



A Plea for Restoration

Lesson Overview

Week of April 25

1 Life Need:

Comprehend the need to express our hardships to God.

2 Bible Learning:

Study why and how Jeremiah cried out to the Lord.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Poster and reproducible handout: Exile and Restoration

3 Bible Application:

Examine God's willingness to listen to our complaints.

Suggested Material:

■ *Adult Teacher's Resource Kit:* Reproducible handout: The Stories of Jake and Greta

4 Life Response:

Trust in God's answers to your pleas.

Church/Home Theme:

Revive Us Again,
O Lord!

Lesson Focus:

Cry to God in the
midst of your
suffering.

Lesson Scripture:

Lamentations 5

The Tears—Jeremiah warned the nation of Judah of God's coming judgment. He continued to speak God's messages as he watched the Babylonians savagely conquer their land. In the Book of Lamentations, Jeremiah cried out to the heavenly Father as the Babylonian soldiers laid siege to Jerusalem. Jeremiah compared the depth of their pain to that of an abandoned orphan or to a grieving widow who's just lost her husband.

As the Babylonian siege strangled the city, a person's life could be taken just for attempting to get food or looking after their livestock. Many had blackened skin, indicating starvation. Jewish women endured rape. Officials were strung up. Strong young men did tasks once assigned solely to women and slaves. Children labored so hard they passed out under the heavy loads. Silence lingered at the city gates because the elders disappeared.

Once filled with festive music and dancing on celebration days, Jerusalem's streets were now filled only with grief and mourning. Judgment had fallen because of the people's sin.

The Hope—Jeremiah made a plea before the Lord for restoration, that their present suffering would not be their sentence forever. The prophet knew God is faithful and steadfast, sincerely desiring to show His people mercy. After about 70 years in Babylonian captivity, God did restore His people to Jerusalem.

God still answers the cry of His children amid their afflictions, no matter when or what. He is a compassionate God, ready to respond to signs of repentance from His people.

As Your Students Arrive

Prior to class, collect several pictures of situations in which people have an understandable reason to complain to God. Examples might include a natural disaster in which homes are destroyed, distressed civilians in the middle of a war, a plague-ravaged village, and so on. As students enter the classroom, ask them to briefly describe why people under these circumstances might bitterly cry out to God.

Introduce the lesson by letting the class know that this week's lesson focuses on God's desire for us to turn to Him when we are deeply upset and to convey our complaints to Him.

Link to Last Week: Encourage students to share what they did last week that helped to build God’s kingdom.

1 Life Need

Comprehend the need to express our hardships to God.

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A Plea for Restoration

It’s just so sad,” said Deidra, looking across the restaurant. “I know,” said Brendon. “I mean, Gary was the man. Now look at him. Meeting his children at a fast-food restaurant.”

“They were so happy,” continued Deidra, looking at the man, woman, and two children.

“Tiana is good as ever,” said Brendon. “Too bad Gary could not keep that marriage going. What happened?”

“Who knows?” said Deidra, cutting her cousin off and not wanting to give him any fuel to dump on this family turmoil.

Years before, Gary had shelved the Lord and pursued a host of things—none of which was godly. Tiana had stuck it out for years. She had begged him to come back under the authority of their church and tried to get him to go to couple’s counseling. Gary would not listen; Tiana told him she wanted a separation.

Eventually, Gary was demoted at work, moved into a tiny apartment, and was surviving on the little money left over from all the garnishments attached to his payroll check.

That night, as Gary lay on his sofa looking at his children sleeping in his bed eight feet away, the enormity of the consequences of his sins enveloped him. He did not want to be this guy anymore.

“Help me, Lord,” Gary cried. “I want my family back. I want my life back. Most of all, I want You back. Please, Lord, don’t say it’s too late for me.”

1. Have you ever been so deeply upset that you cried out to God? If so, describe the circumstances and the resolution.

2. Were your complaints directed at God or a plea for God’s help? Explain your answer.

3. Why do you think the Lord wants you to cry out to Him even if it is in the form of a complaint?

LESSON FOCUS: Cry to God in the midst of your suffering.

Take a moment to read the anecdote, and then form small groups to talk about **Questions 1, 2, and 3.**

Question 1 gives students the opportunity to recall an incident in their lives in which their distress was so utterly grievous that they beseeched the Lord to clearly respond to their prayers. The distress may have been the loss of a loved one, crippling health, a financial crisis, or any number of hardships that can emotionally overwhelm a person or a family. Nevertheless, note that no adversity or calamity is greater than the merciful comfort of the Lord.

