

WHERE IS GOD? LAMENTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

SVCC Sunday Morning Online Bible Study

April 19, 2020

If you're doing well—not especially afraid, not grieving—be grateful. Praise God!

- Some have it hard right now. Remember Scripture's call for us to look out for the welfare of our families and neighbors, and to help those in need.

HOW TO HELP SOMEONE WHO IS HAVING A HARD TIME DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Beware sayings like, "God has a purpose for everything," or "Everything happens for a reason." Though there's some truth in such sayings, they don't take the full scope of the situation into account, and they do little to alleviate pain. Sometimes they come across as insensitive. Better to say, "God is faithful," while validating—and joining in—the other person's grief.
- **Job 2:11-13** + chapters 3-25 (especially **11:1-6**, **16:1-5**) — What mistake did Job's friends make?
- **Isaiah 40** — Your way has been hard, but in due time, God himself will comfort you.
- LAMENT — *Listen to Kevin's 2015 sermon series on lament at <http://www.summitviewchurch.net/featured-lessons-archive.html>.*
 - the structure of lament (with variation):
address —> complaint —> request —> motivation —> confidence
 - examples:
 - **Psalms 13** — What, if anything, seems harsh about this psalm?
 - How might this kind of prayer be helpful to a person who is hurting?
 - **Psalms 44** — What is the cry of despair in this psalm? What is the hope?
 - **Psalms 77** — What is the complaint in this psalm? What is the hope?
- JESUS
 - Jesus suffered. In Jesus, God does not take away all our suffering, but rather joins us in it.
 - **Matthew 27:46** — Was Jesus giving up on God? Had God really abandoned him? What is going on in Jesus' words here?
 - Does knowing the story of Jesus make our suffering harder to bear, or easier?

WISE WORDS FROM 2 MEN WHO HAVE SUFFERED

Dr. John Mark Hicks, Professor of Theology & History at Lipscomb University — posted on Facebook, March 27, 2020 — Dr. Hicks lost his first wife to an unexpected complication of surgery and lost his son to a rare genetic disorder.

Thinking about God in a Pandemic. #3

Where is God? For some, it is a taunt; for others, a deep sigh. Either way, God remains hidden, intangible, and seemingly distant. The question gnaws at us. It disturbs me. When surrounded by injustice, hunger, disease, and death, the question clouds faith and creates doubt. I have no rationales, but I do have a witness.

Where is God? God is hanging on the cross. God did not avoid suffering but chose it for our sakes. God loved us by participating in the suffering of the world. Jesus said, I came to give my life for the life of the world—to serve rather than be served. Where is God? God is present in the hungry, the prisoner, and the coronavirus patient on the ventilator. Jesus said, if you serve the least of these, you serve me. Where is God? God is acting through the healthcare worker, the volunteer, the social worker, the first responders, and pastoral care. Jesus said, whoever gives a cup of cold water in my name is my disciple.

God is not absent but hidden. Though hidden, God is made visible in Jesus, the suffering, and those who follow Jesus. Where is God? Here. Present in the suffering with the sufferer as a sufferer.

Dr. John Mark Hicks — posted on Facebook, March 25, 2020

Thinking about God in a Pandemic. #1

Why, God? That is a good question to ask. Many have asked it before us. Psalm 10:1, "Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?" Psalm 44:24, "Why do you forget our afflictions and oppression?"

Some things don't make any sense. Eli Wiesel once said, "God and the death camps, I'll never understand." Agreed.

The history of theology and philosophy is replete with possible answers to the "why" question. Some provide some guidance. But, ultimately, we don't know. Can we live with ignorance? I think we have to. But we are not without recourse. Like Israel, we struggle with God. Like Jesus, we lament. Like Job, we protest. Like the martyrs, we ask, "How long?" Yes, ask God. "How long?" Why? "Where are you?" "Why don't you do something?" Let us pray; and let us struggle, lament, and protest. We have great models for that in the Bible. Follow their example. It is spiritual therapy. Psalms 13, 44, 77, 143; Job 3, 7, 10.

Dr. David LaVelle, retired orthopaedic surgeon, Memphis, TN; Highland Church of Christ deacon when Kevin worked there, 1998-2003 — posted on Facebook, March 22 2020 — Dr. LaVelle lost his college-age daughter in a car accident.

Calm — Faith — Peace of mind

My father was an ear, nose and throat doctor but since I went to a very small Christian school, he was often asked to be the "team doctor" for our sports teams. At the time (late 60's, early 70's) sports medicine was not a thing and he'd been a GP for years before doing a residency. He would do it, but very reluctantly as he was not a sports fan and thought sports was a huge waste of energy that could be put to good use working on a farm or doing something constructive rather than beating each other up.

He would stand on the sideline of a football game as long as he could stand it, then would walk home. (We lived next door.) Since he didn't let me play football (thanks dad!) I'd often stand with him during a game. I already wanted to be a doctor and I imagined myself as his assistant.

Once there was a particularly gruesome injury and the crowd at the game gasped! Everyone was shouting and I could feel the hysteria building. The coaches and other players on both sides were running out on the field and running around in a panic. I looked up at dad and he was just standing there. And then in his normal pace, calmly walked out to the field to help the player. Later, I asked dad "why didn't you run out there?" He said something like "as a doctor, if you remain calm, it helps others to be calm too. If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, you can do your job better and help others be calm. Being in a panic doesn't help anyone." Since I wanted to be a doctor and master this mysterious power, I asked, how do you stay calm? Practice.

I've thought back to that conversation a hundred times in my career. During a full on cardiac resuscitations. When being called to the ER with a poly trauma. During surgery when something catastrophic happened. Practice calm. How do you do that? Pause. Slow your steps. Take a deep breath. Focus on one thing at a time. Don't look too far into the future. Stay in the moment. Say "We can do this (there's always a team)". Pray. Remember the 2 laws of being a surgeon: 1- There is a God. 2- You ain't Him. It's wonderful to be a Christian at a time like this. Since I really do believe God is in control, I don't have to worry about being in control. It helps me be calm. I know many of you aren't Christians but I'll tell you. It's WONDERFUL to know that there is a God and he loves us and no matter what happens, we're going to be ok. If one of us gets sick, it's going to be ok. If I die, it's ok. If anyone in my family dies, it's going to be ok. (Ask my how I know...)

So have faith. It's going to be ok. Practice calm. Take a good cleansing breath. Turn off the breathless reporters and endless discussions on TV and read a book. Go for a walk. Ride your bike. Cook or work in the yard. Plant some flowers. Call that friend you've been meaning to catch up with. Know that you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs. (Kipling quote) These things lead to peace of mind. Keep the faith! Doc