

# FINDING PURPOSE IN PAIN PLENARY 2: REALISTIC HOPE AND OPTIMISM THROUGH THE CHURCH AND FOR THE HURTING

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## INTRODUCTION

- The Big Picture
  - How does one find hope, meaning and purpose while experiencing significant suffering?
  - What about those who feel hopeless?
  - The role of the church

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## PSALM 77:1-12 (MSG) — THE PSALMIST'S HONEST REFLECTION OF SUFFERING AND GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

I yell out to my God, I yell with all my might,  
I yell at the top of my lungs. He listens.  
24 I found myself in trouble and went looking for my  
Lord;  
my life was an open wound that wouldn't heal.  
When friends said, "Everything will turn out all right,"  
I didn't believe a word they said.  
I remember God—and shake my head.  
I bow my head—then wring my hands.  
I'm awake all night—not a wink of sleep;  
I can't even say what's bothering me.  
I go over the days one by one,  
I ponder the years gone by.  
I strum my lute all through the night,  
wondering how to get my life together.

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## PSALM 77:1-12 (MSG)

<sup>1-10</sup> Will the Lord walk off and leave us for good?  
 Will he never smile again?  
 Is his love worn threadbare?  
 Has his salvation promise burned out?  
 Has God forgotten his manners?  
 Has he angrily stomped off and left us?  
 "Just my luck," I said. "The High God retires  
 just the moment I need him."  
<sup>11-12</sup> Once again I'll go over what God has done,  
 lay out on the table the ancient wonders;  
 I'll ponder all the things you've accomplished,  
 and give a long, loving look at your acts.




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**"THE HOPE IS ROOTED PRECISELY *IN THE MIDST OF LOSS AND DARKNESS WHERE GOD IS SURPRISINGLY PRESENT* THE JEWISH REALITY OF EXILE, THE CHRISTIAN CONFESSION OF CRUCIFIXION AND CROSS, THE HONEST RECOGNITION THAT THERE IS AN UNTAMED DARKNESS IN OUR LIFE THAT MUST BE EMBRACED — ALL OF THAT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE GIFT OF NEW LIFE" (THE MESSAGE OF THE PSALMS, BRUEGGEMANN)**

What is our "untamed darkness" and where in it might  
 God be at work?




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## TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

1. They are aware of, and accept the fact, that life is  
 difficult – Psalm 77




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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

2. They don't overly personalize their suffering –  
Romans 8



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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

3. They remember “rightly” – Psalm 77



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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

4. They “hold” the good/bad tension and don’t  
expect their situation to immediately, or perhaps  
even fully, resolve – Psalm 77



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**TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS**

5. They allow themselves time and space to grieve -  
Romans 5:3-5




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**TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS**

6. They have meaningful connection to others  
(community)  
- "Pain shared, is pain lessened" (AA)  
- Depressive symptoms are common among those  
who are lonely or isolated during such times




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**TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND  
LOSS**

7. They pursue connection with God and bring their  
suffering into relationship with God (God is near to  
the brokenhearted)– Psalm 77 & Psalm 34:18




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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

8. Embrace how the pain may be creating a deeper, "better self" – despite their wish that the painful situation never happened –

<sup>3</sup>Not only so, but we<sup>4</sup> also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; <sup>4</sup>perseverance, character; and character, hope. <sup>5</sup>And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Rom. 5:3-5)




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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

9. They redeem some of their pain by coming "alongside someone else who is going through hard times." 2 Cor. 1:3-4

<sup>3-4</sup> All praise to the God and Father of our Master, Jesus the Messiah! Father of all mercy! God of all healing counsel! He comes alongside us when we go through hard times, and before you know it, he brings us alongside someone else who is going through hard times so that we can be there for that person just as God was there for us...




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TEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO APPEAR TO HEALTHILY  
AND PRODUCTIVELY MOVE THROUGH PAIN, SUFFERING AND LOSS

10. They find hope in their belief that God will ultimately redeem all creation – Romans 5: 3-5




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## WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO FEEL HOPELESS?

- At times, hopelessness is all we feel
- Many situations are irreparable, unresolvable or permanent
- Pain and suffering bring us closer to the existential reality that earthly life is temporary – a fact that all humans must ultimately confront
- After the trials and perseverance and character building, our only real hope may be the promises of Romans 8 – “We, too, wait anxiously for that day when God will give us our full rights as his children, including the new bodies he has promised us...”



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## WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO WISH TO COME ALONGSIDE THOSE WHO FEEL HOPELESS?

- Those who are in relationship with people who feel hopeless must be able to tolerate these feelings with empathy and compassion
- No platitudes or easy answers
- We must be able to sit with them in the messiness and confusion



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## THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

- Christ's hands and feet
- Care ministries for those who suffer (e.g., mental health care ministries, recovery ministry, grief ministry, etc.)
- Community for those who are often feel lonely, forgotten and sidelined
- Care ministry as a form of evangelism



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