when we fill our hearts with the Word of God to find a lasting peace within.

Sharing the Gospel of Jesus will be a part of our lives. We want others to join us in that river of love. As our lives reflect the light of Jesus, others are drawn to us, and we have an opportunity to tell them our story. Well-fed and watered trees continue to grow and produce seeds and fruit. We are those trees; fed and watered by the Word of God with deep roots in the water of life – Jesus!

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Roots absorb and transport water and minerals to the tree as well as anchor it to the soil. How can you relate roots to your spiritual life? Do you see yourself as a "bush in the wasteland" or a "green tree"? Explain.

2. Read Psalm 1. What is meant by a "blessed person" according to verse 3? What does the life of a blessed person look like? What does verse 2 say about that person's "roots"?

3. If comfortable, share about your spiritual roots. Tell how you first heard of Jesus and how your knowledge grew.

4. In times of stress and problems, what does the world suggest we do for help? Why is trying to address anxiety on our own a useless solution?

5. Martin Luther suggests that we begin each day with a short prayer. Think of a short 8 or 10 word prayer that you could use while you're in the shower or brushing your teeth. Then commit to saying or even singing it each day.

6. Read Luke 10:38-42. Jesus tells Mary that she has chosen the one essential thing. What is it? Why does Jesus give it top priority?

7. Discuss how the power of Scripture through the Holy Spirit can cause your roots to grow deeper into Jesus; our source of living water.

逸 PRAY

Lord Jesus, you have blessed us with faith, forgiveness, and salvation. We want to grow in our knowledge of you. Give us a sincere desire to deepen our faith that we may be your shining lights upon this dark world so that one day we will meet you in Paradise and see for ourselves the water of life flowing in the river. You have redeemed us, Jesus; we are yours. Amen.

Week Five His Man On Your Team

Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer
 Lord, I know that people's lives are not their own;
 it is not for them to direct their steps. —Jeremiah 10:23

Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (watch optional video content)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Where are you? Not the physical place, but the "people place" where God has situated you in this season of life. While we like to think we are in control of our lives and destiny, Jeremiah 10:23 reminds us that our "lives are not [our] own; it is not for [me] to direct [my] steps." This is never more true than in the "people places" we find ourselves in.

What looked like the dream workplace/neighborhood/marriage we so cleverly got hired, moved, or married into... any or all of these can surprise us with the amount of conflict involved with the PEOPLE we get stuck with in these situations; co-workers, neighbors, family.

Although I've only lived in one physical place (here in Orange, California near St. John's) my entire adult life, I've lived in lots of different "people places" the communities God has placed me in over the years. Some of these people groups have been blessedly stress-free (women's Bible studies, fitness classes, writing communities), while others have been stress-filled and anything but a blessing. When the ties-that-bind frazzle and fray, it's natural to immediately think, "What's wrong with that other person? Why can't they get their act together?"

The prophet Jeremiah and scribe Baruch worked together during tough times—before the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. As Jeremiah's assistant, Baruch wrote down the words that God had delivered to his prophet. It was not a popular message. Once when Baruch read from the scroll of prophecy in the royal court, the king clipped and burned each section as soon as Baruch read them (and then put out an arrest warrant for God's prophet and his scribe.) What would God have them do next in this difficult situation? Nothing more or less than this: Jeremiah must now re-dictate the entire message for Baruch to re-write. This sounds like a big possibility for conflict in this Godordained "workplace."

Baruch: What? Write all those warnings of destruction again? While we're in hiding so the king can't find us and kill us? This is way above my pay grade, no thanks! Jeremiah: It's the word of the Lord, Baruch. We have no choice but to obey. Baruch: (grumble grumble)

But it was Jeremiah's calling to receive God's message for the nation of Judah; Baruch's job was to write it down and even proclaim it when it was too dangerous for Jeremiah to show up in public. These two co-workers definitely had different skills, and most likely very different personalities. They were at their most effective not as a single player, or a dynamic duo, but as the team of three: Jeremiah, Baruch, and most importantly, God. "A cord of three strands is not easily broken." [Ecclesiastes 4:12]

When it feels like God has "blessed" us with teammates who are downright difficult to work with, and we can't see eye-to-eye for the life of us, instead of thinking "What's wrong with them?" it might be helpful to widen our field of vision by looking in the mirror. Maybe we are that difficult person? Could it be God's hand at work, directing our steps into proximity with people who might be different—even difficult—at home, school, work, or in the community? Could it be God's sense of humor at work, putting us in an oil-and-vinegar relationship situation so the resulting mix, though difficult to blend, is much more delicious than its parts are separately? Could God's grace and wisdom be deep and wide enough for us to receive it... and humbly admit our own need for a wider perspective?

