

## WEEK FOUR: How Do We Respond When Life Is Broken?

### GATHER

Take a few minutes to reconnect with one another.

As you begin, remember some of our practices for good groups:

- Start and end on time.
- Listen more than you talk.
- Make room for everyone.
- Resist the temptation to fix, advise, or solve.
- What is shared in the group stays in the group.

### LOOKING BACK

Last week we explored the idea that a life worth living is less like a grocery list and more like a **recipe**. Our lives include:

- **Agency:** How we choose to respond to what happens.
- **Circumstances:** The realities and conditions of our lives.
- **Emotional life:** How we experience and make sense of what happens.

Reflect on your past week:

**What did you notice about your own balance, or “recipe,” of agency, circumstances, and emotional responses?**

We also considered two very different ways of understanding ourselves:

*I am a collection of cells living for a short time on a ball of rock and metal.*

or

*I am a beloved child of God whose life has meaning and significance.*

**Which perspective tends to shape the way you move through your everyday life?**

### THIS WEEK: RESPONDING TO A BROKEN WORLD

The authors invite us to consider some enormous questions:

**What responsibility do we have toward other people?**

What responsibility do we have toward people experiencing poverty, racial injustice, misogyny, violence, or other forms of suffering?

And when the problems of the world feel overwhelmingly large, **where do we find hope that anything can actually change?**

**The book describes three pathways for responding.**

## **1. PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION**

This might include:

- Prayer
- Worship
- Study
- Spiritual practices
- Learning
- Examining our assumptions and prejudices
- Learning to see ourselves, other people, and the world more through God's eyes

Personal transformation asks: **Who am I becoming?**

## **2. PRACTICAL, MATERIAL INTERVENTION**

This might include:

- Feeding someone who is hungry
- Providing shelter or clothing
- Caring for someone who is lonely
- Volunteering
- Giving financial assistance
- Participating in ministries such as Saturday Sanctuary

Practical intervention asks: **What can I do to help someone right now?**

## **3. SYSTEMIC CHANGE**

This might include:

- Advocacy
- Voting and working at polling locations
- Writing elected officials
- Letter-writing campaigns
- Organizing
- Marches or peaceful protest
- Supporting changes to policies, institutions, or systems

Systemic change asks: **What needs to change so fewer people experience this problem in the future?**

## **DISCUSS**

- Which of these three approaches comes most naturally to you?
- Which gives you the greatest sense of hope?
- Which one is hardest for you?
- Are you in the same place you were 5, 10, or 15 years ago?
- How has the way you respond to the problems of the world changed over time?
- Which of these three “muscles” might God be inviting you to strengthen right now?

## WHEN BROKENNESS BECOMES PERSONAL

The book also turns toward a much more personal question: **What happens when life gets really bad?**

The story of Job describes extraordinary loss. Most of us will never experience suffering exactly like Job's. But loss is part of every human life. We lose people. We lose relationships. We lose abilities. We lose dreams. We lose jobs, security, health, pets, homes, certainty, and sometimes the future we thought we were going to have. Faith does not require us to pretend those losses do not hurt.

## SOMETIMES FAITHFULNESS LOOKS LIKE LAMENT

About one-third of the 150 Psalms are laments.

Again and again, people of faith bring their rawest emotions to God.

Many biblical laments follow a pattern:

1. **Turn toward God.**
2. **Tell God what is wrong.**
3. **Remember who God is and what God has done before.**
4. **Move, sometimes slowly, toward trust, praise, or hope.**

Lament teaches us that we do not have to make our feelings pretty, holy, or religious before bringing them to God. God can handle the truth.

On the cross Jesus prayed the opening words of Psalm 22:

**“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”**

Jesus used Israel's own language of lament. Psalm 22 does not deny suffering. But suffering does not receive the final word. The Psalm eventually declares:

“Future generations will be told about the Lord,  
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.”

Going to God with our real feelings can be a powerful spiritual practice. Trying to hide our anger, grief, disappointment, or sense of unfairness from God does not accomplish much anyway. God already knows. Lament gives us a way to bring those feelings into our relationship with God and, over time, perhaps gain what the Psalms call **a heart of wisdom**.

## DISCUSS

- How free do you feel to express anger, disappointment, or confusion to God?
- Were you taught that some emotions were inappropriate to bring to God?
- Have you ever experienced prayer as a place where you could simply tell the truth?
- What might it mean for you to practice lament?

## **WALKING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS HURTING**

We often want to make another person's pain better. Usually, we cannot. Sometimes our attempts to make things better actually make things worse. One of the most faithful things we can offer another person is simply our presence. We cannot take away someone's grief.

**But we can help make sure they do not have to carry it alone.**

Before offering words of explanation or reassurance, ask yourself:

**Am I saying this because it will help the person who is hurting, or because I am uncomfortable with their pain and want to make it go away?**

## **THINGS THAT ARE USUALLY NOT HELPFUL**

- "God won't give you more than you can handle."
- "Everything happens for a reason."
- "God needed another angel in heaven."
- "At least they lived a long life."
- "At least you have other children."
- "You can always get another pet."
- "It could have been worse."
- "You'll understand someday."
- "You just need to have faith."
- "The sun will come out tomorrow."

Some of these statements may express truths that a grieving person eventually claims for themselves. That does not mean someone else should say them.

## **DISCUSS**

**What other things should we probably NEVER say to someone who is suffering?**

Then turn the question around:

**When you have gone through a difficult time, what did someone say or do that actually helped?**

## **TRY THIS THIS WEEK**

Choose **one** of the three pathways you would like to strengthen:

- **Personal transformation**  
Spend intentional time in prayer, Scripture, learning, or reflection about an issue that concerns you.
- **Practical intervention**  
Do one concrete thing that directly helps another person.
- **Systemic change**  
Take one small step toward addressing a larger cause of suffering or injustice.

You do not have to fix the world this week. Simply exercise a muscle you want to strengthen.

## **PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER**

As you close, share one prayer request that is **about you and your own life**, rather than primarily about someone outside the group.