

## LOST IN THE MIDDLE CHAPTER 2—"TWO MID-LIFE PSALMS"

Note: The following is a handout from the Sunday School class of 9/18/05. It includes some materials that will be used in the sermon series on "Lamentations."

These notes cover up through page 64 of Dr. Tripp's material.

### INTRO (Tripp pages 53-55)

Story about Sam (age 49) needing bypass surgery. Unexpected happened. He's disappointed that his expectations not realized. Doesn't make any sense to him. He's slim, active, a careful eater. After surgery he feels like an old man. Response to the crisis makes him "age".

Note: Most of us don't expect to live to be 100. If we are 50 and below, we may expect to live 70,80, or 90 years. May expect to see our children grow up. Disappointment = when our expectations are not met. There's a gap.

Feelings of being old didn't fade after Sam's physical recovery. Wondered if he would ever be the same. Lost his job. Felt like he had no future. Other people went back to their own lives. "Life goes on."

Sam grew bitter, focused on what he did not have/could not do (glass half empty). Envied others who had what he did not. Felt like a failure, unfulfilled, dreams evaporated. Spent more and more time alone, silent and withdrawn when with others. Glamorized the past (unrealistically) and blackened the present (unrealistically).

Numbers 11:4-10 (selected)--So the children of Israel also wept again and said: "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"...And the anger of the Lord was greatly aroused; Moses also was displeased.

Sam hated his life. He was bitter, discouraged.

QUOTE--C. S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (book III, chapter 12)  
God's work in our lives can be painful, but His ultimate goal is to transform us into something better.

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and

stopping the leaks in the roof and so on. You knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised.

But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards.

You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but He is building up a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

#### THE SIDELINING OF SCRIPTURE (Tripp pages 55-57)

Bible gets functionally sidelined in lives of struggling people.

Real believers seldom directly deny Scriptures and the Christian faith...

But in times of personal suffering, difficulty, and crisis, the Bible suddenly becomes functionally irrelevant.

Thinking and living is not shaped and directed by Scripture's overarching story.

When this happens, people lose their identity, ethics, mission, and values.

People see a huge gap between the Bible and our painful circumstances.

People are not guided by Scripture when struggling to make sense out of life.

This is not only common in mid-life, but in ANY crisis.

John Owen (para)—People leave off devotions (Scripture meditation and prayer) before going far in any pattern of sin.

When we aren't spending time in fellowship with the Lord, we sin.

When sinning, we don't want to be with God, not comfortable in His presence.

Bible is our Owner's Manual. Written by our Maker and Master.

WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH (1.6)--The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.(1) Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the word;(2) and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the word, which are always to be observed.(3)

(1)2 Tim. 3:15,16,17; Gal. 1:8,9; 2 Thess. 2:2.; (2)John 6:45; 1 Cor. 2:9,10,11,12.

(3)1 Cor. 11:13,14; 1 Cor. 14:26,40.

## CHILDREN'S CATECHISM #14

Q—Where do you learn how to love and obey God?

A—In the Bible alone. (old version). Only in the Bible. (new version)

## WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM #1-3

WSC 1 What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God(1) and to enjoy Him forever.(2) (1)1 Cor. 10:31; Rom. 11:36; (2)Ps. 73:25-28

WSC 2 What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him? A. The word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments,(1) is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy Him.(2)

(1)2 Tim. 3:16; Eph. 2:20; (2)1 John 1:3,4

WSC 3 What do the Scriptures principally teach? A. The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.(1) (1)2 Tim. 1:13; 2 Tim. 3:16.

Don't compartmentalize (leave the Bible out of consideration).

God's word is the reliable manual on the proper use and maintenance of our life. It speaks with power and wisdom to every human experience.

It's impossible for the Bible not to address the issues of your life, because LIFE is what the Scriptures are all about.

It's written by the One who knows everything from eternity past through eternity future, containing all we need to live as God intends here and now.

Deuteronomy 32:46,47-- ...Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe; all the words of this law. For it is not a futile thing for you, because IT IS YOUR LIFE, and by this word you shall prolong your days in the land...."

The Bible was not governing Sam's perspective on life and his troubles.

He "believed" the Scriptures but this belief lived in a different chamber of his heart than the painful particulars of his physical disease.

Like Mark 4:40,41--Jesus said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, "Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!"

We need God's grace, help, wisdom to bridge the gap of functional separation between the Bible and everyday life.

Gap is most common in times of personal trouble.

TRANSITION--Psalms show us that biblical faith isn't neat and easy.

Honest about how the Christian faith is messy, chaotic, and filled with questions.

Lots of things happen in life that we don't understand. Same in Psalms.  
 God puzzles us in 2005 and sin blinds us. Same in Psalms.  
 Psalms balance honesty and hope.