The answers to Question 2 will vary from one student to another. It is a human tendency for people to blame God for their troubles. After all, the Lord is all-powerful, and their faith in Christ has been steadfast. Therefore, why would He allow such suffering to befall them? On the other hand, despite the baffling nature of their suffering, other Christians do not question God but, instead solicit His help. In either case, the Lord listens intently, welcoming their complaints and their pleas.

Finally, for Question 3, discuss God’s parental nature; that is, the Lord cares for us like parents who deeply desire for their children to come to them whenever they are suffering.

2 Bible Learning

Study why and how Jeremiah cried out to the Lord.



Not only did the prophet Jeremiah witness the suffering of his people, but he also experienced this suffering

for himself. Therefore, when he cried out to God, it was from the very depth of his heart. The way he expressed himself to the Lord and what he sought from the Lord are reminders of how we, too, should verbally turn to Him and expect from Him when we endure excruciating ordeals.

On the handout, read the last three paragraphs, and note on the poster the

BIBLE EXTRA

God's Memory

Scripture is clear that God never forgets anything—unless, of course, He divinely chooses to do so. As the prophet Amos observed, “The LORD hath sworn by the excellency of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works” (Amos 8:7, KJV). God is omniscient, knowing all things and recalling all things perfectly. He knows the precise number of stars and calls them all by name (Ps. 147:4). And He knows the thoughts and intentions of every person’s heart (Acts 15:8; Heb. 4:12). So when Jeremiah asked God to remember, he was not reminding God of something that He had forgotten. Rather, the prophet was asking God to take note and to do what only He could do to set things right.

However, as alluded above, though God knows all things, there is one thing that He sovereignly chooses to forget—namely, the forgiven sin of those who come to Him in faith. As God told Isaiah, “I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more” (Isa. 43:25).

photo of Rembrandt’s painting of Jeremiah lamenting the fall of Jerusalem.

PLEA FOR REMEMBRANCE

Read Lamentations 5:1-7, and highlight these key points as you discuss the Scripture:

- During their Babylonian captivity, the ancient Jews lived far from their homeland and had become slaves to their enemies.
- The prophet Jeremiah implored God to recall

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Plea for Remembrance

Lamentations 5:1-7, KJV

- 1 Remember, O LORD, what is come upon us: consider, and behold our reproach.
- 2 Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens.
- 3 We are orphans and fatherless, our mothers are as widows.
- 4 We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold unto us.
- 5 Our necks are under persecution: we labour, and have no rest.
- 6 We have given the hand to the Egyptians, and to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread.
- 7 Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities.

Lamentations 5:1-7, NIV

- ¹Remember, LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace.
- ²Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.
- ³We have become fatherless, our mothers are widows.
- ⁴We must buy the water we drink; our wood can be had only at a price.
- ⁵Those who pursue us are at our heels; we are weary and find no rest.
- ⁶We submitted to Egypt and Assyria to get enough bread.
- ⁷Our ancestors sinned and are no more, and we bear their punishment.

The Babylonians had conquered Jerusalem and sent the Judeans into exile. Jeremiah sat in the ruins, asking God to remember and look upon their disgrace. Jeremiah lamented that foreigners and strangers were occupying the land and even living in what was left of Judean homes.

Jeremiah then asked God to note other horrible things that were happening. Because so many men had been slain, many women were widows and children were fatherless. Further, water and firewood were so scarce that those people who remained had little or no funds to buy them. Furthermore, Jeremiah’s people had to be on guard against hostile pursuers who rarely gave them rest. They also had to submit to their enemies to the north (Assyria) and to the south (Egypt) just to get enough bread to eat.



Further commentary on this Scripture passage can be found on p. 1273 in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament*.

what had happened to His people and observe how they had been disgraced before the nations.

- What the Lord had given them now belonged to others, and, indeed, they had lost their fathers and husbands.
- They must pay to quench their thirst and heat their bodies, while being continually harassed by those who sought to harm them.
- They had to submit themselves to Egypt and Assyria in order to live.
- They were suffering because they had rebelled against God, and now they were paying for their sins.

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The current generation was reaping the consequences of God's judgment that had been building for many generations before them. This is not to say that the current generation was guiltless. Over and over, Jeremiah warned the current generation to repent and do what God told them.

