

# Lamentations Devotionals & Sermon Illustrations

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## DEVOTIONALS FROM OUR DAILY BREAD

### Lamentations 1:12-16; 3:19-23 Silhouette By Dennis Fisher

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. —Lamentations 3:22

In the 18th century, silhouettes (shadow profiles traced and cut from black paper) were a popular alternative to costly portraits. The word took its name from the French controller general of finance, Étienne de Silhouette. During the Seven Years War against England, he tried to raise revenues by heavily taxing the wealthy. Victims of his high taxes complained and used the word silhouette to refer to their wealth being reduced to a mere shadow of what it once was.

With the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah lamented over the shadow of what once was a great city and center of worship now devastated by war. "Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow" (Lam. 1:12).

But Jeremiah did not remain in despair. He recognized God's sovereignty in suffering. Later in this book of sorrow, the prophet reflected: "I have hope. Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (3:21-23).

Has sorrow or suffering made your life feel like a dark silhouette of what it once was? Remember, God's mercies are new every morning. He is compassionately working in your life for His glory and your blessing.

Not a shadow can rise, not a cloud in the skies,

But His smile quickly drives it away;

Not a doubt nor a fear, not a sigh nor a tear

Can abide while we trust and obey. —Sammis

To see beyond earth's shadows, look to Christ the Light.

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**Lamentations 1:9** - We should all be concerned about the future because we will have to spend the rest of our lives there. — Charles F. Kettering

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### Lamentations 1:12-20 What Good Is Affliction?

By Herbert Vander Lugt

It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. —Psalm 119:71

Bible in a Year:

Leviticus 19-20; Matthew 27:51-66

During a television interview, David Frost asked former president George Bush how he could square his belief in a loving and all-powerful God with the miseries and injustices of life. Frost reminded Bush of the time he shed tears at the sight of starving children and of his grief when his own daughter had died.

President Bush said, "It never occurred to me to blame God for that." He insisted that the Lord has provided enough food for everyone, but that starvation occurs because of human greed and ineptitude. The President said that his daughter's illness had drawn the family closer to one another and to God. He was comforted because he knew that she had been caught up in the arms of

her loving heavenly Father.

Like those starving children, we may suffer because of the greed and selfishness of others. Like the Bush family, we may endure sorrow for reasons we can't understand. Or we may suffer because of our own sin, as Jeremiah recounted in his lament for the wayward tribe of Judah (Lam. 1:5).

In any case, we can trust God and say with the psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Ps. 119:71). With confidence, we can ask with Abraham, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25).

There is so much within this world

Of brokenness and pain,

Yet nothing God in grace allows

Is ever done in vain. —DJJ

God will spare you from suffering—or He'll give you the grace to bear it.

Lamentations 1:8-11

As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. - Job 4:8

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In his book, *Down to Earth*, John Lawrence writes, "Many believers are sowing wild oats during the week, then going to church on Sunday and praying for a crop failure." A faulty view of grace leads some Christians to treat sin casually. While it's certainly true that God forgives sins, He is not mocked, and the "laws of harvest" abide. This is the main theme of Lamentations: we can never disobey God without consequences.

Using the graphic imagery of a fallen woman, today's passage vividly portrays the gross ways in which the nation--both men and women--had "sinned greatly." The defiling worship of foreign gods--especially Baal--involved sensuous and depraved practices, including child sacrifice. Archaeological evidence suggests that social disease was rampant in Jerusalem. Jerusalem had become unclean and filthy (Lam 1:9).

Public nakedness signaled disgrace and the nation's exposed impurity repulsed those around her --even Jerusalem couldn't bear to look at what she had become (v. 9). The "future" that Jerusalem had failed to consider (v. 9) was now upon her. Yet in Lam 1:9 we find a small glimmer of hope--the chastised Jerusalem calls out to the Lord for the first time.

Unfortunately, the horrifying reality of pagan conquerors carrying off her treasures (a reference both to temple riches and to people) and entering the temple snapped the personified Jerusalem back to despair. Only Jews from the priestly tribe of Aaron were allowed to enter the temple--and only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies. Foreigners were forbidden ever to enter the temple; thus, Jewish abhorrence at the sight of pagans in the Temple was intense.

In addition to being defiled, Jerusalem had become destitute. Any treasure not carried off was used for survival. The Anchor Bible poignantly captured this dire situation in its translation of Lam 1:11: "They gave their darlings for food."

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Jerusalem dismissed numerous prophets' warnings, probably believing its transgressions weren't all that bad. Similar thinking can lead us to ignore our own sin.

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**Lamentations 1:11, 12. IS IT NOTHING TO YOU?** - Think of these words as coming from the lips of the rejected Son of God.

1. An Awful Confession. "I am become vile." Think of who He is, and why He became vile.
2. An Urgent Appeal to God. "See, O Lord, and consider." Consider who I am: "Thy Son." Consider for whom I am vile (Gal. 3:13).
3. A Pathetic Appeal to Men. "Ye that pass by: behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow." Any sorrow so deep, so undeserved, so effective.
4. A Mournful Entreaty. "Is it nothing to you? "

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Lamentations 1:12-17

I, even I, am he who comforts you. - Isaiah 51:12

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Half way through Handel's oratorio Messiah is the short piece, "Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto His sorrow," describing the suffering of our Lord Jesus Christ. This verse from today's passage (Lam 1:12) originally expressed Jerusalem's anguish following its ruin. It is not surprising, however, that Handel applied this verse to Christ. When Christ bore our sins on the cross, He bore the full brunt of sin's shame, isolation, and scorn, although He was sinless (cf. Isa. 52:13–53:12).

As we have seen, however, Jerusalem was far from sinless. Today's passage reveals another sad reality about sin: despite promises to the contrary, the path of sin leads to isolation (v. 16). So-called friends become foes (Lam 1:17) when deception underlies the friendship.

The passage opens with Jerusalem's pathetic appeal to onlookers--perhaps even her enemies. The rhetorical question, "Is it nothing to you?" is really a plea to learn from Jerusalem. It's as if the destroyed city were crying out: "Look at what happens when the Lord's fierce anger is provoked! Learn from this calamity!"

Lam 1:13 through Lam 1:15 contain terrifying images of the fierce wrath of God's righteous judgment. Fire often symbolizes God's judgment--such as the burning sulfur rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah for their unspeakable sin. Fire also figuratively portrayed the fever of sin that burned within the people. Similarly, the image of a net was used to describe Yahweh capturing His enemies. How terrifying it must have been for Jerusalem to realize that it had become the enemy of Yahweh!

In His judgment, God formed a yoke from Jerusalem's sin. The yoke, a wooden frame for beasts of burden, represented the weighty accumulation of Jerusalem's sin (Lam 1:14). The winepress of the Lord (Lam 1:15), used elsewhere to trample pagan nations, was now used to crush Jerusalem.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although God's justice demands judgment, His mercy provides comfort. As God's children we can find much comfort from Him when we face temptation.

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#### Lamentations 1:18-22

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. - Psalm 32:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the most astounding consequences of the 1970s Watergate scandal was the conversion of Charles Colson. With events exploding around him, he surrendered his life to Jesus Christ and found "strength and serenity, a wonderful new assurance about life." The way out of despair always begins by turning to the Lord.

Yesterday we saw Jerusalem begin to turn to the Lord in her distress and despair. Today we will hear her first clear admission of her sin and acknowledgment of God's righteousness (Lam 1:18)--an essential first step toward restoration.

Prior to this, however, Jerusalem again implored onlookers to observe the high cost of sin: her young people were exiled (Lam 1:18) and her so-called allies betrayed her (Lam 1:19). Those that Judah had formerly trusted had betrayed the nation. As a result of Jerusalem's rebellion, God destroyed the city. This devastation was so severe that even the religious leaders--who should have provided direction and comfort--perished.

With a tormented soul and a distressed heart, Jerusalem could no longer bear to keep away from the Lord (v. 20). A word play at the end of verse 20 only heightens the intensity of the situation. During the siege, those who left the city were killed by the enemy, but those who remained were exposed to pestilence. Metaphorically, this verse portrays a soul tormented by sin--external circumstances pierce, but internal anguish is a virtual death. Anyone who has been wracked by the guilt and remorse of sin understands this picture only too well.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The turning point for Jerusalem was to admit her sin and to turn to the Lord--just as it was for Charles Colson and is for every believer.

## LAMENTATIONS 2

### Lamentations 2:13-19 You Have A Prayer

Pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord. —Lamentations 2:19

Hopelessness. I encountered it in an embittered man who told me, “Don’t try to convert me and don’t pray for me. When I die, the only place I’ll go is 6 feet under.”

That man needed hope. People like him who are ready to give up can find it. It’s only a prayer away.

A pastor met a mother of three small children while visiting a hospital. Her husband was dying of injuries received in a car accident, and she had no one to turn to for help. As the pastor explained God’s plan of salvation, she listened intently. Then she joined him in prayer and put her trust in Jesus. She still didn’t know how things would work out, but her prayer of faith had given her hope. Now, through new Christian friends, God is taking care of her.

In Lamentations 2, the situation appeared hopeless. Jerusalem’s streets were littered with the bodies of victims slain by the invading Babylonians. No food was available for the people who remained. But the few survivors heeded the prophet’s call to repentance and prayer (v.19). We know from history that conditions improved and the exile came to an end.

Do your circumstances appear hopeless? Take heart! As long as you have a prayer, you have real hope.

Beyond the losses of this life

That cause us to despair,

New hope is born within our hearts

Because our God is there. —DJD

Even when you feel you have nothing left, you still have prayer—and that’s enough.

Lamentations 2:1-8; Jeremiah 7:1-15

The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. - Hebrews 12:6

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In the nineteenth century it was said that the sun never set on the British Empire, so vast was its extent. Yet in 1899, a small band of determined Dutch settlers in South Africa defied the British in the Boer War and revealed the first crack in the seemingly invincible British Empire.

To Jerusalem’s inhabitants it was just as unthinkable that their city should ever fall as it was for British citizens that their empire would ever end. Jerusalem’s confidence was based on the Temple--surely God would never allow destruction to come upon His dwelling place!

Today’s passage from Jeremiah shows that this confidence was really deception. Real hope was found only in the Lord and was incompatible with detestable practices (Lam 2:5–10). Just as the Lord destroyed the altar at Shiloh, so too He would destroy Jerusalem for its sickening sin (Lam 2:12).

And destroy the Temple He did, as today’s passage from Lamentations reveals. The cloud of the Lord, formerly bestowing His protection, now revealed His terrifying anger in which He hurled Jerusalem from its exalted place (Lam 2:1) and rejected His dwelling place--His footstool (Ps. 132:7). In His fury, the Lord destroyed Judah’s fortresses and debased her leaders (Lam 2:2).