PSALM 88—FINDING HOPE WHERE THERE IS NONE (Tripp pages 57-60)

This is the darkest of the Psalms. One of the darkest passages in all Scripture.

Seems bleak, hopeless, joyless, desperate. Sad, suffering, struggling.

Without relief, resolution, or expectancy.

Only one of the Psalms that doesn't turn upward at the end.

Psalms usually turn upward with confidence in Christ and praise.

Psalmist seems about ready to give up. Why God isn't doing something?

Feels alone, like no one understands or cares, like no one can help.

QUESTION--Can real believers feel forsaken and friendless like this?

Bible and church history say, "Yes."

Dark night of the soul is common for great heroes of the faith.

Son of God felt something like this in Gethsemane and Golgotha.

Christ was "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3)

Psalm 88 shows us that real Christianity is not warm and fuzzy.

We don't always have feelings of happiness, comfort, and peace.

PSALM 88: CONFRONTATION (Tripp pages 60-62)

Psalm shows us that life in this fallen world is hard. The world is a broken place.

Believers experience the unexpected. Can't figure out what God is doing.

Feel like we are unheard and our prayers unanswered. Feel alone.

Being in covenantal relation with Christ does not exempt us from dark days.

Christians get old, sick, unemployed. Betrayed by friends, opposed by enemies.

Suffer rejection, injustice, disappointment, sadness, mistreatment.

Our families break up, cars crash, houses burn down/are swept away by floods.

NEGRO SPIRITUAL

This world is not my home,/ I'm just a passing through,

My treasures are laid up/ Somewhere beyond the blue;

The angels beckon me/ From heaven's open door.

And I can't feel at home/ In this world any more.

HEBREWS 11:8-16 (selected)

By faith Abraham [and others] waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

We live in the uncomfortable moment between the glories of our regeneration, justification, and adoption...  
 And the glory of our final union with Christ for all eternity.  
 Until Jesus comes again, we live in a world that has been, and continues to be, devastated by sin.

John 16:33--These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

1 Corinthians 15:25--For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet.

Romans 8:22,23--For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

ALREADY saved/ NOT YET fully saved. See Romans 8:28-30 "Golden Chain."  
 See also 1 Peter 1:1-9.

This "in between stage" is part of God's design.  
 His plan has not failed. This is part of His plan.  
 We are here and in whatever trials we are in because our all-wise and all-loving Heavenly Father wants us here.  
 Our hard experiences don't get in the way of what God is doing in and through us.  
 These are the ways and means by which the Lord gets His will done.

JAMES 1:2-4--My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience (perseverance). But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect (mature) and complete, lacking nothing.

ROMANS 5:3-5--We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Psalms 88 shows us that God is not trying to give us a trouble-free life NOW.  
 OUR immediate personal satisfaction and pleasure is not HIS goal.

We tend to be self-centered, self-absorbed, self-referenced.

Want everything (circumstances, relationships, surrounding creation) to be comfortable, happy, pleasurable.

When our expectations are not met we are disappointed, discouraged, angry. God is working for His glory and our ETERNAL happiness and satisfaction. Happiness in this life is attainable only when we forsake our own glory and pursue God's glory.

#### MATTHEW 16

24 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.

25 "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

26 "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

27 "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.

#### PSALM 131

1 LORD, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.

2 Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, Like a weaned child with his mother; Like a weaned child is my soul within me.

3 O Israel, hope in the LORD From this time forth and forever.

PHILIPPIANS 4:11-13--I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

WE may pray to God and wonder if He's heard us.

May feel like the Lord is against us, like we are Friendless.

Our struggles in this life are not only physical, relational, and circumstantial, but also intensely spiritual.

We question God's presence and faithfulness. His wisdom, love, and power.

Does God KNOW what's best for us? (His wisdom)

Does He WANT what's best for us? (His love)

Is He able to DO what's best for us? (His power)

We can doubt His plan, doubt that He's really in control.

We need a faith that stands in the middle of Psalm 88, unshocked and unafraid. Mid-life and all other crises are HARD.

We struggle with HIS PLAN because it's not OUR PLAN.

We are disappointed because we age, decay, get sick, decline.

Dissatisfied because our dreams are not realized.  
 Discouraged that, in our sin, we failed so many times.  
 Disappointed that good things end, people move on (death, divorce, relocation).  
 Struggle with the fact that God completes His work of sanctification in us by  
     keeping us in the middle of all the harsh realities of the Fall.  
 Coming to faith in Christ doesn't remove us from the travails of a broken world.  
 Travails are the workroom in which Christ completes His work in/on us.