4. *What did Jeremiah ask God to remember?*
5. *Who occupied the Israelites' land and homes?*
6. *What are some other examples of the suffering that Jeremiah lamented about?*

Plea for Relief

Lamentations 5:8-14, KJV

8 Servants have ruled over us: there is none that doth deliver us out of their hand.
 9 We gat our bread with the peril of our lives because of the sword of the wilderness.
 10 Our skin was black like an oven because of the terrible famine.
 11 They ravished the women in Zion, and the maids in the cities of Judah.
 12 Princes are hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured.
 13 They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood.
 14 The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their musick.

Lamentations 5:8-14, NIV

⁸Slaves rule over us, and there is no one to free us from their hands.
⁹We get our bread at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the desert.
¹⁰Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger.
¹¹Women have been violated in Zion, and virgins in the towns of Judah.
¹²Princes have been hung up by their hands; elders are shown no respect.
¹³Young men toil at the millstones; boys stagger under loads of wood.
¹⁴The elders are gone from the city gate; the young men have stopped their music.

Things seemed to go from bad to worse for Jeremiah

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 4

The weeping prophet asked God to remember their situation. He asked the Lord to consider what had become of them and to look with mercy on the reproach they bore at the hands of their enemies.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 5

As was common practice at that time, the conquerors had taken many of Jeremiah's people into captivity and moved people from other nations in to take their place. Therefore, strangers and foreigners had come to occupy the land and homes that once had belonged to the Jews.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 6

Along with the land being occupied by strangers and foreigners, orphans and widows were in abundance because so many of the men had been slain, they had to buy water and firewood, they

BIBLE EXTRA

The Weeping Prophet

Many commentators have referred to Jeremiah as the weeping prophet. The Book of Lamentations captures Jeremiah's broken heart for what had happened to his land and to his people, the events of which are recorded in the Book of Jeremiah. God is merciful and gracious, but there comes a time when His mercy and grace will give way to wrath and judgment if people continue in their sinful and rebellious ways. The Lord offered His people the opportunity to repent time and again, but they continued to practice injustice, idolatry, etc. Therefore, God brought Nebuchadzar against Judah and Jerusalem as a sword of His righteous judgment, and the Babylonian king destroyed the walls of Jerusalem, razed the temple, slew many of the Israelites, and took many others into captivity in Babylon.

faced persecution without rest, and they even had to submit to Assyria and Egypt for the very bread they ate.

PLEA FOR RELIEF

While reading Lamentations 5:8-14, note these important points in your class discussion:

- Jeremiah continued to describe in detail how God's people had suffered at the hands of their enemies.
- Those over whom Judah formerly had dominion were now their masters, denying them food and subjecting the Jews with their military might.
- Worse, their conquerors had ravished their women, even violating the innocence of their girls.
- Further, the nobility were executed unceremoniously, while their seniors had been shamed.
- Both Jewish men and boys toiled under the oppression, while both Jewish elders and music had been banished.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 7

Jeremiah noted that the people who were once subdued by Judah were now the ones in charge. The rulers had become the slaves, and the slaves had become the rulers. And search as he might, Jeremiah could find no one to

help free his people from the oppression.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 8

The people were in danger of death every time they went out to forage for food, so starvation was overtaking many. Violence against women, even the young, was rampant. Former leaders were publicly humiliated. And young men and boys were forced into hard labor.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 9

Perhaps as heartbreaking as what he did see was what he did not see. The elders were no longer conducting business and public affairs at the gate, and there was no longer joyous music to be heard.

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and his people. People who had once been subdued under Judah's dominion had now become rulers over the land. As a result of their defeat, the Jews had no protection. The people faced death at the hands of armed marauders while foraging for food and suffering terribly from hunger.

Throughout Judah, women were assaulted and abused; the former rulers of the land were executed and then their bodies were hung in humiliation. Elders were treated contemptuously, and the young men were used as beasts of burden to grind grain at the millstones. Even young boys were made to carry the heavy loads of wood for their new masters. Jeremiah saw suffering everywhere.

When things are bad, it is easy to begin to reminisce ruefully about better times. The city gates that were once places of important judgments by the community elders had become empty. Also missing were the pleasant sounds of a civilized community, like the music of young men that had once brought joy to passersby. Now there was just silence.

7. *How had the tables been turned on Jeremiah's people?*

8. *What other signs of suffering did Jeremiah observe?*

9. *What did Jeremiah not observe that also grieved him greatly?*

Plea for Restoration

Lam. 5:15-22, KJV

15 The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning.

16 The crown is fallen from our head: woe unto us, that we have sinned!

17 For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim.

18 Because of the mountain of

Lamentations 5:15-22, NIV

¹⁵Joy is gone from our hearts; our dancing has turned to mourning.

¹⁶The crown has fallen from our head.