With relentless blows, the Lord cut off the strength, or horns, of the nation (v. 3). The right hand of blessing and victory now brought judgment; the comforting pillar of fire (Ex. 13:21-22) now consumed all in its path (Lam 2:3).

God had become the enemy of His people (Lam 2:5)! Provoked by their flagrant sin, His terrifying bow slew those in whom He delighted (v. 4). The seemingly indestructible Temple was leveled as easily as a garden shed (Lam 2:6). Without priests or a king, the appointed feasts and Sabbaths were no more (Lam 2:6). The triumphant shouts of the conquering enemy replaced shouts of praise to Yahweh (Lam 2:7).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although today’s passage seems hopeless, God’s complete judgment is encouraging. Just as discipline communicates love to children, so too our Heavenly Father’s discipline reveals His care for us.

Today might be a good day for a spiritual inventory. Is your devotion heartfelt and honest?

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## Lamentations 2:9-12

As [Jesus] approached Jerusalem, he wept over

it and said, "If you, even you, had only known

on this day what would bring you peace ... " - Luke 19:41-42

### TODAY IN THE WORD

The twelfth-century abbot Bernard of Clairvaux beautifully captured the grieving heart of our Lord Jesus in his well-loved hymn, translated into English as follows: "O sacred Head now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down, Now scornfully surrounded with thorns Thy only crown ... "

How God's heart must have grieved when the destruction of His temple reached its horrifying crescendo, with the enemy's shouts ringing through His house (Lam 2:7). Today's passage confronts us with the silence of disbelief and death that followed. With the city gates and their strong crossbars gone, the city was defenseless (Lam 2:9). The king and princes likely refers to King Jehoiachin and his court, who were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 b.c.

In ancient Israel, true prophets, in addition to receiving insights into the future, proclaimed God's law and instructed the people in His ways. But when Jerusalem fell, the only "vision" received from the Lord was the outpouring of His righteous wrath.

No wonder the civic leaders "[sat] on the ground in silence" (Lam 2:10). Elders were men who exerted considerable influence on Jewish society by advising, settling disputes, and witnessing legal agreements. But they now sat stunned, putting dust on their heads as a sign of their mourning and wearing sackcloth to lament their calamity (v. 10). Jerusalem was without vision or leadership!

Recalling the horror of the city's destruction struck Jeremiah to his very core--the expression "I am in torment within" (v. 11) could be translated "my intestines are fermenting." The nightmare of children gasping for basic food and drink (Lam 2:12) was indelibly written on his heart.

### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Some have said that Jeremiah ministered more in tears than in proclamation. His example certainly challenges popular notions that crying--especially for men--shows weakness. Some Christians feel that tears indicate a lack of faith.

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## Lamentations 2:13-17

Where there is no revelation [vision], the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law. - Proverbs 29:18

### TODAY IN THE WORD

Former U.S. Senate chaplain Peter Marshall once offered this prayer, "Give us clear vision that we may know where to stand and what to stand for, for unless we stand for something, we shall fall for anything." This insight certainly explains the sad situation that anguished Jeremiah. Forsaking the clear vision of the Lord, the people had fallen into shameful immorality and idolatrous spirituality.

Today's passage opens with several rhetorical questions intended to show Jerusalem that its depravity and resulting judgment were unprecedented in history and nature. Although Jeremiah did eventually offer great comfort (Lam. 3:22), it was important for the people to mourn their sin adequately and to feel its full, grievous effects.

God's judgment of Jerusalem may seem harsh, but it must be set against His numerous gracious warnings. Judah had already witnessed divine judgment on sin when Israel was destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B.C. Moreover, a series of true prophets, such as Isaiah and Micah, had passionately warned of sin's inescapable consequences and pleaded with the people to repent.

That's why Jeremiah squarely blamed the so-called prophets with their "false and worthless" visions (v. 14). Instead of confronting people with their covenantal responsibilities, these prophets preached blatant lies: "You will not see the sword or suffer famine. Indeed, [God] will give you lasting peace in this place" (Jer. 14:13). Like whitewash on a decaying building, these prophets covered up sin rather than exposed it (Lam. 2:14). And Jeremiah 5:31 says that the people loved these false prophecies! Certainly God was justified in His wrathful judgment.

Judah's enemies were only too happy to taunt "the city that was called the perfection of beauty" when it finally received its "just desserts"--a day they had longed for (Lam 2:16). What these hissing enemies failed to recognize was that any sinful nation would eventually face divine justice.

### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage shows the heartbreak of short-sighted rebellion. Hebrews 12:2–3 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our

faith ... Consider

him ... so that you will not grow weary and lose sight."

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Lamentations 2:18-22

Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. - 2 Corinthians 7:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the classic antislavery novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, wrote, "Any mind that is capable of real sorrow is capable of good." This echoes today's verse. Real (or godly) sorrow prompts one to repentance. "Worldly" sorrow, on the other hand, seldom gets past the regret of "getting caught."

Having realized the link between their sin and God's judgment, Jerusalem was beginning to experience that godly sorrow that would lead to its healing and salvation. Sensing their brokenness, Jeremiah encouraged the people to cry out to God with unending tears (v. 18). The first step toward wholeness begins by pouring one's heart out before the Lord.

Lam 2:18 echoes Amos 5:24: "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!" In a poignant reversal, sorrow for sin has turned the river of justice and the stream of righteousness into an unending flow of tears!

But this river was for healing. So the prophet intensified his appeal by urging repeated prayer throughout the long, dark night of their travail (v. 19). The unforgettable sight of starving children prompted Jeremiah to exhort the people to pray not only for themselves but also for those whom their sin had most impacted--their children (Lam 2:19).

The people's prayer began well with an appeal to God's mercy--"Look O Lord!" (Lam 2:20). Soon, however, their prayer seemed to degenerate into a series of accusations against the Lord God. It's almost as if the people were saying, "Lord, don't You remember who You are dealing with?" Or, "Can You really allow such horrific things--women eating their children or priests and prophets slain in Your house--to happen?" (Lam 2:20). This "prayer" ends by reminding God that none had been spared His wrathful slaughter (Lam 2:21, 22).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Jeremiah's heart for children is felt throughout Lamentations, especially in his exhortation to pray for them in today's passage. It's sobering to consider how our actions impact our children or others' children in our lives.

## LAMENTATIONS 3

### Lamentations 3:1-6,22-26 God's Darkroom

By Henry G. Bosch

He has set me in dark places ... It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. —Lamentations 3:6,26

In the development of photographs, the film must first be taken into a darkroom. Only after the chemicals have done their work in the dark is it safe to expose the negatives to light and produce the final prints. The light, which would have destroyed the film, now brings out its beauty.

God takes us through "darkroom" experiences to develop our spiritual life. As we pass through trial, sorrow, frustration, and disappointment, the image of Christ is produced in us. Then we are ready to be displayed in the light.

Too often we blame people or circumstances for our dark tunnels of despair and frustration. Although they may be the secondary causes, we need to realize that the hand of the heavenly Father momentarily shades the light from our pathway. He graciously takes us through such experiences because He wants to provide us with the benefits of darkness.

Are you in God's darkroom? Then don't despair. The Lord is developing the beauty of Christlikeness within you for display in His art gallery of eternity! Do not seek to get back into the light too soon. Await His perfect timing, or you will spoil the imprint of His love on

the film of your life.

Still will we trust, though earth seem dark and dreary,

And the heart faint beneath His chastening rod;

Though rough and steep our pathway, worn and weary,

Still will we trust in God. —Burleigh

God takes us into His darkroom to develop godliness.

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## Lamentations 3:1-24 - God Is Faithful

By David C. McCasland

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

At the end of every year, I set aside some time to review the previous 12 months and record God's faithfulness to me and my family. I may leaf through a calendar, my appointment book, or prayer diary to jog my memory. Then, on a piece of paper labeled "God's Faithfulness" I'll write everything that comes to mind as evidence of God's love and care. It's a wonderful way to look back at the year and look forward to a fresh beginning.

My list will certainly include instances of God's grace and provision. But it will also chronicle God's presence during times of difficulty and disappointment. And it must include my failures and sins, which He has been "faithful and just" to forgive (1 John 1:9).

The prophet Jeremiah found that God's trustworthiness appeared as a light during the darkness of desperate circumstances. In his lament over the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Today, why not take time to record God's faithfulness to you and thank Him for it. —David McCasland

Lord, help us bring to mind each day

Past blessings that You've sent our way;

And may these blessings from above

Remind us of Your faithful love. —D. De Haan

Adding up your blessings will multiply your joy.

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"Great Is thy Faithfulness" is not the result of some tragic event in Thomas Chisholm's life but a powerful witness to his daily walk with Jesus as he experienced "morning by morning" new mercies from His Everlasting Father. Pastor Chisholm always trusted his Everlasting Father to take care of Him, sustain him, and provide for his daily needs. Just before his death in 1960 he wrote this power, personal witness:

My income has never been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. But I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care which have filled me with astonishing gratefulness." [SOURCE: Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1990), 348.] (R David Reynolds)

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## Lamentations 3:1-6, 16-25 Heartbreak And Hope

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him. —Lamentations 3:25

When American country singer George Jones died at the age of 81, his fans remembered his remarkable voice and his hard life and personal struggles. While many of his songs reflected his own despair and longing, it was the way he sang them that touched people deeply. Chicago Tribune music critic Greg Kot said, "His voice was made for conveying heartbreak."

The book of Lamentations records Jeremiah's anguish over the nation of Judah's stubborn refusal to follow God. Often called "the

weeping prophet,” he witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and saw his people carried into captivity. He wandered the streets of the city, overwhelmed by grief (Lam. 1:1-5).

Yet, in Jeremiah’s darkest hour, he said, “This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (3:21-23).

Whether we suffer for our own choices or from those of others, despair may threaten to overwhelm us. When all seems lost, we can cling to the Lord’s faithfulness. “‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul. ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’” (v.24).

I’m thankful for Your faithfulness, Father, even  
in the times when I am unfaithful. Help me to  
remember, like Jeremiah, that my hope comes  
from You, not from my circumstances.

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## Lamentations 3:1-3, 25-33 Play In Pain

By David C. Egnor

Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion. —Lamentations 3:32

Baseball Hall-of-Fame catcher Gary Carter was a follower of Jesus. During his 19-year career, he drew strength and endurance from his faith in God to compete day after day. In an article that appeared in the Wall Street Journal shortly after Carter died of brain cancer at age 57, writer Andrew Klavan told how Carter had influenced his life.