God's word assures us that He is always with us. Jesus' name "Immanuel" means "God with us." [Matthew 1:23]. He is always on our team.

And His strength is made perfect in our weakness [2 Corinthians 12:9], so that where we have gaps and lapses—in background, experience, personality, point of view, communication style—all of these can be balanced out in relationship with others.

Speaking of personality, God gives each of us a very specific way of being in and seeing the world. A family member or co-worker who might seem "difficult" to me just might be a person (another child of God, even!) who simply processes life in a completely different way from me. But the same loving Father created each of us, just how we are—we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works [Ephesians 2:10] ... together! Together with other people who are NOT our clones—and that is a good thing. It's a grace from God to realize, sooner or later (and I hope for those of you reading this that it happens sooner than I figured this out), that I do NOT actually know everything, and that other people have ideas and skills that make our work together that much stronger for our differences... even conflicts. As Jill Briscoe writes, "God is not into 'cloning.' He is into counterparting!" (112) Jeremiah and Baruch were counterparts, given different gifts and tasks by God, who was with them through all the conflicts and danger their prophetic work entailed. In these New Testament times, Jesus is "God's man on our team"; He is always with us through His Holy Spirit, directing our steps into relationships of all sorts—where conflict sometimes lurks, and where Satan hopes to divide us.

Has this ever happened to you: you think of a person—another one of God's children, a fellow heir of eternal life—but only their shortcomings and annoying ideas, words and actions come to mind? See if you can direct the "camera" of your mind's eye to this scene: picture them at church with you, and listen as both of you agree, out loud, on the many things that you have in common as you say together: "We both believe… in God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. And we both believe… in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. On the third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead. And we both believe… in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting." Amen? Amen!

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Think about a "counterpart" person in your life; where God has led your steps, what name or face jumps to mind? (Someone you are working closely with right now. No need to name the person out loud.)

If they are always a blessing, thank God for them! If they are sometimes "difficult" . . . thank God for them!

What Bible verse does God bring to mind to help you see this person in a new light, perhaps as someone whom God can use to grow the fruits of the spirit in your life? (see Gal. 5:22-23)

(Examples: Prov. 15:1; Rom. 12:18; Gal. 5:14-15; Col. 4:6; James 1:5; 1 Pet. 5:7; Eph. 4:32)

2. Please read Genesis 50:20. Talk about difficult family members. Discuss the context of story of Joseph and his brothers. What had happened over the course of their relationship? How easy or difficult might it have been for Joseph to come to the insight: *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*?

Can you look back on a less-than-ideal (difficult!) situation or relationship in your life where God was able to create good? Share if you'd like.

3. THIS WEEK: Think about the difficult people God has allowed into your life. Narrow it down to one. Think of some things you have in common (remember the Apostles Creed). Write them down. Pray for that person, focusing on the things you have in common.

If you find your thoughts fixating on that person throughout the day—how they've wronged you, how wrong their beliefs are, whatever—thank God for bringing this person to mind, not so you can endlessly run them through the wringer of your judgment, but so you can bring to mind your common ground and then continue to pray for them, and for yourself, so that you might not be a "difficult person" to them, but instead a blessing of Christcentered, loving words and actions.

逸 PRAY

Pray for those people whom God brings to your mind this week—whether "difficult" or not.

Pray for people in church leadership (or missionary) roles who might be dealing with difficult people.

Pray that God will continue to grow the fruits of the Spirit in your life—especially as you deal with difficult people and situations.

Thank God that He is on your team, that He is always with you in Jesus your Immanuel, that because of Jesus, your Savior, your life and path are in His good hands. Thank God that He directs your steps through His Holy Spirit's work in your life, and that He helps you to be a blessing to others. Ask for wisdom to see and act in love in difficult situations as they arise.

