

STUDY NOTES

UNPOPULAR THINGS

A SERIES *at* NEW CITY CHURCH

www.newcityphx.com/sermons

The following content is based on the message “Pain, Loss, and Honest Prayer” on 11/26/17 at New City Church in Phoenix, AZ. The following is not meant to be a full synopsis but rather a brief look at the main ideas. To use this Study Guide effectively you must listen to the message found at <http://newcityphx.com/sermons/>.

Leaders using these Study Notes for group study and reflection should read the Biblical text thoroughly before beginning, using this resource as assistance and not relying solely on this material for insight. We encourage all leaders to pray and ask the Spirit for revelation as they lead their respective community groups.

PRAYER

Pray and ask God to lead the discussion as everyone gets to share.

SCRIPTURE: PSALM 77
(READ PORTIONS AS DIRECTED)

HONEST PRAYER TO GOD

Read Psalm 77:1-9. Asaph was Israel’s temple musician. He would write liturgy with which the people could worship. We don’t know what caused him to write this Psalm, but we see into his honest heart. He says a lot of things that we are often scared to say to God. Yet, God wanted to hear the pain and frustration that Asaph was experiencing. Asaph sets an example for how we can approach God.

Prayer is a time to be honest, not to be good.

- *When you first hear Asaph’s prayer, what is your personal reaction?*
- *Have you ever prayed like this? Why or why not?*

BUT WHAT IF I DON’T PRAY IN THIS WAY?

Praying like this can be difficult for some people. They are afraid that if they share their honest feelings, it will seem like they are depressed. However, if you think about it, pressing down emotions, rather than sharing them, is depressing those emotions in your heart. Others find it difficult because they claim to not have any emotions like

this—emotions that might seem dark. However, in a broken world, we all have had things that we need to grieve. Most people just choose to distract themselves instead.

- *How have you distracted yourself from pain that you were experiencing?*
- *What happens to your relationship with God when you withhold your honest emotions from him?*

ENTERING INTO PAIN WITH OTHERS

One of the most difficult things to do is to watch others go through pain. Most people want to try to move them out of that pain. However, that’s God’s work—in his timing. We just need to show up and provide loving presence for the suffering other. Being present with them shares the load (or at least, expresses the willingness to share the burden) with them.

Trying to explain away suffering pushes the burden of suffering back onto the suffering other.

- *Why do you think trying to explain away pain would make it more difficult for the one who is suffering? How has this been your personal experience?*

MEDITATING ON THE CHARACTER OF GOD

Read Psalm 77:10-20. Even in the midst of his darkness, Asaph makes sure that he turns to God. It may not be always easy to do, but we must. Asaph doesn’t try to find answers, but he just meditates on the character of God. When he consistently does this, he finds that God is great, good, holy, and faithful. We can find that Jesus has proven his faithfulness to us when he went through the darkness on the cross. There he defeated sin and death; and we can look forward to when he defeats Satan once and for all.

If Jesus defeated the ultimate darkness, he can most certainly handle your darkness.

- *Even when we might not believe it, why do you think meditating on the character of God, would help us start to believe that he is good, holy, and faithful?*
- *Pain reminds us that we are weak and that we need God. How is weakness a good thing?*

Read 2 Corinthians 12:5-10 to close.