In the late 1980s, Klavan had sunk to a low point in his life. His mind dwelt on suicide. Then he heard Carter interviewed after a game. His team, the New York Mets, had won, and the aging catcher had helped by running hard at a critical point in the game. Carter was asked how he could do that with his aching knees. Klavan heard him say something like this: “Sometimes you just have to play in pain.” That simple statement helped draw Klavan out of his depression. “I can do that!” he declared. Encouraged, he found hope—and later became a believer in Christ.

The comforting truth behind Carter’s statement comes from Lamentations. We may face sorrow, pain, and hardship, but we don’t have to sink into self-pity. The same God who allows our suffering also showers us with His compassion (Lam. 3:32). With God’s love lifting us up, we can—if we have to—“play” in pain.

Along life’s pathway troubles come

That God will help us bear;

Then we can look beyond the pain

To those who need our care. —Branon

God will either spare you from suffering or give you the grace to bear it.

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## Lamentations 3:1-26 If God Seems Far Away

By Herbert Vander Lugt

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. —Lamentations 3:25

In my five decades of ministry, I’ve talked to many people who were deeply troubled because God seemed far away. They didn’t feel that He cared about their personal needs, so they had a difficult time praying.

Occasionally the reason surfaced quickly—unconfessed sin, a vengeful spirit, pride, addictions, and the like. But when no sin was evident and the person submitted daily to Jesus as Lord, read the Bible, and prayed persistently, the best advice I could offer was, “Talk to God about your problem and keep doing what you are doing.”

The Bible tells us of people who faced the same sort of problem. The prophet Jeremiah went through a time when God actually seemed like his enemy (Lam. 3:1-18). In striking imagery he described his anguish over a God who “shuts out my prayer” (v.8). He felt as if God were hunting him down (vv.10-12). But as he expressed his sorrow, Jeremiah saw a light that pierced the darkness and

restored his hope in the Lord (vv.21-26).

If God seems far away from you, even though you are trusting Him and trying to do His will, don't despair. Talk to Him about it. Keep doing what you know is right. The light will break through. And when it does, you will be immeasurably better for it.

Lift up your eyes, discouraged one,

The Lord your help will be;

New strength will come from Him who said,

"For rest come unto Me." —Anon.

If you're in a tunnel of discouragement, keep walking toward the light.

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## Lamentations 3:1-9,24 A Weeping World

By Dennis J. De Haan

"The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I hope in Him!" —Lamentations 3:24

A mother was told that her son had been killed in an accident on the job. In that moment, her life was flooded with tears. In another family, a sudden heart attack snatched away a husband, leaving a wife to face life alone. More tears! We live in a weeping world.

The book of Lamentations was written by Jeremiah, who is called the weeping prophet. The citizens of Judah had been taken into captivity (1:3); Jerusalem lay in ruins (2:8-9); the people were destitute (2:11-12); their suffering was horrible beyond belief (2:20); and the prophet wept continually (3:48-49). Yet Jeremiah still affirmed the mercies, the compassions, and the faithfulness of God. From deep within him, his soul was saying, "The Lord is my portion, therefore I hope in Him!" (3:24).

What realism in those tear-saturated words! It's the reality that weeping and lamentations do not necessarily reflect a weak faith or a lack of trust in God. Some of us may think that a Christian must feel joyful even when the heart is breaking—or at least try to appear that way. But Jeremiah's experience refutes that. Tears are a natural part of a Christian's life. But thank God, one day in Glory our blessed Savior will wipe them all away (Revelation 21:4).

Christian, when your way seems darkest,

When your eyes with tears are dim,

Go to God your Father quickly,

Tell your troubles all to Him. —Anon.

The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.

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## Lamentations 3:13-26 Never Let Down

By Joe Stowell

[The Lord's] compassions fail not. They are new every morning. —Lamentations 3:22-23

When I was a child, one of my favorite pastimes was playing on the teeter-totter in the nearby park. A kid would sit on each end of the board and bounce each other up and down. Sometimes the one who was down would stay there and leave his playmate stuck up in the air yelling to be let down. But the cruelest of all tricks was getting off the teeter-totter and running away when your friend was up in the air—he would come crashing down to the ground with a painful bump.

Sometimes we may feel that Jesus does that to us. We trust Him to be there with us through the ups and downs of life. However, when life takes a turn and leaves us with bumps and bruises, it may feel as if He has walked away leaving our lives to come painfully crashing down.

But Lamentations 3 reminds us that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end" (v.22 esv) and that God is faithful to the end even when everything seems to be falling apart. This means that in the midst of our pain, even though we may be lonely, we are not alone. And though we may not feel His presence, He is there as our trusted companion who will never walk away and let us down!

Thank You, Lord, that we can trust in Your

faithful presence even when we feel alone.

Help us to wait patiently for You to manifest

Your steadfast loving presence.

When everyone else fails, Jesus is your most trusted friend.

Insight

In Lamentations 3 we see the tribulations of God's people. They are described in terms of physical suffering, painful injury, and imprisonment. Judah's journey is portrayed in harrowing terms of terrible obstacles, wild animals, a wound to the heart, and bitter food. And the spiritual devastation can be seen in these words: "You have moved my soul far from peace" (v.17). Yet despite the despair of the moment, the promise of restoration and renewal are given: "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (vv.22-23).

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Lamentations 3:23 - Illustrations from Rich Cather

Illustration - Today is the first day of the rest of your life. In her book, *Celebrate Joy!*, Velma Seawell Daniels gives a striking new meaning to this familiar phrase. She tells of interviewing a man who had made a trip to Alaska to visit people who live above the Arctic Circle.

"Never ask an Eskimo how old he is," the man said. "If you do, he will say, 'I don't know and I don't care.' And he doesn't. One of them told me that, and I pressed him a bit further. When I asked him the second time, he said, 'Almost—that's all.' That still wasn't good enough for me, so I asked him 'Almost what?'" and he said, "Almost one day."

Mrs. Daniels asked him if he could figure out what the Eskimo meant. He answered that he did but only after talking to another man who had lived in the Arctic Circle for about twenty years. "He was a newspaperman who had written a book about the Eskimos and their customs and beliefs. He said the Eskimos believe that when they go to sleep at night they die—that they are dead to the world. Then, when they wake up in the morning, they have been resurrected and are living a new life. Therefore, no Eskimo is more than one day old. So, that is what the Eskimo meant when he said he was 'almost' a day old. The day wasn't over yet."

"Life above the Arctic Circle is harsh and cruel, and mere survival becomes a major accomplishment," he explained. "But, you never see an Eskimo who seems worried or anxious. They have learned to face one day at a time."

And every morning you get up, you have an entire day of God's faithfulness ahead of you.

Illustration - Don't you kind of hate it when you're watching a TV show and you are wondering how they're going to wrap it all up in the last three minutes, only to face the words "To Be Continued..."? But for us, God's "faithfulness" has those three words written all over it – "To Be Continued ..." Every morning.

What's new?

Faithfulness – 'emuwnah – firmness, fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness. You can count on God to come through.

Illustration - In a recent interview with *Today's Christian Woman*, author Gwen Shamblin told this story:

The girls at the horse barn next door are sweet, but they kept wanting our collies, Chaucer and Virginia, to come over. I told them, "I don't know about letting them come across the fence 'cause they might get confused. But as long as you don't feed them, it's fine."

Soon I had no dogs. They were over at the barn every day, living the high life. I'd call them home, but they wouldn't come. ... Eventually I realized the problem was that our dogs no longer knew who their master was. So a silent war was declared that day. I had to lift Chaucer and carry him home from the barn. We put our dogs on leashes. Then I fussed at Chaucer and Virginia when they were over there, and loved them when they were at home. Then we'd unleash them, test them, find them back over at the barn, and have to repeat the process. But finally we got their hearts back home. ...

Did I want those dogs because of their work? No! They bark at the wrong people. They bark at cars leaving, not coming. They slobber all over me and my company. They're completely in the way. They steal the cat food. They're trouble, but they're still precious to me, and I adore them.

And that's how God feels about us. We're precious in his sight, and he pursues us. He's faithful even when we're not. -- Leadership,

Why every morning?

Illustration - One of Rabbi Ben Jochai's scholars once asked him, "Why did not the Lord furnish enough manna to Israel for a year all at one time?" The teacher said, "I will answer you with a parable. Once there was a king who had a son to whom he gave a yearly allowance, paying him the entire sum on the fixed date. It soon happened that the day on which the allowance was due was the only day of the year when the father ever saw his son. So the king changed his plan and gave his son day by day that which was sufficient for the day; and then the son visited his father every morning. How he needed his father's unbroken love, companionship, wisdom and giving! Thus God dealt with Israel and deals with us."

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## Lamentations 3:13-26 Love We Can Trust

By David C. McCasland

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. —Lamentations 3:22

Perhaps the most painful statement a person can hear is, "I don't love you anymore." Those words end relationships, break hearts, and shatter dreams. Often, people who have been betrayed guard themselves against future pain by deciding not to trust anyone's love again. That settled conviction may even include the love of God.

The remarkable thing about God's love for us is His promise that it will never end. The prophet Jeremiah experienced devastating circumstances that left him emotionally depleted (Lam. 3:13-20). His own people rejected his repeated calls to respond to God's love and follow Him. At a low point, Jeremiah said, "My strength and my hope have perished from the Lord" (v.18).

Yet, in his darkest hour Jeremiah considered God's unfailing love and wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lam. 3:22-24). A person may vow to love us forever yet fail to keep that promise, but God's love remains steadfast and sure. "He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6). That's a love we can trust.

O Love that wilt not let me go

I rest my weary soul in Thee;

I give Thee back the life I owe,

That in Thine ocean depths its flow

May richer, fuller be. —Matheson

God's love never fails.

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## Lamentations 3:16-33 Surprising Light

By David C. McCasland

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

If you've ever been so overwhelmed by sorrow that you couldn't speak, you can begin to understand the emotions of Jeremiah as he wrote the book of Lamentations. It is a sobbing requiem for the death of Jerusalem and the captivity of her people because of their sins. The tears of "the weeping prophet" seem to splash onto every page.

Recently, as I read Lamentations, I was so caught up in the destruction and desolation described by Jeremiah that a familiar passage took me by surprise. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:22-23).

Those verses are so often quoted alone that I had forgotten the bleak context in which they were penned. In the midst of Jeremiah's dark night of the soul, they shine as an unexpected ray of hope and light.

There may be times in our lives when it appears that all is lost and we sink into despair. But in our deepest sorrow, we are often surprised by the light of God's never-failing love. Then, by His grace and mercy, we can echo the words of Jeremiah: "The Lord is

my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!'" (v.24).

During our times of deepest sorrow,

When in the depths we're sinking low,

If we look up to our faithful Father,

Love and compassion to us will flow. —Fitzhugh

Life's darkest trial cannot dim the light of God's love.