Woe to us, for we have sinned!

¹⁷Because of this our hearts are faint, because of these things our eyes grow dim

BIBLE EXTRA

Trials and Suffering

The apostle Peter said, "If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. . . . Those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good (1 Pet. 4:16, 19). Trials and suffering are part of life in a sin-filled world. But whether we suffer because of our own sin, at the hands of sinners because of our stand for Christ, or just because life's circumstances have somehow overwhelmed us, we can always trust that when we cry out to the Lord in faith, one way or another our restoration is sure.

PLEA FOR RESTORATION

Finally, read Lamentations 5:15-22, and note these summaries of the text:

- Jeremiah's grief for the exiled Jews reflected a deep sorrow in his heart, which lacked joy and his ability to rejoice through dancing.
- Moreover, Israel's wickedness had toppled God's elect from their royal appointment from God into a life of utter desolation in which their hearts were faint and their eyes were dim.
- The prophet magnified the eternal rule of the Lord, questioning God as to why He had forgotten and forsaken His people.
- Jeremiah then pleaded for the Lord to restore

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KJV

Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it.

19 Thou, O LORD, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation.

20 Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?

21 Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old.

22 But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wrath against us.

NIV

¹⁸for Mount Zion, which lies desolate, with jackals prowling over it.

¹⁹You, LORD, reign forever; your throne endures from generation to generation.

²⁰Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long?

²¹Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old

²²unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

Jeremiah continued his lament for Israel's lost joy. Where there once was dancing, only hopeless mourning remained. The picture of the crown falling from the head points back to their loss of national sovereignty at the hands of their enemies. But the prophet reminded the people that all their tribulation was from their sin against God. The desolation of Mount Zion (Jerusalem) is an apt picture of a life ravaged by sin.

After despairing over the consequences of his people's sin, Jeremiah chose to turn his eyes to the only source of hope any of us have—our Lord. The prophet acknowledged that earthly kingdoms come and go, but God's kingdom is eternal.

Jeremiah acknowledged in his prayer that God might not come to Judah's aid because His anger toward them might not be appeased. However, Jeremiah also acknowledged the goodness of God. In spite of all evidence to the contrary, "His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

- 10.** How did Jeremiah describe the people's sorrow?
- 11.** What happened when Jeremiah turned his eyes heavenward?
- 12.** What did Jeremiah seek from the Lord?

the Jews to their homeland as in the days when they had prospered under His reign over them.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 10

The people had lost all joy, and where there once was dancing, only mourning remained. Furthermore, the crown of authority that was once theirs had fallen from their heads, and they were being ruled by their enemies. As a result, the strength of their hearts failed them, and tears of sorrow constantly blurred their vision.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 11

As long as Jeremiah looked around him, he saw nothing but despair and suffering. However, when he turned his eyes to the Lord, he saw the one who sits eternally on the throne of heaven and earth. Jeremiah saw the only source of hope for both himself and his people.

SUGGESTED ANSWER TO QUESTION 12

After the grieving prophet turned his eyes to the Lord, he asked that his people be restored and that things be renewed as in the days when God had blessed them. Jeremiah knew that God had every right to reject his plea, but he trusted in the goodness of God, and that trust was rewarded when the Lord brought His people back from Babylonian captivity.

WINDOW ON THE WORD

Mount Zion

Mount Zion specifically refers to a hill sacred to the Jews. It is located just beyond the walls of ancient Jerusalem. In general, it had referred to the city of King David—that is, Jerusalem. But in a wider sense the term can also apply to all of Israel and its people.

In the Hebrew Bible, Mount Zion is a symbol for the redemption of the Jewish people. In the New Testament, Mount Zion is used to refer to the heavenly Jerusalem—that is, God's holy and eternal city.

3 Bible Application

Examine God's willingness to listen to our complaints.

This step encourages class members to be open about why, at times, they might express their grievances to God. Allow students to select the activity they would like to do. If possible, photocopy this page and give instructions to each group.



Handout:

'The Stories of Jake and Greta'

Read the stories on this handout and discuss your answers to the questions. How much can you relate to the people in these case studies?

GROUP ACTIVITIES

Discussion Group

Read "Our Deliverer!" and answer **Questions 13, 14, and 15** in the student book. There is nothing wrong with gift-giving, as well as the other secular elements of this holiday, but the focus must always center on the birth of Jesus and the significance of this historical event. Likewise, the celebration of the Easter holiday is fine, but its secular features should never dim the true Easter message regarding Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection. As Christians, we know that God listens and delivers, but it's when nothing seems to happen that our faith is challenged. We must trust in God no matter how quiet He seems.

