

## **Being Made New, Part 3 of 3**

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Lamentations 3:1-9,17-26

Being made new by God has something to do with God nurturing us and moving us into a mode of life that is different from what has been familiar in the past. It is often a life described as deeper, more meaningful, more focused, more deliberate, more purpose-driven.

Being made new has something to do with God giving us a vision of a future that is unlike the past. As we see this possible future, it challenges us to live differently today — to live in a way that is in alignment with this God-given vision.

Being made new is also about an inward shift of our mind and heart. When this happens, things that used to be important fall away, and God gives us passion for new things. The way we interact, who we interact with, the places we spend our time, and the directions we spend our money are different — compelled by a new inner direction. Our role and place in life is understood in a fresh way.

I would dare to say that any and all of us, when we are open to and invite God's leading into our lives, will be made new by God.

Being made new is not something that happens over night, but it's a process that is accelerated at points and is slower at others. It ebbs and flows often beyond our control.

Coming into this service today in the park, we were not sure what the weather would be like. Several weeks ago we figured it might be sunny and 80 degrees, or it could be 50, windy and rainy. The weather is unpredictable.

Life is like that as well. There are many things we can control, but there are also many things out of our control.

Any particular day might have in store for us wonderfully spectacular news that has us celebrate. Maybe a surprise party, the birth of a child, news of a friend's promotion, or any number of things.

The same day could also hold tragic news that alters the course of our lives. Perhaps you have heard the stories from people who have lived through Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas, and along the south-eastern United States.

Literally millions of people's lives have changed this past week with loss of homes and possessions, loss of friends, loss of family, and loss of community.

This will not be temporary blip for these people. Instead, the waves of this event will impact their children and grandchildren. Generations from now will have stories to share about what happened to their grandparents.

Sometimes things happen beyond our control and these events change the direction of our family and community life.

This was the case for people who lost their place of worship and homes back in 586 BC in Israel. An enemy came in and burned down their temple, and took away many of their good friends. They were devastated.

Visiting a neighbor for Sunday brunch, or going to Friday Night Euchre wouldn't happen this week, or next month, or even next year. In fact, for many of these people, they weren't sure that they would ever see their best friends again. Imagine what that might be like.

More than simply being separated from friends, they were not certain of their own safety — their survival was not assured. So, long range

plans faded and were replaced by the immediate need for shelter, food, and safety.

Listen to what it says in the writing of Lamentations.

### **READ LAM. 3:1-9,17-26**

The writing of Lamentations is poetry. Poetry is often used when straight narrative just can't communicate the emotion of the experience, and the reality of life.

Inside this poetry we find an unmistakable theme of hope.

Remember, the mode of the people was survival.

However, the community was open to God. They were able to communicate with God about everything they were feeling and experiencing, holding nothing back: pain, rage, suffering, feelings about enemies who seemed stronger than them. They also took to God all of the hardest questions of life.

What does this life really mean?

Why do I have to suffer?

Is there anything more than this?

Why do the evil people win, and those who love God lose?

How can I go on without those I love?

In the midst of the questions, there was a transformation happening within them.

They found that there was a hope rising up through the middle of all of the questions, the pain, and uncertainty.

Hope is found here in the poet's lyrical writing as much as in its content. The poetry alone breaks the hold of suffering, as only music, poetry, or art can. It changes the direction of a person's attention, breaks the flow of a despairing spirit, and does not allow suffering the final word.

Even while the situations of life might not have changed, this poetry opens up the space for something new to grow — It plants the seed of possibility for a different tomorrow, it sparks a kernel of love, and dares one to risk with hope.

This is how God works in our lives. There is always another note to be played, and another melody to be sung. There is always a new angle to view life, another vantage point from which to stand that we might be captivated by a new reality different from what we have known.

God seems to always find a way to interrupt our status quo, and offer an alternative.

This is what the writings of Lamentations is about. Amidst the suffering is the reality of redemption, the possibility of renewal, the offering of healing.

The reality of life hits us all. It just does. We cannot keep the waves from crashing our shores. We experience trouble and pain. This is a normal part of life.

But the amazing thing is that we serve a God who acknowledges our pain, understands our trials, truly cares about us and for us.

Our God offers us an alternative picture of life where hope burns bright beyond the dark clouds. Where healing is possible from the deep wounds of life. And where death is not the end.

Where else in the world can you find that kind of strength?

About 30 years ago, Linda was a manager at Pizza Hut when Frank moved to town from Texas. He was cute, so she hired him, but it wasn't long before they fell for each other. He quit so that they could date. About a year later they got engaged.

Neither one of them were Christians but they wanted to get married in a church, so Linda called up a local pastor and asked if it was possible to get married in his church since she wasn't a member. She felt awkward about it. The pastor was very welcoming and open and married them.

Soon things got really tough for Linda and Frank. They questioned if they made a mistake getting married. In their turmoil, they went to a marriage counselor, who happened to be a Christian. Through the counseling, they not only found a new balance in their relationship but they received a message that going to church would be a good thing for them.

Neither one of them had any church background and they felt disconnected from what God was doing. A pastor once asked the question, "Do you have a fire for God?" Frank's answer was "I don't even have a spark." They were both distant from God.

But God was working. Frank was invited to go on something called an Emmaus Walk, a weekend retreat that parallels the challenging journey of Jesus' friends after his crucifixion to his resurrection.

God spoke into Frank's life through that retreat and he came home to Linda a different person, with different priorities. He was more sensitive to the needs of others, including Linda's, more patient with the kids, and he had a deeper peace about him even at points that were stressful in the past.

Six weeks later, Linda went on an Emmaus Walk herself and also came home different. She said that the change for her was in how she understood Jesus. He used to be only a character in a storybook, but after the retreat she came to know Jesus as a human being in relationship with her.

From this point, they both became more involved in doing God's work. Opportunities opened up in front of them to work with youth. So they did, and watched the lives of these kids change in front of them and it was inspiring.

Then about five years ago Linda and Frank experienced being led into a new direction involving leading people into God's presence through music. They said "Yes" to God. Linda sang and Frank played drums and ran the sound not only for worship at a church service, but in a nearby jail, at a drug recovery program, at festivals, and in other places.

God meets us in the disruptions of our lives, and interestingly not so much in the easy and good times. When we are open to God's leading, we take one step at a time and soon discover that our lives are being made new by God's Spirit.

We seldom lift our eyes beyond the immediate routine of life to see the bigger picture of God's work. Usually the exception is that we do this in the ugly and distressing times, in the tragedies of life.

Like in the story from Lamentations, God comes to us in the disruptions of life, when the hard questions are being asked.

These times are not easy, but these are our biggest opportunities to be open for God to make us new.