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## Lamentations 3:19-26 Reason To Hope

By Dave Branon

The Lord is good to those who wait for Him. —Lamentations 3:25

Sorrow was gripping the hearts of the citizens of Jerusalem (Lam. 1). The glorious city was in ruins and the people were facing exile. God's majestic Zion had fallen to the Babylonians.

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC was the result of God's judgment on an unrepentant people. Because we too can find ourselves wondering how to return to fellowship with God after failing Him, the lessons learned by those downcast citizens are worth heeding.

For the defeated people of the Holy City—and for us—the hope of restoration is given in Lamentations 3. It begins, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope" (v.21).

We have hope because of God's character, which is marked by these traits: His mercy and compassion (v.22), faithfulness (v.23), goodness (v.25), and salvation (v.26).

Although we cannot understand completely the sadness of the displaced Jerusalemites, we do know how empty life becomes when our sin cuts us off from fellowship with God. Yet we can be restored because He will forgive us when we repent of our sin. His compassions are "new every morning" (v.23). He alone gives the refreshment of hope, and therefore we too can proclaim, "Great is Your faithfulness."

We're thankful, Lord, that when we fall

We can begin anew

If humbly we confess our sin,

Then turn and follow You. —Sper

No one is hopeless whose hope is in God.

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### Lamentations 3:3

He repeatedly turns His hand against me all day long. Lamentations 3:3

Lamentations is the saddest book in the Bible, a collection of funeral dirges written by Jeremiah in his anguish over the destruction of his people. Chapter 3 begins with these bitter words: "I am the man who has seen affliction.... [God] has driven me away and forced me to walk in darkness.... He repeatedly turns His hand against me all day long. He has worn away my flesh and skin; He has shattered my bones. He has laid siege against me." In verse 7, he continued: "He has walled me in so I cannot escape. He has weighed me down with chains." Jeremiah described God as a bear that had torn him to pieces. In Lam 3:12-13, he accused God of shooting him with an arrow in his kidneys. "I have forgotten what happiness is.... My future is lost, as well as my hope from the Lord" (Lam 3:17-18).

Some moments in life are so horrendous that our faith is shaken and we lose all sense of God's goodness.

But not quite....

Though we sometimes lose our grip on God, He never loses His grip on us. In verse 21, Jeremiah emerges from "the dark night of

the soul" to give us one of Scripture's sweetest passages and words that inspired the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness."

Yet I call this to mind, and therefore I have hope:  
Because of the Lord's faithful love we do not perish,  
for His mercies never end.  
They are new every morning;  
great is Your faithfulness!

All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. (Robert Morgan - My All in All Devotional)

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Lamentations 3:22 says that His compassions fail not.

I was reading again the other day about what hymn writer Frances Havergal said on her deathbed: "Splendid to be so near the gates of heaven! I am lost in amazement! There has not failed one word of all His good promises!"

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The words of my favorite hymn say:  
Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father,  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not;  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

The author of that hymn, Thomas Chisholm, was born in a log cabin in Kentucky, and as a young adult converted under the ministry of evangelist H. C. Morrison. But Chisholm's health was unstable, and he alternated between bouts of illness and gainful employment in which he did everything from journalism to insurance to evangelistic work. Through all the ups and downs, he discovered new blessings from God every morning. Lamentations 3 became precious to him, and he wrote this hymn after 30 years of serving Christ.

It was relatively unknown until popularized around the world by George Beverly Shea and the choirs at the Billy Graham Crusades. At Graham's 1954 Harringay Crusade, a man named Wilber Konkel first heard "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," and a flood of memories coursed through his mind. He recalled the dark nights of World War II, when London was nearly bombed to oblivion. "Each night as the enemy planes came over," Konkel wrote, "we cast our care upon Him. I quoted (this Scripture) to myself. I used it in my prayers. Those were dark days. At times they seemed hopeless. It was in those darkest hours that God proved His faithfulness to me. We were so near death. Yet it is the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning."

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Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not. - A. T. Pierson (1837-1911) was a brilliant Bible teacher from New York City who filled in for the great Charles Spurgeon during the latter's illness. He once wrote: That which is "most high" is lifted up above all else. The lower down we are the more perishable everything is. The grass under your foot in the summer is one of the frailest things in nature; it grows and blooms today, it withers and decays tomorrow. You ascend a little higher and you find the trees that last not only for one season but many seasons, till you come to great trees like the Sequoia Gigantea in the Californian forests, that have been standing for 3,000 or 3,500 years, but even these decay and fall by-and-by. You rise above the level of the trees, and come to the hills that last for ages, though they are worn away by rains and snows, and are shaken by storms and upheaved by earthquakes until sometimes they disappear altogether as hills and become the beds of lakes. You mount still above the hills, and there are what are called in the Bible "everlasting mountains" that have stood ever since the world began. You soar above the mountains, and you come to the planets that are constantly changing their places in the sky as they move around the sun in their annual journeys; but far beyond the planets stand the fixed stars that never have changed their place since time began. So you see that the farther up you go, the nearer you come to that which does not change, and beyond all these is He who is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever." He is the unchanging God and the unchanging friend of His people.

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"Great Is Thy Faithfulness" (Robert Morgan - From this Verse)  
May 28

When I was in college, I was often fairly unmoved during chapel services; but for some reason I would always tear up when we sang

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” the great hymn based on Lamentations 3. Now I consider it a barometer of my spiritual life, whether or not my eyes still moisten during this song.

It was written by Thomas Chisholm, who was born Lincoln-like in a log cabin in Kentucky. As a young adult, he was converted by evangelist H. C. Morrison. Chisholm’s health was unstable, and he alternated between bouts of illness and gainful employment, in which he did everything from journalism to insurance to evangelistic work. Through all the ups and downs, he discovered new blessings from God every morning. Lamentations 3 became precious to him, and he wrote this hymn after 30 years of serving Christ.

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Perhaps we should all shed an occasional tear of thanksgiving whenever we sing:

Great is Thy Faithfulness! Great is Thy Faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new mercies I see.  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided.  
Great is Thy Faithfulness, Lord, unto me.

><>><>><>

Great Is Thy Faithfulness 1923 (from Robert Morgan's "Then Sings My Soul)

Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the clouds.  
Psalm 36:5

The author of this hymn, Thomas Obediah Chisholm, was born in a log cabin in Kentucky. At age 16, he began teaching school, despite the paucity of his own education. He came to Christ at age 27 under the ministry of evangelist H. C. Morrison. But Chisholm’s health was unstable, and he alternated between bouts of illness and gainful employment in which he did everything from journalism to insurance to evangelistic work. Through all the ups and downs, he discovered new blessings from God every morning. The third chapter of Lamentations 3 became precious to him: His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:22–23).

Thomas later admitted there was no dramatic story behind the writing of “Great is Thy Faithfulness.” While serving the Lord in Vineland, New Jersey, Thomas sent several poems to his friend, musician William Runyan, who was so moved by this one that he prayed earnestly for special guidance in composing the music. Runyan was in Baldwin, Kansas, at the time, and the hymn was published in 1923 in Runyan’s private song pamphlets.

“It went rather slowly for several years,” Thomas recalled. Then Dr. Will Houghton of the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago discovered it, and would say in chapel, “Well, I think we shall have to sing ‘Great is Thy Faithfulness.’” It became an unofficial theme song for the Institute; and when Houghton died, it was sung at his funeral.

Still, it remained relatively unknown until popularized around the world by George Beverly Shea and the choirs at the Billy Graham Crusades.

Thomas spent his retirement years in a Methodist Home for the Aged in Ocean Park, New Jersey, where he was frequently seen walking by the ocean and along town streets. Tom Rich, a resident of Ocean Park, recalls his pleasant demeanor as he dropped by the diner, sat on park benches, and fellowshiped with friends at Ocean Park’s summer Bible conferences.

Thomas died in Ocean Park in 1960. During his lifetime he wrote 1,200 poems and hymns. In addition to “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” he is the author of the well-known “O To Be Like Thee,” and the hymn, “Living for Jesus.”

Living for Jesus, a life that is true,  
Striving to please Him in all that I do;  
Yielding allegiance, glad hearted and free,  
This is the pathway of blessing for me.

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**More Courage Among the Flames**

In December 1914, a great, sweeping fire destroyed Thomas Edison's laboratories in West Orange, New Jersey, wiping out two million dollars' worth of equipment and the record of much of his life's work.

Edison's son Charles ran about frantically trying to find his father. Finally he came upon him, standing near the fire, his face ruddy in the glow, his white hair blown by the winter winds. "My heart ached for him," Charles Edison said. "He was no longer young, and everything was being destroyed. He spotted me. 'Where's your mother?' he shouted. 'Find her. Bring her here. She'll never see anything like this again as long as she lives.' "

The next morning, walking about the charred embers of so many of his hopes and dreams, the sixty-seven-year-old Edison said, "There is great value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Thank God we can start anew."

Jeremiah, looking at the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem, said the same thing in Lamentations 3:22-24:

Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed,  
Because His compassions fail not.  
They are new every morning;  
Great is Your faithfulness.  
"The LORD is my portion," says my soul,  
"Therefore I hope in Him!"

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## Lamentations 3:19-33 Hope To Continue On

By Anne Cetas

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. —Lamentations 3:22-23

The solar-powered airplane Solar Impulse can fly day and night without fuel. Inventors Bertrand Piccard and André Borschberg hope to fly it around the world in 2015. While the plane flies all day by solar power, it gathers enough energy to be able to fly all night. When the sun rises, Piccard says, "It brings the hope again that you can continue."

The idea of sunrise bringing us hope makes me think of Lamentations 3 from our Bible reading for today: "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (vv.21-23). Even when God's people were in the depths of despair while the city of Jerusalem was being invaded by the Babylonians, the prophet Jeremiah said they had reason to hope—they still had the Lord's mercies and compassions.

Sometimes our struggles seem worse at night, but when sunrise comes it brings hope again that we can continue. "Weeping may endure for a night," the psalmist says, "but joy comes in the morning" (Ps. 30:5).

Thank You, Lord, for the hope You send with each sunrise. Your mercies and compassions are new every morning!

New mercies every morning,

Grace for every day,

New hope for every trial,

And courage all the way. —McVeigh

Each new day gives us new reasons to praise the Lord.

Insight

For 2 years the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem. Conditions within the besieged city were desperate and deplorable. Starvation during the siege even led to cannibalism (2 Kings 25:1-4; Lam. 2:20; 4:10). Sadly, Jeremiah witnessed the destruction of the city and temple (Jer. 52:12-27). In five emotionally charged dirges, or funeral laments (one for each chapter of Lamentations), he described the sufferings of the people and the reasons for their suffering. But he also wrote of hope in the midst of despair (Lam. 3:21-32) and of restoration that would come (Lam 5:19-22).