Week Six His Tears On Your Face

O Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer

Read 'Small Group Essentials - The Four Keys' on PAGE 2

Read Lesson Below (*watch optional video content*)

Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Jeremiah 45

¹ When Baruch son of Neriah wrote on a scroll the words Jeremiah the prophet dictated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, Jeremiah said this to Baruch: ² "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says to you, Baruch: 3 You said, 'Woe to me! The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest.' ⁴ But the LORD has told me to say to you, 'This is what the LORD says: I will overthrow what I have built and uproot what I have planted, throughout the earth. ⁵ Should you then seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them. For I will bring disaster on all people, declares the LORD, but wherever you go I will let you escape with your life."

In Jeremiah 45, we are given a glimpse at a conversation that takes place between Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch. Even though Baruch hadn't mentioned this to Jeremiah or probably anyone, God knows his heart and knows how he feels. Jeremiah reveals to Baruch that his feelings are not hidden from God and that this is God's message to him. It's curious to think that Baruch didn't share his feelings with Jeremiah. If anyone could have understood how Baruch was feeling it was Jeremiah.

They both knew of the desolations that were coming on their country, they both had families that didn't want them doing what they were doing for the Lord, they both had experienced firsthand their world falling apart around them, and while they had been protected to this point, they both had suffered. No golden age had dawned yet nor any relief and the present and future seemed dark and depressing.

Yet through it all, we only hear of Jeremiah crying out and never Baruch.

Perhaps it was because Baruch had listened and seen how God has responded to Jeremiah every time he was afraid, exhausted, exasperated and just plain worn out. Here's a famous example:

"If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? –Jeremiah 12:5

Even though the context surrounding the verse in chapter 12 shows that God was concerned about Jeremiah's pain, God did not allow his servant to wallow in it. God called him to greater faith, for the greater challenges that still lay ahead. And knowing that you were going to get that kind of response, why would you really say anything at all?

It's no wonder Baruch didn't share how he was feeling with Jeremiah. Many of us struggle and say nothing, not wanting to bother others, not wanting to show weakness, not wanting to cause an unnecessary burden on our loved ones or friends. We just suffer silently because what could possibly change by sharing our pain?

I wonder how long the silent suffering lasts until it becomes a source of pride?

I wonder how long the silent suffering lasts until we begin to resent others for not seeing our pain despite our silence?

I wonder how long it takes for us to hear and understand what it means to share our burdens with one another?

I wonder how long it takes for us to stop holding on by ourselves and turn to our Heavenly Father?

I wonder too, what Baruch felt when Jeremiah spoke these words of God to him, letting him know that God sees his pain, his frustration, his disappointment – God sees exactly how tired he is and how overwhelmed he feels. The fact that God knew what Baruch said and spoke to him about could only have been sobering for him. What he had been harboring in his heart, wasn't hidden but known by God; including his unbelief and disappointment about where he himself was.

How quickly God cuts through our pride. Baruch's expectations of great things; of the life he felt he deserved, the life he thought he should have, the *great things* he thought should come to him, weren't going to happen. The disappointment of great things sought and unfulfilled weighed heavily on him. But God promised him that He would still care, provide for, and be present with him. Would that be enough for you?

How quickly God cuts through our resentment. He does not allow us to shift the blame to Him or wallow in our self-pity but instead He takes our sin, He takes our anger, and He takes our hurt. Not in a resentful way, nor will He hold it over our head. He simply comes, forgives, and renews. How certain we can be that God does not leave us in our burdens but is there in the midst of them. How certain we can be not to hide our pain, our suffering, our shame – how certain we can be to hide nothing from God for He knows these things already and is active despite our silence.

Perhaps you've heard this before:

What a friend we have in Jesus All our sins and griefs to bear What a privilege to carry Everything to God in prayer

- Oh, what peace we often forfeit Oh, what needless pain we bear All because we do not carry Everything to God in prayer
- Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere? We should never be discouraged Take it to the Lord in prayer

Can we find a friend so faithful Who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness Take it to the Lord in prayer

Lyrics by Joseph Scriven

The response of Baruch is not recorded. Only that he continued on the path.

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Which way do you struggle when it comes to your problems; sharing and telling like Jeremiah, or keeping it in like Baruch? What would you consider to be a healthy and appropriate way of sharing your struggles?

2. We all can relate to this line from Baruch, "The LORD has added sorrow to my pain; I am worn out with groaning and find no rest." Is knowing that God is with you in the struggle enough for you? Why so? And if not, what more would you want?

3. When we see Jesus in the scripture, we see Him confront those who are sinning; we see Him comfort those who are mourning; we see Him encourage those who need support; we see Him call us to more when we are complacent. How do you decide or know which response of Jesus you need?

