

Making It Through the Valley

18 - Nehemiah: A Time for Restoration
Church on the Park | Sunday, 14 March 2021 | Glen Gerhauser

Text: “So I sent messengers to them, saying, ‘I am doing a great work and I cannot come down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and come down to you?’” — Nehemiah 6:3

Theme: You can walk through the valley and make it out victoriously.

Intro: How can you make it through the valley? Life has many valleys of lamentation—places of deep sorrow, pain and weeping. David sings about ‘the valley of the shadow of death’ (Psalm 23:4). The sons of Korah write about ‘the valley of weeping’ (Psalm 84:6, NLT; Bahah sounds like weeping in Hebrew). Joel prophesied about ‘the valley of decision’ (Joel 3:14). Moses declared that “the land into which you are about to cross [is] a land of hills and valleys” (Deu. 11:11). Yahweh brought Ezekiel into the valley of dry bones (Ps 37:1-2). Achan was executed in a place they called the ‘valley of Achor’, which means trouble or disturbance (Josh. 7:24-26). Nehemiah began and concluded his inspection of the broken down walls at night through the Valley Gate (Neh. 2:13-15). And yet, God promises: “I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water and the dry land fountains of water” (Isa. 41:18).

1) V - Voice your pain and sorrow to God (Psalm 5:1-3; Psalm 13).

- Sometimes we think we can’t voice our grief to God. If we do, we think God would see it as complaining.
- However, this is not a healthy or a biblical mindset.
 - Most of the Psalms have some kind of lamentation in them.
 - There’s even a whole book in the Bible called Lamentations.
 - What many people don’t know about the Book of Lamentations is that it’s a book full of acrostic poems, covering each and every letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
 - This teaches us that we need to deal with our grief thoroughly before God in prayer.
 - But not just any kind of prayer.
 - The model of prayer in Scripture is poetry, song, writing and art—prayer that is real, raw and honest before God—and prayer that is thoughtful and beautiful.
 - Part of the healing process is producing poems, stories, songs and art.
- “There is a time to weep” as Ecclesiastes reminds us (Ecc. 3:4).
- But as God’s people, we don’t just weep about our own isolated pain and sorrow.
 - We weep because Jesus wept (John 11:35; Luke 19:41-44; Matt 23:37-39).
 - We weep because we are fellowshiping in the sufferings of Jesus.
 - We weep because God’s law is broken (Psalm 119:136; *Eze. 9:1-11).
 - This story of God’s mark on the foreheads of the righteous has been on my heart for this season (Eze. 9:1-11).
 - The righteous are marked by their grief over sin.
 - When we stop crying and weeping we know we are drifting away from God’s heart, which is aching over the horrors caused by sin.
 - We weep because the world is fallen.
 - “There is no one righteous, no not one” (Romans 3:10).
 - We weep over the fruit of sin: brokenness, sickness, oppression and death.
 - We weep over our own sins in repentance (James 4:8-10).
 - We weep because of the sacrifice we make for the sake of the Gospel (Ps 126:5).
- Yet, we know that weeping is never the final movement in God’s symphony. Instead, it’s a valley we are passing through. In the end we read, “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away” (Rev. 21:4).

2) A - Announce God’s resurrection life in your valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1-10).

- As God’s prophetic people, we are called like Ezekiel to transform the valley of dry bones around us.
- We can only do this by eating, knowing and speaking God’s Word (Eze. 2:8-3:3).

- God is able to make our valleys of Achor (trouble) a door of hope (Hosea 2:15).
- Remember, Achor is the place they stoned Achan, a place of great trouble and pain.
- Psalm 84
 - “Blessed are those whose strength is in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baka, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion” (Ps 84:5–7).
- As God’s people, we have power to transform the environment around us.
 - We are like Nehemiah who change the rubble into something regal.
 - We are the restorers and the igniters of revival—we cannot come down from the great work we are doing (Neh. 6:3).

3) L - Look for God’s goodness (Lamentations 3:25-27).

