

## Crying Out to God

Jeremiah 15: 15-21  
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For infants, crying out through tears serves as an important communication tool, allowing them to show their need for support. According to several recent studies, that same communication tool may also serve us well in adulthood.

Psychologist David Wells says tears are a social lubricant, helping to ensure the smooth functioning of a community by helping people communicate. Research shows that crying is more likely to make people feel better when they have emotional support (such as a close friend nearby)... or if their crying led to a ... new understanding of the situation.<sup>1</sup>

In today's Old Testament lesson, the Prophet Jeremiah gains a new understanding of his situation by crying out to God, by turning to God for emotional support.

Initially – before he cries out to God – Jeremiah is upset that society seems to be working against him. He feels that he's done everything the Lord has asked him and still things aren't going well.

So he cries out to God, praying, "O Lord, you know; remember me and visit me, and bring down retribution for me on my persecutors."

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet, to speak out on his behalf so that his wayward people would draw close to God, return to godly living. But as Jeremiah did this, his life has gotten worse and worse.

"... On your account, I suffer insults," he says to God. "... I did not sit in the company of merry-makers...." Instead, "under the weight of your hand, I sat alone.... Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?"

Jeremiah is suffering terribly, even though he's done right in the eyes of God.

Have you ever felt that way? You work hard all your life and, yet, you don't have the wealth and success that others have. And it seems like they just have it handed to them. What an insult.

Or maybe you've done your best to lead a healthy lifestyle only to have serious illness or a major injury add to your pain and suffering. Or you've done all you can to be nice and do your part, and still people make you out to be the villain, the slacker. It's not fair, right?

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<sup>1</sup> David Wells, "The purpose of tears," *Brisbane Clinical Psychologist* website. [brisbaneclinicalpsychologist.com](http://brisbaneclinicalpsychologist.com). Retrieved April 1, 2019.

Well, that's just how Jeremiah felt. But instead of sitting there taking it, he cries out to God in complaint, saying, "Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail."

Wow! Calling God deceitful and saying he's failed – that's pretty bold. We would never do anything like that, at least not out loud. But how many times have we wondered.... How many times have we wondered if God cares about us?

If God really cared, I wouldn't be going through this right now, whatever that is for you. If God really cared, life would be more fair for those who have so little. If God really cared, I wouldn't see everything I eat hit my waistline, while others can eat whatever they want. If God really cared, people wouldn't get away with cheating their way to the top, or abusing the power and trust they've been given.

If God really cared.... We've all thought it, but how many of us have been bold enough to say it out loud, not to mention cry out to God about it. We just wouldn't dare. It's not right. God would not be pleased.

And yet, here we see the Prophet of God himself doing just that – crying out to God, calling God deceitful, saying that God has failed him.

In response, God says to Jeremiah, the Israelites and to us, "If you turn back, I will take you back, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall serve as my mouth." In other words, now that you've got it out of your system, let's get on with life.

What we see here is that if we don't cry out to God when things go terrible wrong, we will never really get past our anger and upset.

But it's hard to cry out to God in a way such as that. Part of us thinks maybe God doesn't really understand, or worse yet, maybe God doesn't really care, at least not about me and my problems. And yet, the truth is God does understand your troubles, and God cares deeply about you and your future.

Reflecting on this, theologian Rowan Williams says, "... Inasmuch as we do good or ill to any human person, it is done to God. ... And the good news of Christianity is that, since God suffers human pain, ... then there is – beyond all our sin – a love that is inexhaustible. God's love for ... creation never comes to a point where it can take no more."<sup>2</sup>

What this means for us is that when you can't take it anymore, that's when you need to give it to God. And I mean really give it God. Cry out to God. Even yell at God if that's what you need to do. Because God can take it.

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<sup>2</sup> Rowan Williams, *A Ray of Darkness* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1995), 51.

And because God can and does take it on our behalf, because God suffers the pain of humanity out of his love for us, we, too, can take it. We can take anything and everything the world throws at us, trusting that God will see us through and make things right in the end.

After Jeremiah lays it all out there before the Lord – all his struggles, his suffering, his anger, his disappointment in God and in humanity itself – God gives him this assurance, saying, “It is they who will turn to you, not you who will turn to them.”

In other words, keep the faith, keep doing what you know to be right in the sight of God, and those who put you down, those who make you feel less than, they will see the truth and value of who you are being, how faithfully you are living your life.

And not only that, but because you’re taking a stand for God, God will take a stand for you. As God says, “I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze. They will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, says the Lord.”

For us to share in that blessing, we have to share in the faithfulness of Jeremiah, the honest, heart-felt, fearless determination of Jeremiah.

“Your words were found and I ate them,” says Jeremiah – I took in and digested all that you’ve said, O God – “and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord...”

For any of us here who have felt God calling us to something greater than ourselves, it is only in the boldness of our relationship with God that we will rise to that calling. And it is only in being authentic with God – through good times and bad – that we can truly hear God speak to us and then take in what he is saying.

So, don’t be afraid to cry out to God in your moment of need, anger and frustration. God can take it, and God can turn your greatest need into your greatest strength. Knowing that – knowing that God can and will redeem your struggles and troubles – now that will see you through, and not only see you through, but deliver you, bringing you to that place of joy and blessing that God has for you. Amen.

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Let us open our hearts and minds to the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. May God's Spirit be here, leading us toward a more mature faith, nurturing our hope, and embracing us in love.

Lord, remind us that the Scriptures proclaim to us God's abiding and forgiving love. Remind us, Lord, that you have called us to be peacemakers.

Our world is so divided and troubled. Now we need your great and worthy guidance to take up the message and practice of biblical teachings. May we be persons of redeeming love and reconciling peace.

We pray, also, your comforting and healing presence for those struggling with illness and disease, and especially those we name in our hearts at this time. As we lift up our prayers for these and others in need, we pray, O God, that you help us walk in faith, assured of your eternal presence in our lives.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray together, saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.**