逸 PRAY

As you take prayer requests and pray for each other, take a moment to pray for all people who are suffering—especially those in silent suffering.

Week Seven His Strength For Your Days

- O Welcome, Introduction, Ice Breakers and Opening Prayer
- Read 'Small Group Essentials The Four Keys' on PAGE 2
- **Read Lesson Below** (*watch optional video content*)
- Answer Questions, Discuss and Close in Prayer

LESSON

Jeremiah 36:28

"Take another scroll and write on it all the words that were on the first scroll, which Jehoiakim king of Judah burned up."

When I was an undergrad at Butler University, I worked at the Information Technology Help Desk. The Help Desk was a bustling place; it never seemed like there was a dull moment. Students and faculty would bring their computers, tablets, and mobile devices to the Help Desk with various technological issues, and it would be my job to diagnose and figure those issues out. There was one issue that trumped the rest and was sure to invoke panic... the "blue screen of death."

Upon startup, a computer's screen would turn blue with an error code. This screen became affectionately known as the "blue screen of death." It usually meant that the computer's hard drive was failing, either due to a virus or something physically wrong with the drive itself. If a student was not in the routine of backing up their data, all sorts of schoolwork, photos, and other personal files were at extreme risk of being lost forever.

It was the worst when a student would come to us with a "blue screen of death" the day before a final paper or project was due. We would have to relay some very, very bad new; unless they had backed up that paper somewhere else, the student would have to start over again. While we would try to provide comfort, telling students that we would salvage as much data as we could from the bad hard drive, some students would leave in tears; knowing that they had to go back to the beginning and start from scratch.

Have you ever worked on something that took countless hours, only to have to go back and start from the beginning? Maybe you had to assemble something (furniture, a bike, an appliance) and you skipped a step or read the instructions wrong and now you must take the whole thing apart and start from the beginning. Maybe you practiced a piece of music incorrectly, and you must unlearn what you have practiced, go back, and start over from the beginning.

In our lesson today, we learn how Jeremiah had to start over from the beginning, due to things out of his control. The backdrop is set in the fourth year of the reign of King Jehoiakim. The Word of the Lord came to Jeremiah: "Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you concerning Israel, Judah, and all the other nations from the time I began speaking to you in the reign of Josiah till now. Perhaps when the people of Judah hear about every disaster I plan to inflict on them, they will each turn from their wicked ways; then I will forgive their wickedness and their sin." [Jeremiah 36:2-3]

Now this sounds like a fun assignment! "Jeremiah, make sure to write down all the pain I plan to inflict if my people do not repent. Go!" Jeremiah listened to the Lord's words and remembered (as Jill Briscoe writes) "twenty years' worth of memories." That scroll must have been long! And think of the active listening Jeremiah must have done when the Lord spoke. Jeremiah spoke all the words the Lord had given to him while his friend, Baruch wrote them down on the scroll. Not only was it an arduous and time-consuming task to remember God's words, but also for Baruch to put together the scroll.

Because Jeremiah was "not allowed to go to the Lord's temple," he tells Baruch to go to the house of the Lord and to read the scroll. He also asks Baruch to go "on a day of fasting," an act commonly associated with repentance. [Joel 2:12-17, Nehemiah 9:1]

Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, **"in the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim..."** Micaiah hears these words and informs the officials of the royal palace that they should take a listen to these words from Jeremiah. Baruch then reads to the officials, and the officials look at each other in agreement that they must report this news to King Jehoiakim. Before they make their report to the king, they ask Baruch and Jeremiah to hide.

The officials bring the scroll to King Jehoiakim, and King Jehoiakim asks Jehudi to read the scroll while the officials stood beside him and we get to this verse: **"Whenever Jehudi had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe's knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire."** [Jeremiah 36:23]

Making matters worse, Jehoiakim showed no fear at the impending disasters God was threatening for His unrepentant people and sent three men to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. *Ouch!...* Jehoiakim shows a blatant rejection of God's Word. So the Lord commands Jeremiah to dictate His words again, and Baruch writes all of those words down for a second time! The Bible is silent on whether there was a reaction from a Baruch or Jeremiah when they heard that King Jehoiakim had burned the scroll they had worked so hard on. (We do know that there was NOT a backup scroll.)

