

Introduction: Life is difficult

"I have told you these things, so that in Me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33

In this world, you will have _____.

Numbering our days:

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

James 4:14

Taking your first thoughts captive

- What you think about when you first wake up has a way of determining what you think about through the _____ of the _____.
- Examples in Scripture: Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Hezekiah, Job, Isaiah, David, and Jesus all prioritized meeting God early in the morning.

The neuroscience of the morning

- The neuroplasticity window: During the first hour or two of your day, what you think about carries disproportionate weight and has a compounding effect on your thoughts for the rest of the day.
- The cortisol awakening response: Because stress hormone levels are naturally highest in the morning, your morning thoughts have an amplified emotional impact that sets you up for either resiliency or negative thought patterns for the rest of the day.
- The primacy effect and priming: Your first thoughts about the day create neural pathways used to process whatever else happens to you; like a coat of primer on a wall, what people can see is impacted by what they can't see.
- The parable of the smudge: what you tune your mind to in the morning is what you will look for all day.

Three things to call to mind

Lamentations 3:21-24

1. God's compassions _____.
2. Great is His _____.
3. The Lord is my _____ – He is enough.

Challenge: A practical morning routine

- Don't check your phone first thing in the morning
- Take your thoughts captive
- Pray and read Scripture before engaging in the demands of your day

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some common "smudges" (frustrations, news headlines, comparisons) that easily distract you and ruin your perspective for the rest of the day?
2. How might your days look different if you spent the first 10 minutes taking your thoughts captive with God instead of scrolling on a screen?
3. Lamentations teaches us to bring our honest, raw grief to God, but the key principle is to "start, but don't stay" there. Why is it important to balance being honest with God about our pain while intentionally choosing to reframe our perspective?
4. In the midst of darkness, Jeremiah deliberately chose to call three things to mind: God's compassions never fail (His mercies are new every morning), His faithfulness is great, and He is enough. Which of these three truths do you need to remind yourself of the most right now, and why?