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## Lamentations 3:19-41 Source Of Hope

By Dave Branon

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed. —Lamentations 3:22

What good is faith when all seems lost? I've asked that penetrating question in my life, and not long ago I received a letter from a mom who has asked it as well.

She told me that she and her husband set out in their marriage to seek God's will for their lives and entrust their future to Him. Then their second son was born with Down syndrome. Their initial response was "grief, shock, and disbelief." Yet the same day he was born, God used Philippians 4:6-7 to put peace in their hearts and give them an undying love for their precious son. It says: "Let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts."

But their days in the desert were not over. Nine years later, their fourth son was diagnosed with cancer. Before he reached his third birthday, he was gone. Shock, pain, and sadness again broke into their world. And again, they found help from God and His Word. "When the grief overwhelms us," says this mom, "we turn to God's Word and His gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ."

When life's troubles hit us like a tidal wave, we can remember that God's compassions never fail (Lamentations 3:22). He can give us the hope we need.

My sheep I know, they are My own,

I leave them not in trials alone;

I will be with them to the end—

Their hope, their joy, their dearest Friend. —Anon.

Feeling hopeless reminds us that we are helpless without God.

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## Lamentations 3:19-27 Coping With Change

By David C. McCasland Great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:23

A friend of mine studied and trained for years in preparation for the work of Bible translation. When he finally arrived in his assigned country, he wrote about the odyssey of the previous years: "The key to staying alive in this life of constant change is to expect the unexpected, to remain vigilant, and above all, to remember daily that God is firmly in control when all else indicates otherwise."

Ten days later, his letter seemed prophetic when the country erupted in civil war and he was forced to leave.

We all know the feeling of being "almost there" when a sudden shift of circumstances alters everything, and we feel that life is out of control.

The prophet Jeremiah could have felt like this in the aftermath of devastating change. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had conquered Jerusalem, deported the people, and reduced the city to rubble. But Jeremiah affirmed God's faithfulness and control when he wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Today, we can face unexpected change because our faithful God is still in control.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God My Father!

There is no shadow of turning with Thee;

Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not:

As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be. —Chisholm

In our changing world, we can always depend on our unchanging God.

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## Lamentations 3:19-33 A Reason For Hope

By Julie Ackerman Link

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

It's one of the saddest stories of the Bible, yet it inspired one of the most hopeful hymns of the 20th century.

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed unimaginable horrors when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 586 BC. Solomon's temple was reduced to ruins, and with it went not only the center of worship but also the heart of the community. The people were left with no food, no rest, no peace, no leader. But in the midst of suffering and grief, one of their prophets found a reason for hope. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed," wrote Jeremiah, "because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Jeremiah's hope came from his personal experience of the Lord's faithfulness and from his knowledge of God's promises in the past. Without these, he would have been unable to comfort his people.

This hope of Lamentations 3 is echoed in a hymn by Thomas Chisholm (1866-1960). Although suffering sickness and setbacks throughout his life, he wrote "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." It assures us that even in times of great fear, tragic loss, and intense suffering we can find comfort and confidence as we trust in God's great faithfulness.

The best reason for hope is God's faithfulness.

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## Lamentations 3:19-41 Source Of Hope

By Dave Branon

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In our changing world, we can always depend on our unchanging God.

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## Lamentations 3:22-23 Disaster Diaries

By Dennis Fisher

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

Bible in a Year:

Jeremiah 50; Hebrews 8

Yves Congar was just 10 years old when World War I began and the French town where he lived was invaded by the German army. His mother encouraged him to keep a diary, and what resulted was a lucid description of a military occupation, complete with written narrative and colored sketches. His diary recorded a disaster from a child's perspective. What he witnessed had such a profound effect on him that he felt called to bring others the hope of Christ.

Centuries earlier the prophet Jeremiah was an eyewitness to the invasion of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. He wrote down his observations in his "diary"—the book of Lamentations. Despite these distressing times, the prophet found hope in the heart of God. He wrote: "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:22-23).

At various times, we may experience or witness disasters that feel like hostile forces entering our lives. But these times of trouble do not last forever. And, like Jeremiah, our most sustaining hope is to reflect upon the faithfulness and provision of our heavenly Father. The Lord's compassions are new every morning, and His faithfulness is great!

The best reason for hope is God's faithfulness.

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## Lamentations 3:19-32 Morning

By Bill Crowder

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

On a teaching trip to the Bible lands, our study group had just spent a restful night at our Tiberias hotel. When I awoke, I went to my window and gazed at the beauty of the sunrise on the Sea of Galilee. As I thought ahead to the places we would be visiting that day—the same places where Jesus had walked 2,000 years before—I was excited about the opportunities of the day that had begun with the splendor of the sunrise.

We don't need to be in Israel, however, to be amazed at what God gives us each day. Every morning of life offers us new challenges and rich blessings as we walk with Christ. Despite mistakes we may have made yesterday, choices we regret, and heartache we have endured, God is merciful to us. The sunrise reminds us of His faithfulness and of the new start each day brings.

Perhaps it was the simple joy of a beautiful sunrise that prompted Jeremiah to write, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

Each new day the Lord gives to us—whether in the Bible lands or at home—is an expression of His faithfulness and provides

opportunities to live for Him.

Lord, in the hush of early dawn,

When all the world lies sleeping,

I place my life and all I love

Into Thy gracious keeping. —White

The best reason for hope is God's faithfulness.

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## **Lamentations 3:22-23 The Father's Faithfulness**

By Paul Van Gorder

Read: Psalm 107:1-16

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not... Great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

Hudson Taylor, the humble servant of God to China, demonstrated extraordinary trust in God's faithfulness. In his journal he wrote:

"Our heavenly Father is a very experienced One. He knows very well that His children wake up with a good appetite every morning... He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. We do not expect He will send 3 million missionaries to China; but if He did, He would have ample means to sustain them all... Depend on it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

We may be faint and weary, but our heavenly Father is all-powerful. Our feelings may fluctuate, but He is unchangeable. Even creation itself is a record of His steadfastness. That's why we can sing these words from a hymn by Thomas Chisholm: "Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, sun, moon, and stars in their courses above join with all nature in manifold witness to Thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love."

What an encouragement to live for Him! Our strength for the present and hope for the future are not based on the stability of our own perseverance but on the fidelity of God. No matter what our need, we can count on the Father's faithfulness.

He who abandons himself to God will never be abandoned by God.

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## **Lamentations 3:19-27 Learning To Lament**

By Dennis Fisher

This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. —Lamentations 3:21

On February 14, 1884, Theodore Roosevelt's wife, Alice, died giving birth to their daughter, also named Alice. Roosevelt was so distraught with the loss of his wife that he never spoke of her again. But reminders of her absence haunted the family. Because the newborn had the same name as her mother, she was called "Sister"—never Alice. On Valentine's Day, the holiday for sweethearts, few in the Roosevelt household felt inclined to celebrate it or Sister's birthday. Broken hearts made moods strained and stoic.

Burying our feelings doesn't help, but prayerful grieving can. Jeremiah's heart was broken by Israel's disobedience and the Babylonian captivity that followed. Memories of Jerusalem's destruction haunted him (Lam. 1–2). Yet he had learned how to lament. He identified what caused him grief, began to pray, and let his tears flow. Soon his focus shifted from his loss to the steadfast grace of the Lord's provision. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (3:22-23). Grief gave way to thankfulness.

Learning to lament can give us a fresh vision of hope and begin the process of healing and restoration.

I have been through the valley of weeping,

The valley of sorrow and pain;

But the God of all comfort was with me,

At hand to uphold and sustain. —Anon.

Grief is itself a medicine. —Cowper

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## Lamentations 3:19-33 Hope In The Sad Times

By Dave Branon

It is good that one should hope and wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. —Lamentations 3:26

Sadness and sorrow are life's great equalizers. They affect us all, in varying degrees.

Sometimes entire countries suffer. In 1994 we were horrified by the massive sorrow in Rwanda and Bosnia. And we are all touched by smaller-scale tragedies: accidents, illnesses, family breakups, financial woes. Regardless of our own optimistic tendencies, sorrow visits all of us.

But there's another side to this. No matter how tragic our lives may be, no matter if we are given to depression and despair rather than happiness and joy, we are never left hopeless.

That's because life is not a string of accidental circumstances. Life has a spiritual dimension that can always be buoyed by God's love, mercy, and grace.

Look, for example, at Lamentations 3. Drenched as this passage is in the misery of the people of Jerusalem, there is hope. Amid the details of wholesale slaughter and devastation as the city was overrun, the author inserted mankind's best hope for a reason to go on: God's great love. To counter the affliction and sadness, the writer spoke of God's compassion, His faithfulness, His goodness, and His salvation (vv.22-26).

It's remarkable! No matter what we might be suffering, we can be sure that God will never leave us hopeless.

When trouble seeks to rob your very breath,

When tragedy hits hard and steals your days,

Recall that Christ endured the sting of death;

He gives us hope, and merits all our praise. —Gustafson

No one is hopeless whose hope is in God.

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## Lamentations 3:19-29 Losing A Friend

By David C. McCasland

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. —Lamentations 3:22

When London's red double-decker Routemaster buses were withdrawn from regular service in December 2005, many people felt they had lost a friend. The Routemasters had provided reliable service for 51 years, and they were popular with Londoners and tourists alike because of their easy jump-on, jump-off rear access. A few of the old buses still run on two Heritage tourist routes, but in the rest of the sprawling city, they're gone.

Many changes in our lives represent loss, whether as small as the cherished memory of a bus or as large as a destroyed family home, a thwarted dream of success, or the death of a person we've deeply loved. In every loss we long for a touch of healing and hope.

The book of Lamentations has been called "the funeral of a city." In it, Jeremiah mourned the captivity of his people and the destruction of Jerusalem. Yet in the midst of sorrow, there is a celebration of God's faithfulness: "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him!'" (Lam. 3:22-24).

When our hearts hurt because of loss, we can find hope in our Lord, who never changes.

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;

Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;

Leave to thy God to order and provide;

In every change He faithful will remain. —von Schlegel

When the sunshine of God's love meets the showers of our sorrow, the rainbow of promise appears.

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## Lamentations 3:22 Grace, Mercy, And Peace

By Albert Lee

Read: 2 Timothy 1:1-10

Bless the Lord, ... who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies. —Psalm 103:1,4

The words grace and peace are found in all of Paul's greetings in his New Testament letters to the churches. And in his letters to Timothy and Titus, he also includes mercy: "Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" (2 Tim. 1:2). Let's examine each of these words.