They also find out that in their newest edition of the scroll, the Lord "will bring on [the king and his children and his attendants] and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah, every disaster I pronounced on them, because they have not listened." [Jeremiah 36:31]

It is not fun being the bearer of bad news. I think of the doctor that must tell his or her patient that their cancer is terminal. I think of the employer telling an employee that they are being laid off. I think of the brother calling a sibling out of town to let them know that a parent passed away.

It is not fun hearing bad news. News of war, economic turmoil, the newest pandemic, you name it. Jeremiah and Baruch received bad news that the scroll had been burned, and that they would have to dictate and write it again. And they were going to be bearers of worse news, announcing God's wrath in the newest version of the scroll.

When you must bear or hear bad news, follow the examples of Jeremiah and Baruch. They listened to God, even though they had spent a great amount of time on the first scroll. They were obedient to God, even when they knew their news was not good. They feared God, even when authorities were plotting to arrest them. And above all, they trusted in God, even when the world was crumbling around them.

"The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I will praise him"

[Psalm 28:7 NIV]

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

1. Jeremiah and Baruch found themselves in some tough circumstances. Read Philippians 1:12-14; 19-26. These are the Apostle Paul's proclamations from prison. What stands out to you in the text? 2. Jeremiah had a lot to remember in order to dictate God's Word to Baruch. Do you have a hard time remembering things? What about the Word of God? What are your "go-to" verses when you are in need?

3. It was a big task for Jeremiah and Baruch to undertake not just one scroll, but two. Where in your life has God, by His Spirit, enabled you to tackle something difficult and daunting?

4. Jeremiah prayed for some hard-hearted people. Remember Lamentations 3:22-23. Is there a hard-hearted person that God is softening your heart for in prayer? (*Possible applications: Write a card. Make a phone call. Pray for that person.*)

5. Jeremiah told Baruch to go read the scroll on a "day of fasting," where there would be lots of people around. What places are you currently going to where there are lots of people that you could be a witness to? Is there a person in your circle of influence that has questions about God?

6. The obedience of Jeremiah and Baruch is remarkable in this text. Where could God be leading you to discover and use your spiritual gifts in His church and your local community?

逸 PRAY

Jill Briscoe writes, "Prayer that is effective is prayer that is specific." How can your group pray for you today?

Individual Prayer Time

- Write down a list of your fears. Pray about them one by one.
- Pray for tears. Make a list of things that God is calling you to care about.
- Pray for compassionate ministries to flourish in your church. Ask "who needs help?" and "Can I supply it?"
- Sit quietly and think about the people you influence. How can you use your influence for Him?
- Pray for people who need to "do it again." Pray for endurance and perseverance. Pray for missionaries. Pray for marriages. Pray for discouraged pastors around the world.
- Pray for yourself and for your family.

Ice Breakers To do with your group if time allows

Take something from your wallet/purse and tell how it relates to you.

Tell about the most positive conversation that you had today.

Tell about the most interesting thing that happened to you today.

Tell about the most humorous incident that you experienced in the last year.

My favorite fun activity when I was a child was...

The thing that drives me crazy is...

We celebrated Easter when I was a child by...

My favorite movie of all times is...

My idea of a great vacation is...

My favorite food is...

If I could visit any era of history, I would visit...

My favorite childhood memory is...

My favorite leisure activity is...

Tell about the best birthday present you ever received.

Share one of the happiest days of your life.

Describe what your day was like today.

If you had to move and could only take three things with you, what would you take?

While growing up I saw God as...

What would you do if someone willed you a million dollars?

If you could do anything you want this time next year, what would it be?

Thank You!

We give an extra-special word of thanks to Jill Briscoe who's book, "Faith Enough to Finish" was the inspiration and basis for this Bible study curriculum. We are very grateful to Jill and **Telling the Truth** ministries for allowing St. John's to appropriate the God-inspired truths from this now, out of print book.

www.tellingthetruth.org

And thank you to all who have contributed to the Faith Enough to Finish curriculum guide, video production, and St. John's 2022 spiritual growth campaign:

Pastor Tim Klinkenberg Pastor Trevor Van Blarcom Kay Klinkenberg Marian Baden Thea Gavin Micah Raebel Estevan Feliciano Megan Gjersvold Chris Higgins Jen Bradtke Deanne Zimpelmann

BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM FOR GROUP, FAMILY, OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY

to



St. John's Orange www.stjohnsorange.org Orange, CA | 714-288-4400