**BCM Bible Study– September 20/21, 2017, [Jer 11-15, 19 & 20]**

**Conversations with God in the Midst of Suffering (through a hard calling)**

*Background: The last “good king” (Josiah) of Israel has died, Israel has refused to repent, and the Lord has sent Jeremiah back to the people to again send warnings to them about the destruction they are about to endure. Upon returning home to Anathoth, he has realized that his own neighbors and friends from home are plotting against his life, thus he begins a series of conversations with God on his suffering as a prophet to a people who do not listen.*

**Ice breaker or opening question**:

What does your prayer life usually look like?

Ex.) Does it feel formal? Is it filled with emotion? Rehearsed? Awkward? Full of requests?

What does your prayer life look like when you’re going through suffering or a difficult calling/life season?

**Read Jeremiah 11:18-23 [Conversation 1]**

* What is Jeremiah saying to God? What does he ultimately ask for?
* What does God say back to Jeremiah? How does God’s response ultimately declare that He is in control of what Jeremiah asks for?
* Does it make you feel better or worse that God is ultimately in control of our requests? Why or why not?

**Read Jeremiah 12:1-6 [Conversation 1, con’t]**

What is happening in this conversation?

* What is Jeremiah asking God?
* What is God’s answer to Jeremiah?

**Notes:**

Jeremiah’s complaint reveals his impatience in God dealing with the wicked and the dejected state of his faith and being through his questioning of his justice.

God’s response is summed up well by Ray Stedman’s paraphrasing:

*"Now, if faith grows cold and faint and weak in the midst of the pressures of today," God's question to Jeremiah, and to us, is, "what are you going to do when it gets worse? How will you compete with horses, when you give in against men on foot?"*

* Where are you feeling weary with believing in God’s justice over the wicked prospering?
* With all that is going on in the world today, how can we encourage one another in believing in God’s perfect timing in dealing with injustice and persecution?
* What biblical truths can you think of that encourage you in times of doubt or lack of faith? (example: Isaiah 40:30-31, 2 Peter 3:9, Romans 8:28, etc.)

Jeremiah is expecting God to “deal with” his problems or just increase the comfort of his situation. Instead, God tells him things will get worse. In times of hardship or trouble like Jeremiah is experiencing, where can we find hope? How do we pursue contentment and even joy in the midst of trial?

**Conversation 2**

Context: Jeremiah and God begin to converse about saving the people of Judah. Although God has told Jeremiah many times to no longer pray for the people of Judah, he asks God to spare the people for God’s namesake. God responds with a firm no, and Jeremiah becomes distraught.

**Read Jeremiah 15:18-21**

* What stands out to you about Jeremiah’s heartfelt words in v. 18? [leader note: a picture of unrealized hope]
* Would you feel comfortable being that open with God?
* How does God’s response differ this time from the last response he gave Jeremiah?
* Take a look at v. 19-21. Which declaration to Jeremiah [from God] is most encouraging to you where you are in life right now?

“God answers his own questions here. He had asked Jeremiah, "What will you do, if you've been wearied by running with the men on foot, when you contend with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, what will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?" Now his answer is, "Jeremiah, even in those hours when everything else seems to be collapsing, and nothing seems to be dependable, if in that hour you will rest on me, you will find that I will strengthen you and see you through. I am the only adequate source of strength in any time of trouble. Any other source will fail you. The arm of flesh will fail” – **Ray Stedman ties in 12:5 to 15:19-21**

**Conversation 3**

**Read Jeremiah 19:14 – 20:4 & 20:7-18**

* What emotions do you see from Jeremiah after experiencing physical harm from Pashur? (Try to identify three different stages in Jeremiah’s lamenting)
* Jeremiah declares that God has deceived him in v. 8-9. Why is this not true?
* When you encounter times of trouble or hardship, what is your first reaction when talking to God?
* How do you think Jeremiah made the leap from thinking that God deceived him to praising his name in ch. 20 v. 11-13?
* What happens when Jeremiah turns the focus completely to himself instead of focusing on the God who has called him to his mission? How can we avoid this trap ourselves?

**Conclusion: Read James 1:2-4**

How does this passage interact with what we’ve read already?

How do we find joy in the midst of trials?

**Read**: “Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine.” – Tim Keller (*Walking with God in Pain and Suffering)*

How have you experienced finding meaning in suffering in your own life?

**Small group accountability questions**:

How can we turn to each other and God in the midst of pain and suffering or a difficult calling?

How are you doing right now in life – leaning more toward the pain and suffering side, or in a place of preparing of how to respond when you do face pain and suffering?

Encourage your peeps to pray for one another or encourage one another based on answers – either praise God for not being in suffering, or pray for the other in the midst of suffering/tough calling.