- How can you make it through the valley?
 - Look for God’s goodness.
- Lamentations 3 is the heart of the book of Lamentations.
 - And we see Jeremiah’s poetry taking a turn when he hits the seventh letter of the Hebrew alphabet: Zayin.
 - He begins to remember God’s lovingkindness (Hesed) and goodness (Tov).
- Here’s what I wrote this week:
 - Morning Thought: Life is full of valleys of lamentation. It would be naive to think that your walk with God does not have times of weeping. But in these valleys, there are lilies—beautiful pieces of God’s detailed artistry.
 - On the mountain top, we see the Lord’s glorious victory. In the valley, we behold the thoughtful detail he creates in our lives—the very fragrance of Christ that our Father infuses within us in our darkness.
 - Tet ט is the ninth letter in the Hebrew alphabet and begins one of the most precious Hebrew words: tov טוב, meaning good. After God created everything, he stepped back and said it was "tov meod מאד טוב", very good or extremely beautiful.
 - Alone, lamentations are not good. But alongside everything God is creating within you, they are like the dark parts of a painting: they cause the brighter colours to pop.
 - When we reach the heart of the Book of Lamentations, we come into the tov טוב 'field' (Lamentations 3:25-27). Each verse of this triplet trove begins with tov טוב. "The Lord is good טוב" even amid my weeping; my tears serve to water the ground for the seeds of God’s Word to flourish.
 - Tet ט looks like a basket, and in this basket, the Lord stores beautiful treasures. When you weep, he personally hands you one of his chosen gems from this container of his goodness. The Tet ט portion of Psalm 119 begins by saying, "Good—so good—you’ve been to your servant; O Yahweh, just like your word states" (Psalm 119:65, my translation).
 - Psalm 119:65-72, Tet.

4) L - Look to the Shepherd and his staff (Psalm 23:3-4).

- In Psalm 23:3-4, David gives us insight on making it through the valley.
 - First, the path of righteousness—that is, living right—will, at times, bring you into gloomy valleys (v. 3).
 - “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [valley of gloom/thick darkness; actually, the word death is not in the Hebrew], I fear no evil, for You are with me [You stand with me]; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Ps 23:4).
 - In David’s mind, “Your rod and your staff” are probably not two different items, but rather the one shepherd’s staff.
 - What David is bringing out is that our great Shepherd has all authority to protect us from all evil (*ra*) and misfortune (*ra*).
 - The shepherd’s rod is a weapon to smite enemies, but also can be used to discipline the sheep.
 - The shepherd’s staff speaks of support, especially for walking.
 - In the valley, lean on the Shepherd.
 - And remember, his rod is your rod (Exo. 14:13-16).

- The solution for Moses when Israel stood between ‘a rock and a hard place’ was to life up his staff. In other words, exercise authority in prayer.
- Just keep walking...just keep walking with the Shepherd. And walk in his authority.
- Attacks often try to strip us of authority.
 - We may weep before God, but we must stand strong against the evil one.
 - We don’t weep before the enemy.

5) E - Encourage someone else (Heb. 3:12-13).

- When you are going through a valley, it helps to get your eyes off yourself and encourage someone else.
- Who can you encourage?
 - Go out of your way to find someone to encourage this week—someone you usually don’t encourage.

6) Y - Yield to God’s inward work (Nehemiah 6:3; 2 Corinthians 2:14-15).

- Like Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, Jesus is doing a good work within us, rebuilding our inward walls of fortitude.
- Pain can make you want to rebel and withdraw, but this is the time you need to yield to God’s inward work.
- God is infusing the fragrance of Christ in you (2 Cor. 2:14-15).
 - This fragrance is the sacrificial love of Christ that makes up the breastplate of righteousness.

Conclusion: How can you make it through the valley? First, the ‘V’: Voice your pain and sorrow to God; Next, ‘A’: Announce God’s resurrection life. At the middle are the two ‘L’s’: Look for God’s goodness and Look to the Shepherd and his staff. Finally, it’s the ‘E’ and the ‘Y’: Encourage someone else and Yield to God’s inward work.