Grace is what our holy God gives that we, as sinful people, don't deserve. In Acts 17:25, we learn that "He gives to all life, breath, and all things." His gifts include our very next breath. Even in our darkest hour, strength is given by God so that we can endure.

Mercy is what God withholds that we do deserve. In Lamentations 3:22, we read, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed." Even when we're wayward, God gives time and help for us to turn back to Him.

Peace is what God brings to His people. Jesus said: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Even in the worst of times, we have inner tranquillity because our God is in control.

We can be encouraged that throughout our lives the Lord will give us the grace, mercy, and peace we need to live for Him.

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,

He sendeth more strength when the labors increase;

To added affliction He addeth His mercy,

To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace. —Flint

God's grace is immeasurable, His mercy is inexhaustible, His peace is inexpressible.

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## Lamentations 3:22-23 Unfailing Mercy

By Bill Crowder

Read: Luke 22:54-62

Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not... Great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

As I strolled through Chicago's O'Hare airport, something caught my eye—a hat worn by someone racing through the concourse. What caught my attention was the message it conveyed in just two words: "Deny Everything." I wondered what it meant. Don't ever admit to guilt? Or deny yourself the pleasures and luxuries of life? I scratched my head at the mystery of those two simple words, "Deny Everything."

One of Jesus' followers, Simon Peter, did some denying. In a critical moment, he denied three times that He even knew Jesus! (Luke 22:57, 58,60). His fear-filled act of denial caused him such guilt and heartache that, broken by his spiritual failure, he could only go out and weep bitterly (v.62).

But Peter's denial of Christ, like our own moments of spiritual denial, could never diminish the compassion of God. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). We can take heart that even when we fail, our faithful God comes to us in mercy and compassion that never fails!

Thank You, Father, for Your new and never-

failing mercies. Forgive me for the times I deny

You and fail others, and teach me to run to

You for Your overflowing compassion.

Being imperfect emphasizes our dependence on God's mercy.

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## **Lamentations 3:22-23 A God Of Absolutes**

By Paul Van Gorder

Read: Malachi 3:6-12

I am the Lord, I do not change. —Malachi 3:6

I am dubious about the accuracy of our bathroom scale. So I've learned to manipulate it in a self-satisfying manner. The little adjustment knob serves to vary the register, and if that becomes too much bother, I just lean a certain way. The idea is to get a favorable reading—hopefully one that is a few pounds less.

We live in an age when many people believe there are no absolutes. Self-serving behavior is rampant and tramples the moral law given for the protection of society. Our culture prides itself on "freedom" that is actually slavery to sin (Romans 6:16-17).

But there is a God of absolutes whose scales never lose their adjustment. With Him, a pound is a pound, right is right, and wrong is wrong. He says, "I am the Lord, I do not change" (Malachi 3:6).

For us as believers, this puts steel into our spiritual backbone. We gain confidence in the face of difficulty and are assured of the fulfillment of every divine promise.

If God were easily moved by every whim or notion, our eternal destiny would be in constant jeopardy. But because He is the Unchanging One, we "are not consumed" (v.6). "His compassions fail not. They are new every morning" (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Unchanging God who reigns above,

His truth remains forever;

And from this faithful God of love

No earthly trial can sever. —D. De Haan

Earth changes, but God and His Word stand sure! —Browning

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He who abandons himself to God will never be abandoned by God.

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## **Lamentations 3:22-33 A Second Chance**

By David C. McCasland

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. —Lamentations 3:22-23

A year ago today, 155 people on US Airways Flight 1549 thought they were going to die. During take-off from New York City, their plane struck a flock of geese, disabling both engines. In a powerless glide, the captain maneuvered over the densely populated area, then announced: “Brace for impact.” Less than 90 seconds later, the crippled plane made a water landing in the frigid Hudson River, where boats and ferries quickly arrived to rescue the passengers and crew, all of whom survived. People called it the “miracle on the Hudson” and praised the pilot and crew. One grateful passenger said simply, “We have a second chance in life.”

In times of crisis, we grasp the importance of every hour. During our ordinary routine, however, we often forget that each day is a second chance. “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I hope in Him!’ ” (Lam. 3:22-24).

We can choose to live with thankfulness for God’s mercy and grace, with confidence in His faithful care, and with hope because He is with us forever. Today, God offers us a second chance in life. Let’s make the most of it!

As shadows of night give way to dawn’s light,

God opens the door to a brand-new day;

And with it come mercies from His gracious hand

For giving new mercies is always His way. —D. De Haan

Our God is a God of second chances.

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### **Lamentations 3:22-25 - OUR FAITHFUL GOD - sermon by Brian Bill**

Our Faithful God

In the country of Armenia, in 1988, Samuel and Danielle sent their young son, Armand, off to school. Samuel squatted before his son and looked him in the eye. “Have a good day at school, and remember, no matter what, I’ll always be there for you.” They hugged and the boy ran off to school.

Hours later, a powerful earthquake rocked the area. In the midst of the pandemonium, Samuel and Danielle tried to discover what happened to their son but they couldn’t get any information. The radio announced that there were thousands of casualties.

Samuel then grabbed his coat and headed for the schoolyard. When he reached the area, what he saw brought tears to his eyes. Armand’s school was a pile of debris. Other parents were standing around crying.

Samuel found the place where Armand’s classroom used to be and began pulling a broken beam off the pile of rubble. He then grabbed a rock and put it to the side, and then grabbed another one.

One of the parents looking on asked, “What are you doing?” “Digging for my son,” Samuel answered. The man then said, “You’re just going to make things worse! The building is unstable,” and tried to pull Samuel away from his work.

Samuel set his jaw and kept working. As time wore on, one by one, the other parents left. Then a firefighter tried to pull Samuel away from the rubble. Samuel looked at him and said, “Won’t you help me?” The firefighter left and Samuel kept digging.

All through the night and into the next day, Samuel continued digging. Parents placed flowers and pictures of their children on the ruins. But, Samuel just kept working. He picked up a beam and pushed it out of the way when he heard a faint cry. “Help! Help!”

Samuel listened but didn't hear anything again. Then he heard a muffled voice, "Papa?"

Samuel began to dig furiously. Finally he could see his son. "Come on out, son!" he said with relief. "No," Armand said. "Let the other kids come out first because I know you'll get me." Child after child emerged until, finally, little Armand appeared. Samuel took him in his arms and Armand said, "I told the other kids not to worry because you told me that you'd always be there for me!"

Fourteen children were saved that day because one father was faithful.

Friends, how much more faithful is our heavenly Father! Whether trapped by fallen debris or ensnared by life's hardships and struggles, we are never cut off from God's faithfulness. He is true to His character. He is reliable and trustworthy and can be counted on always.

Here's a simple definition: "God's faithfulness means that everything He says and does is certain." He is 100% reliable, 100% of the time. He does not fail, forget, falter, change, or disappoint. He says what He means and means what He says and therefore does everything He says He will do.

#### Key Passages on God's Faithfulness

Let's look at some of the key passages on God's Faithfulness.

Exodus 34:6: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

Deuteronomy 7:9: "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations..."

Deuteronomy 32:4: "He is the Rock, His works are perfect, and all His ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is He."

Joshua 21:45: "Not one of all the Lord's good promises to the house of Israel failed; every one was fulfilled."

Psalms 25:10: "All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful."

And, as Psalm 89:8 reminds us, "O Lord God Almighty, who is like you? You are mighty, O Lord, and your faithfulness surrounds you."

These verses, when taken together, establish that God's faithfulness is not some minor or secondary part of His character. To say that God is faithful goes to the very core of who He really is. If He didn't keep His Word, He wouldn't be God.

#### Faithfulness Like an Engine

Bill Bright, President of Campus Crusade for Christ, compares the attributes of God to an automobile engine. Pistons, fan belts, water pumps, and thousands of moving parts all whirl around within a small space, making power for us to drive our car. The parts all work together harmoniously as components of the whole engine.

That's the way God's attributes function too. If you took away love, God's character would be incomplete. God's love works with all the other attributes, like His justice, to produce the right kind of results. We can compare God's faithfulness to the oil in the engine that keeps the internal parts running smoothly. God's faithfulness means that each attribute in His character is working at full capacity at all times. When does God's love fail? Never, because He is faithful. When is God less than holy? Never, because His character is pure and He is always faithful to who He is and to what He says.

A.W. Tozer puts it this way: "All of God's acts are consistent with all of His attributes. No attribute contradicts any other, but all harmonize and blend into each other in the infinite abyss of the Godhead."

God's faithfulness is at the core of His very nature. He is knowable, holy, the creator, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, just, sovereign, unchanging, and loving because He is faithful to His own character. He never changes any of His attributes. Paul drew on this truth when he wrote to the Thessalonians, "the one who calls you is faithful and He will do it." (1 Thessalonians 5:24)

#### A Song of Lament

Last week, as we focused on God's power, we camped in the book of Jeremiah. You'll recall that Jeremiah was not very popular

because He was urging His people to surrender to the King of Babylon. Now, we come to the book of Lamentations, which is really a collection of sad songs, or laments. It's a mournful postscript to the Book of Jeremiah.

Through the use of five dirges, or funeral laments that correspond to the five chapters, Jeremiah reminds us that sin, in spite of all its allurements and excitement, carries with it heavy weights of sorrow, grief, misery, barrenness and pain.

The title of the book is taken from the first word in verse 1, "How." It could also be translated, "alas!" which was a characteristic cry of lament or exclamation. Jeremiah is wondering how all this happened everything was going so well and then this. Jerusalem has now been destroyed and Jeremiah, who is known as the "weeping prophet," is in the dumps.

As we come to Lamentations, chapter 3, we see that Jeremiah bares his heart, not holding back the depths of his despair. No prophet ever pleaded with a people in a more impassioned manner. And no one, except Jesus, was treated with more contempt than he was.

## 9 Laments

In the first 20 verses, the weeping prophet lets it all hang out. His language is real and raw. Let me summarize his 9 complaints:

God is angry. Jeremiah has seen trouble and he knows it's because God is upset with His people: "I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of his wrath." (3:1).

Jeremiah is in the dark. Instead of seeing things clearly, Jeremiah feels the loneliness of darkness: "He has driven me away and made me walk in darkness rather than light...He has made me dwell in darkness like those long dead." (3:2, 6)

Feels like God is against Him. Because of God's judgment, Jeremiah feels like God "has turned his hand against him again and again, all day long." (3:3). In verse 10, Jeremiah compares God to a bear lying in wait, or like a lion ready to pounce on his prey. Verses 12-13 are very graphic: "He drew His bow and made me the target for His arrows. He pierced my heart with arrows from his quiver."