#### THE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving/Between my Lord and me.  
 I cannot choose the colors/ He works so steadily.

Off' times He weaves in sorrow/ And I, in foolish pride,  
 Forget He sees the upper/ And I, the underside.

The dark threads are as needed/ In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
 As the threads of gold and silver/ In the pattern He has planned.

Not till the loom is silent/ And shuttles cease to fly,  
 Will God unroll the canvas/ And explain the reason why.

#### ANOTHER VERSION--LIFE'S WEAVING (attributed to Father Tabb)

My life is but a weaving /Between my God and me,  
 I may not choose the colors/He knows what they should be.

For He can view the pattern/ Upon the upper side,  
 While I can see it only/ On this the under side.

Sometimes He weaveth sorrow/ Which seemeth strange to me,  
 But I will trust His judgment / And work on faithfully.

'Tis He who fills the shuttle/ He knows just what is best,  
 So I shall weave in earnest / And leave with Him the rest.

At last when life is ended/ in Him shall I abide,  
 Then I may view the pattern/Upon the upper side.

Then I shall know the reason/ Why pain with joy entwined,  
 Was woven in the fabric/ Of the life that God designed.

#### PSALM 88: HOPE (Tripp pages 62-64)

Because our hope rests in God, not circumstances, hope is implied in this Psalm.  
 Hope is not based on our ability to figure life out enough to solve our problems.

Psalm 88 shows that the Lord really does understand our deepest issues. It's God-breathed. The Holy Spirit gave the Psalmist these words to pray.

#### NO ONE UNDERSTANDS LIKE JESUS

Chorus: No one understands like Jesus/ When the days are dark and grim.  
No one is so near, so dear as Jesus;/ Cast Your every care on Him.

1. No one understands like Jesus;/ He's a Friend beyond compare.  
Meet Him at the throne of mercy;/ He is waiting for You there.

2. No one understands like Jesus;/ Every woe He sees and feels.  
Tenderly He whispers comfort;/ And the broken heart He heals.

3. No one understands like Jesus/ When the foes of life assail.  
You should never be discouraged;/ Jesus cares and will not fail.

4. No one understands like Jesus/ When you falter on the way.  
Though you fail Him, sadly fail Him,/ He will pardon You today.

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Lord looks with loving understanding into the deepest caverns of our experience.  
He hears with patience and mercy our most desperate cries.  
He never minimizes, mis-characterizes, misunderstands, or mocks our struggle.  
Psalm 88 shows that God really knows and understands how we feel.  
So we can come to Him when feeling lost, confused, and hopeless.  
Christ stands WITH US in trouble.  
The darkness of our situation does not blind His eyes or prevent His care.

Psalm 88 shows how deep, wide, and far the arms of our Sure Redeemer extend.

God's grace stretches with life-altering power to the deepest level of suffering.  
God's grace reaches into the most specific and troubling details of our lives.  
He hears the most desperate cries of our hearts, never turning a deaf ear.

HEBREWS 2:17,18--Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

#### HEBREWS 4

14 Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the

- heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.
- 15 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.
- 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

#### HEBREWS 5

- 7 ...In the days of [Jesus'] flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear,
- 8 though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.
- 9 And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.

HEBREWS 7:25--He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

Psalm 88 addresses our most fearful and doubt-ridden thoughts.

It reminds us that Christ redeems the lost and lonely, the rebel and the fearful...

The confused and the doubtful, the sinner and the sufferer...

The poor and the forsaken, the rejecter and the one rejected.

There is no thought so distorted, no emotion so powerful, no circumstance so horrible, no action so twisted, and no desire so desperate as to be outside Christ's reach.

Psalm 88 is in the Bible to remind us that God's sovereign grace is big enough to contain every experience than this broken world can throw at us.

That's a reason for hope!

In mid-life and times of lostness, aloneness, disappointment, disorientation...

We can remind ourselves that what we are going through is not beyond the scope of God's deliverance.

Christ's strong and loving hands can reach into the details of every experience.

God gives us grace for living righteously NOW, as well as grace to take us heaven LATER.

According to Jay Adams (Christian Counselor's Wordbook, page 46)

Grace has at least two meanings in the New Testament:

1. God's unmerited favor shown by calling and saving undeserving sinners to faith in Christ;
2. God's help or assistance to His children that encourages and enables them to fulfill His requirements (Philippians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:18).

We can't get so lost in mid-life or any other crisis that God can't find and help us. We can never live beyond Jesus' reach.

The hymn "How Firm a Foundation" quotes these Scripture verses:

Isaiah 41:10--Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.

Isaiah 43:2--When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

2 Corinthians 12:9--And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Hebrews 13:5,6--For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"