Skit: The Complaints of Believers

Write a script in which people are complaining at a church gathering, such as a church dinner. The complaints might be about family, their work, the government, or even the church. Conclude the skit with a time for prayer by having these people come together and voicing their complaints to God. Next, choose one member to direct the skit and cast the roles of the complainers. Read or perform the script before the class. Then, discuss why it is fruitful to take our complaints to God and why we should then listen to God's wisdom about these matters.

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Our Deliverer!

The psalmist praised the Lord, saying, "The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all" (Ps. 34:17-19).

The psalmist conveys many spiritual insights. Among these insights are that our heavenly Father truly listens to us when we cry out for His help and that He will, indeed, deliver us. The strongest evidence that God not only hears but also hearkens to the pleas of His children is in the true meaning of Christmas. For hundreds of years, the Jews had cried out to God because of their hardships as humiliated subjects under the reign of various conquering dynasties in the region. God heard their cries and listened to their complaints; He sent His Son, who reigned with Him in their heavenly kingdom, humbled Himself by assuming a human form, and was born in a stable in Bethlehem. For thousands of years, Christians have also lifted their hands and their pleas to God, and they only need to look back to the Christmas story to be reassured that God listens.

Another insight from the psalmist is that God will deliver us, and the strongest evidence for this truth is in the true meaning of Easter. Not only did Jesus die on the Cross for our sins, but God also raised His Son from the dead, assuring us of salvation in Christ. Jesus' earthly ministry culminated on Easter Sunday when He conquered sin and death and evil once and for all time.

13. *How do you know that God listens to your pleas for His help when you ponder the Christmas story?*

14. *How do you know that God will deliver you from your troubles when you ponder the Easter story?*

15. *Why is it important for you to know that God works according to His timetable and not yours?*

4 Life Response

Trust in God's answers to your pleas.

It is not a sin to cry out to the Lord or even complain to Him. He not only expects but also wants us to turn to Him when we are in deep distress. Moreover, He understands why we complain, even if the complaint is directed at Him. We are, in fact, frail human beings, who can persevere only through the power of the Holy Spirit. What God does expect from us is that we will invariably trust in His promises to care for our needs despite the severity of our ordeals.

Have your students read "Rest Assured" in *Comprehensive Bible Study*. Some students may want to share a situation this past week when they questioned whether God was really listening to their prayers but found reassurance that He was. Relating past experiences gives us hope for future situations.

End the lesson with a closing prayer. Thank God that He cares for us so much that He desires that we convey whatever is on our hearts, even if our words are in the form of a complaint. Thank Him that He not only listens to us intently but that He also responds to our pleas in such a way that He does deliver us from our hardships. Ask the Lord to strengthen and deepen our faith so that we will have the patience and trust in knowing that He does hear us and will bring us to the other side of our troubles, whether in the near or distant future.

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Rest Assured

This week's Scripture focused on Jeremiah's heartfelt lament about the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and how he sought God's attention and mercy. Although our plight is far less in scale to the Jews at that time, our ordeals can still be a challenge to our faith in Christ. Nevertheless, our faith will be strengthened when we truly believe that God listens to us when we cry out to Him and that He will deliver us from our troubles.

► Briefly describe in your study book a situation in which you have been questioning whether God is really listening to your prayers—and also any reassurance He has given you that your life is firmly in His merciful hands.

KEY VERSE

Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. —Lamentations 5:21, KJV

Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old. —Lamentations 5:21, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of April 26 through May 2

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

- Mon.** 2 Kings 3:9-17—Elisha Prophesies Truth to King Jehoshaphat.
- Tues.** 1 Kings 22:1-6—Kings Propose Battle against Aram.
- Wed.** 1 Kings 22:7-14—Micaiah Resists Pressure to Prophesy Falsely.
- Thurs.** 2 Chronicles 18:18-22—A Lying Spirit Brings Disaster.
- Fri.** 1 Kings 22:29-40—King Ahab Suffers Fatal Injury.
- Sat.** 1 Kings 22:41-46—Jehoshaphat Promotes Peace with Israel.
- Sun.** 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28—Prophet Micaiah Speaks the Truth.



As the class members are leaving, hand out copies of this week's *Power for Living*. Take or mail copies of *Lesson Leaflet* to those who couldn't be with you today, or send them to those you would like to join your class.

Before Teaching Next Week's Lesson

Before next week, read 1 Kings 22:15-23, 26-28. Have students think about the best places for them to find lies that the world tells them (for example, the Internet).