He is tormented mentally and physically. Jeremiah's pain is both acute and chronic. He feels his pain intensely and he can't find a remedy for it. Look at verse 4: "He has made my skin and my flesh grow old and has broken my bones." In verses 15-16, he describes how his life is filled with bitterness, how his teeth have been broken, and how he has been trampled in the dust.

He can't find release. Jeremiah can't figure out how to escape the pain and anguish he feels. He is "besieged and surrounded with bitterness and hardship" in verse 5. Verse 7 says, "He has walled me in so I cannot escape; He has weighed me down with chains." He feels like a man trapped in a maze.

His prayers are unanswered. Notice verse 8: "Even when I call out or cry for help, He shuts out my prayer."

People make fun of him. People tell jokes about Jeremiah and make fun of him all the time. We see this in verse 14: "I became the laughingstock of all my people; they mock me in song all day long."

He is ready to give up. After all that he has been through, he just wants to bag it, to throw in the towel, and to hang it up. We see his honest cry of despair in verse 17, "I have been deprived of peace; I have forgotten what prosperity is."

His hope is gone. He can't forget his troubles because they ambush him at every turn. In verse 18, he says, "My splendor is gone and all that I had hoped from the Lord." As much as he tries to minimize his problems he can't help but think about his affliction and his wandering, and the bitterness that floods through his life in verse 19. When he remembers all that he has gone through he understandably gets bummed out in verse 20: "I will remember them, and my soul is downcast within me."

While Jeremiah experienced a lot of pain and agony, my guess is that some of you have the words to his song already memorized. Perhaps you are experiencing many of these same things and secretly wonder if God is really faithful:

You feel like God is mad at you.

You feel like you're in the dark.

You feel like God is against you.

You have mental and physical pain.

You can't find release.

Your prayers are not being answered.

People don't understand you.

You are ready to give up.

Your hope is gone

Yet This I Call to Mind

Friends, while it's OK to be honest with God and express your real feelings like Jeremiah did, it's not OK to stay there. Jeremiah had every reason to sing the blues and just pitch his faith, but he didn't. He forced himself to think about God's character in particular he grabbed onto His faithfulness.

Some of you may think that you can't help what you're feeling. I don't mean for this to sound harsh but you don't have to allow what you've gone through to keep you emotionally entangled and spiritually sidetracked forever. Jeremiah understands your pain. Let's look now at what Jeremiah latched on to when his world was falling apart.

Verse 21 is really the "hinge" on which the book, and Jeremiah's life turns: "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:" While his outward affliction and inward turmoil pushed him toward despair, Jeremiah forces himself to bring truth to the forefront of his mind. Like a computer that "defaults" to certain settings, each of us have a "despair default." If we don't reconfigure our minds, we will slide down the slippery slope of discouragement and lament.

Here's how it works. If Jeremiah just focused on those things that were filling his mind, he was going to be bummed out. Look again at verses 19 and 20: "I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me."

In order to break out of this pattern and cycle of despair, Jeremiah needed to be vigilant about what he allowed himself to think about. He brought other things to mind. He called them up from his hard drive and made himself think about what was true in verse 21: "Yet this I call to mind..."

Friends, what Jeremiah did was something we need to do as well. We need to engage our will, and purposely and deliberately focus on things other than our problems. Force yourself to remember truth. Recall a verse. Remember a time when God demonstrated his grace and mercy to you. Push God's faithfulness to the front of your mind, even when you don't feel like doing it. When you do, God will begin to restore hope to your life by crowding out the hopelessness that threatens to shipwreck your life.

#### What to Call to Mind

Now, what did Jeremiah call to mind? What did he focus on while he was hurting? What did he lock onto when he was trapped by all the rubble in his life?

Verses 22 and 23 contain four phrases. Each one raises and answers an important question that we need to consider.

1. Why doesn't God destroy me? This is not a theoretical question. We all walk closer to the edge than we think. There is a thin line between disaster and prosperity, joy and sorrow, laughter and tears, life and death.

Here is Jeremiah's answer: "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed" (3:22a). Why doesn't God destroy us? He could and He should. He could because He is God and He should because we are sinners. Our sins would consume us if it were not for His great love.

The Hebrew word for "love" is *hesed*, a word rich with meaning. It has within it the idea of "loyal love," of love that will not let go because it does not depend on emotion but on an act of the will. God was sticking by the people He had chosen. God loves us because He promised to love us and nothing can cause Him to break His promise.

My pastor friend Ray Pritchard makes the following point: "As bad as things are, if it weren't for God, things would be much worse." That seems obvious, and perhaps it is, but we need to hear it again. If it weren't for God, and for God's love, no matter how bad things are in your life right now, they would be much worse without the Lord.

2. How do I know God will keep on loving me? The second half of verse 22 gives the answer to this question: "for his compassions never fail." I want you to notice the word *compassions* is plural. That's very unusual in English in fact; my grammar checker didn't like the word because it had an "s" on it. But, God's compassions are plural because his mercy is intense and limitless. It comes in rolling waves from the very presence of God. The rivers of mercy run fully and constantly, and never run dry.

The word *compassion* comes from the Hebrew word "womb" and shows us the gentle feeling of concern and care that God has for us. The word literally means, "to be moved in the heart out of love for another." God's compassion emanates from deep within Him and floods our lives. He is moved in his heart when He thinks about you.

3. When will God give me what I need? Verse 23a gives a word of hope for each of us to latch onto: "They are new every morning." What if you woke up every morning to find your purse full of money, your car full of gas, your refrigerator full of food, and your youth and vitality fully restored? That's the way it is with God's compassions and mercies. You can never use them up.

Do you remember the story of God providing manna for His people when they were in the wilderness? God sent it every day (except on the Sabbath). The people were instructed to gather as much as they wanted because it would never run out. However, they weren't allowed to store it (except on the day before the Sabbath). In order to drive home his point, God told them that if they tried to save it, the maggots would come and spoil the manna. They were to gather just enough for each day, eat it that day, and then gather more the next day. This is how God taught His people to trust Him day by day to meet their daily needs.

This means at least two things:

- We never have to live on yesterdays' blessings. They are "new" every morning.
- God's blessings are never early but they aren't late either. They are "new" every morning.

Brothers and sisters, let's learn this lesson God's mercies come day by day. They come when we need them not earlier and not later. God gives us what we need today. If we needed more, he would give us more. When we need something else, He will give us that as well. Nothing we truly need will ever be withheld from us.

4. What is my hope for living? This question is answered in the last part of verse 23: "Great is your faithfulness." Jeremiah was rocked by the limitless supply of God's grace offered to him. Whatever hard things we go through, we must never doubt God's faithfulness. We are to celebrate His great faithfulness every day!

#### God's Faithfulness Fleshed Out

Before we wrap up this morning, I want to give you 3 practical ways that you can experience God's great faithfulness in your life:

1. When you struggle. All of us experience hard times in our lives. Some of you are struggling with sickness, financial pressure, grief, or even depression. Friends, do what Jeremiah did when your mind is flooded with difficulties. Choose to focus on God's love, mercy and faithfulness. He does not promise to prevent problems from coming into our lives, but He does promise to go through them with us. Can you do that right now? Call to mind what you know to be true. God is faithful He will always be there for you.

2. When you are tempted. Some of you are faced with some incredible temptations on a daily basis. Did you know that because God is faithful, He will always provide a way out for you so that you do not have to give in to them? 1 Corinthians 10:13: "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

What tempts you? What's your fatal flaw? In what ways are you drawn to do something that you know is not right? Remember this: God's faithfulness will give you a way out! You do not have to give in He knows exactly the limits of what we can bear. God's faithfulness is tied directly to providing us a way to say "no" to sin. When we give in to sin it's because our focus is on the attractiveness of the temptation, rather than on God's faithfulness to deliver us from that situation.

3. When you mess up. Would you be ashamed for others to know everything you've said, done and thought in the last 7 days? Or the last three months? Or the last 5 years? If you know yourself at all, you know how much you mess up and how desperately you need God's mercy.

This past Thursday morning, I took Emily and Lydia to the bus stop. As we were driving, I reached over and tickled Lydia's knee. When she jumped, the seatbelt snagged her earring and pulled it out. That might not seem too bad, but she had just had her ears pierced on Saturday and they were still sore. The earrings were supposed to stay in for 6 weeks until everything healed. We looked everywhere for the fallen earring and eventually had to drive back down to Bloomington that morning to get a new one and have her ear re-pierced.

I felt terrible. What kind of dad am I? When I got home from looking for the earring, Lydia came up to me, wrapped her arms around me and said, "Dad. I love you and forgive you. Don't be mad at yourself. Accidents happen." She then told me that she had just memorized Ephesians 4:32 for AWANA and quoted it for me: "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."

Lydia gave me a gift Thursday morning the gift of forgiveness. That's the same thing God gives to us when we sin and confess it before Him. Because He is faithful, He never tires of extending forgiveness to us. I love 1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

## God's Faithfulness Illustrated

To say that God is faithful is to say that God is committed to you. He is steadfastly devoted to you and is looking to pull you out from under the rubble of your life. Because He is faithful, He protects you as well.

The story is told of a young man who was an atheist and was training to be an Olympic diver. The only spiritual influence in his life came from a Christian friend who tried to share the gospel with him whenever he could. The diver wasn't very interested in spiritual matters and made that known loud and clear.

One night the diver went to the indoor pool at the college he attended. The lights were all off, but the moon was bright, so there was plenty of light to practice his dives. The young man climbed up to the highest diving board and as he turned his back to the pool on the edge of the board and extended his arms out, he saw his shadow on the wall. The shadow was in the shape of a cross. Instead of diving, he knelt down and finally asked Jesus to come into his life.

As the man stood up on the diving board, a maintenance man walked in and turned the lights on. The diver gasped in horror the pool had been drained for repairs!

Friends, God has been faithful to us in so many ways even when we don't see it. Some of you are standing on a diving board today. You're headed for trouble unless you turn your focus to the Cross where God's faithfulness is fully demonstrated.

Let's pray. (In our moments of fear, through our tears we can see that you are faithful. You've always been faithful to us).

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## Lamentations 3:22-33 Peaks And Valleys

By David C. Egener

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning. —Lamentations 3:22-23

One autumn day, my wife and I drove Colorado's beautiful Trail Ridge Road from Grand Lake up through Rocky Mountain National Park and back down to Estes Park. It was an exhilarating ride past mountain meadows and rushing waterfalls. Each bend in the road presented us with another startling, unexpected, awe-inspiring view. But if we hadn't decided to make the climb high above the tree line, we would have missed the view of peak after majestic peak as far as the eye could see.

In some ways, living for Jesus is like driving up a twisting mountain road. Today may find you in the depths of the valley where you can't catch a glimpse of any mountains at all. But you can find courage and strength to keep going.

God's Word tells us that His mercies and compassions are "new every morning" (Lam. 3:22-23). Just as each new day presents us with a different challenge, the Lord reveals the beauty of His character, the fulfillment of His promises, and the tender provision of His grace.

We don't know what today may bring. But we do know this: God will amaze us with His unending, ever-new compassions. The depths of the valleys just make His mountainpeaks that much more breathtaking.

I've found that when life's brush obscures my view

With gloomy strokes that seem to mar the scene,

God's hand appears, and gives to sunless hue

And dreary skies a more majestic sheen. —Gustafson

Where God guides, God provides.

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## Lamentations 3:25-33 Grieving From A To Z

By Dennis Fisher

Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion. —Lamentations 3:32

Jerusalem was engulfed in flames, and the prophet Jeremiah wept. His prediction of divine judgment had largely gone unheeded. Now his terrible prophecy had come to pass with horrifying vividness. The short book of Lamentations records the prophet's grieving

process over the destruction of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah organized the book around the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet, using a technique of alphabetic acrostics to aid the reader in memorizing the passages more easily. But using this technique also shows that he didn't cut short his grieving process. He took deliberate and intentional time to reflect upon and even to write down his heartbreak. You might say he was learning to grieve from A to Z.

In the midst of his grief, the comfort of God surfaced. Reminders of God's sovereignty and goodness gave the prophet hope as he faced the future: "The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lam. 3:31-32).

If you've recently experienced a painful loss, remember to take adequate time to grieve and to reflect upon God's goodness. Then you will be able to experience His comfort and hope for the future.

To experience God's comfort

While you're suffering with grief,

Try to focus on God's goodness,

And He'll bring your heart relief. —Sper

God allows sorrows and tears today to open our hearts to the joys of tomorrow.

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**Lamentations 3:27** - I am certain that I never did grow in grace one-half so much anywhere as I have upon the bed of pain. — Charles Haddon Spurgeon

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## **Lamentations 3:25-42 - Ain't It Awful!**

By David C. McCasland

Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord. —Lamentations 3:40

A friend told me about a man who shouted the same three words each day from his street-corner newsstand. "Ain't it awful!" he would say to passersby while extending a newspaper. People bought a paper because they just had to know what terrible thing had occurred.

Tragedy and dire predictions always make the front page, but if we become preoccupied with bad news, we will succumb to what my friend calls "awfulizing"—a pervasive pessimism that clouds every situation with gloom.

If anyone had a good reason for being despondent, it was the prophet Jeremiah. For 40 years, he declared God's judgment on the rebellious and unrepentant nation of Judah. Jeremiah suffered because of their disobedience, but he clung to his faith in God's goodness. Even after witnessing the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of his people, Jeremiah wrote: "The Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord" (Lamentations 3:31-32,40).

Disobedience to God can cause great pain, but the doorway out of discouragement leads to the Lord, who "is good to those who wait for Him" (v.25).

Turn not aside, discouraged one,

Stir up your gift, pursue your goal;

In God's own time you'll see Him work,

He'll give you hope and lift your soul. —D. De Haan

Awful circumstances cannot alter the goodness of God.

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## **Lamentations 3:31-39 What Good Is Evil?**

By Herbert Vander Lugt

Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that woe and well-being proceed. —Lamentations 3:38

In Jesus' parable about the prodigal son, the son asked for his inheritance in advance and left home (Lk. 15:11-32). How would you feel if you were that father? Would you have let your son have his own way?

This father knew that saying no would do nothing to cure his son's rebellious streak. It must have been with reluctance and sorrow that he gave his son the inheritance, praying that the inevitable hard knocks ahead would lead his son to repentance.

Like that father, God also permits what He doesn't like. We see this in His care for the ancient Hebrews. God had warned His people of sin's consequences, but He left the choice with them. They chose to rebel, which led to grave repercussions. The book of Lamentations reflects Jeremiah's grief over those consequences.

Yet God ultimately brings good out of the evil He allows. This realization led Jeremiah to assure Jerusalem that although God was displeased with them, He was even angrier with their Babylonian captors (Lam. 3:31-36). He would exact justice and extend mercy to His people.

Are you suffering from choices you've made that grieve your heavenly Father? God can use those consequences for your eternal welfare. Humbly return to Him today!

For Further Study

According to Proverbs 3:11-12, what should be our reaction to God's discipline? After David asked God to forgive him, what did he pray in Psalm 51:12-13?

The way back to God begins with a broken heart.

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## Lamentations 3:40 Garden Lesson

By David C. Egner

Read: Proverbs 24:27-34

Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord. —Lamentations 3:40

My garden got away from me last summer. A sudden 2-week trip to Russia, a tree I had to cut down, and numerous other responsibilities kept me away from the garden too long. It got pretty wild out there before I could give the beans and tomatoes and carrots some much-needed attention.

When Solomon was walking by a vineyard, he noticed that it was overgrown with thorns and its wall was broken down. "I looked on it," he wrote, "and received instruction" (Prov. 24:32). He learned the necessity of constant attention, ambition, and discipline to keep the garden clean and fruitful.

It's the same with our spiritual lives. There are so many aspects that require our attention and discipline. If because of busyness or laziness we're not careful, we'll see some relationships crumble. The walls of moral standards will develop holes. Little sins will creep in and become big ones. The fruit of righteousness will be choked out by the nettles of iniquity.

Have you been neglecting the Lord lately? His Word? Your church? Fellowship with other believers? Take steps now to get back at it! Learn the lesson of the neglected garden.

In all the little things of life,

Yourself, Lord, may I see;

In little and in great alike

I'll serve you faithfully! —Anon.

A life, like a garden, requires cultivation.

Lamentations 3:1-18

In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help. - Psalm 31:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Sometimes Christians are afraid to admit they get depressed. Emphasis on victorious Christian living makes it easy to feel unspiritual when we're down. This is especially true if our depression is because of sin, although clearly that is not the cause of all depression. In today's passage Jeremiah depicted the sadness of a life that is lived from within the cloud of sin.

In Lam 3 we hear the soul of the prophet. Yet the first person singular pronouns in this chapter enable all who have suffered because of sin to readily relate. Who has not felt driven into darkness when under the rod of God's punishment? Using famine imagery, the prophet described the wasted, broken effects of sin; using military imagery, he portrayed God as the One who encircles with weapons of bitterness and hardship (Lam 3:1--5).

What a vivid description of the dark, inescapable prison that presses in on one in sin's bondage! Emotional darkness feels like death, and chains weigh down. Even prayer feels shut out; the path seems blocked or tangled as a maze (vv. 6--10).

Not only does sin imprison, but a guilty conscience pictures God as though He were lying in wait, eager to pounce. This individual feels like "target practice" for His piercing arrows and like an object of ridicule for others (Lam 3:11--14).

Truly this experience tastes bitter! The idea of verse 16 is one of extreme humiliation, perhaps along the lines of "rubbing one's face in the dirt." Such circumstances make peace impossible and wipe out the memory of better times. In the saddest part of this chapter, the prophet's soul cried out, "All hope is lost!" (Lam 3:15--18). Yet, as we will see tomorrow, a whisper of faith was about to appear.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Fortunately, Romans 6:23 adds, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

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**Lamentations 3:17-18 - Essentials of Happiness** - The grand essentials of happiness are: something to do, something to love, and something to hope for. —Thomas Chalmers

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#### Lamentations 3:18-23

Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning. - Psalm 30:5b

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

"Bud" had finally reached the end. Years of alcoholism and gambling had taken away his family, his health, and his dignity. As he sat in his bathtub with a gun held to his head, his only thought was that it would soon be over. He pulled the trigger. Incredibly, nothing happened. With disgust, he taunted himself that he could not even pull off his own death. For a long time he sat there, tormented by his many failures. Just when it seemed completely unbearable, a song slowly began to come to him. Very faintly he started singing, "Jesus loves me this I know ... " He put down his gun and wept for a long time.

Somehow when we reach our lowest point--as Jeremiah had--our gracious Lord begins to whisper truth into our hearts. This whisper is found in the expression, "So I say" (Lam 3:18)--a literary technique of Hebrew poetry to announce the advent of something positive (cf. Psalm 31:22, yesterday's verse).

This tiny flicker of hope was nearly snuffed out as the memory of affliction (v. 19) threatened a deeper bout of depression (v. 20). But just in time, this whisper of hope resurfaced (v. 21) and emerged as one of Scriptures most encouraging verses: the Lord's compassions never fail (v. 22). The One who seemed so distant and wrathful is actually merciful and compassionate! The prophet exulted in the hope that anchored his soul (Heb. 6:19) and that could not disappoint (Rom. 5:5), a hope based on the un failing love of God.

In his study on Lamentations, Chuck Swindoll lists three essential truths from this passage. First, God never stops loving us (Lam 3:2). Second, God's concern for us will never stop; His multifold compassions never fail (Lam 3:22). Finally, His faithfulness never diminishes (Lam 3:23). We'll return to these verses tomorrow.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's hard to read today's verses and not start humming the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." This wonderful expression of the truth of today's passage has encouraged generations of believers.

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#### Lamentations 3:19-24

His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. - Lamentations 3:22-23

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

A recent newspaper article cited a study which showed that the amount of daylight in a classroom affects students' learning. Students in classrooms allowing the most daylight learned faster and scored higher on standardized tests than those in classrooms with the least amount of daylight. Other studies show that patients recover faster when their hospital rooms have windows, and even stores with skylights sell more merchandise than stores without them. The article concluded, 'Humans just have a predilection for daylight.'

There is something about a new morning that suggests hope and a fresh beginning. We weren't designed to live in constant darkness. One Bible commentator says that in the Scriptures, dawn was considered the time for God's deliverance. David wrote, 'Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning' (Ps. 30:5).

This is good news for us. It means that no matter what this month and the year ahead may bring, nothing can change the fact that as long as God is in charge, His sun will come up tomorrow.

Jeremiah knew something about the promise of hope that comes with each new morning. The irony is that one of the greatest and most often-repeated statements of hope in the Bible, 'Great is your faithfulness,' comes in the middle of a book whose name means to 'cry out loud.'

You may recall that Lamentations is a series of five poems written to mourn the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonians. True to His covenant word, God was judging His people for their sin, and Jeremiah was suffering along with everyone else.

Yet Jeremiah also realized that even God's severe judgment was a sign of His faithfulness, because God promised in the same covenant He would not abandon Israel forever. So Jeremiah reminded his fellow Jews, 'Even in judgment we have hope. God's loyal love means we will not be completely destroyed.' Every day the sun came up, the Jews could anticipate God's tender mercies.

Our circumstances are very different from Jeremiah's, but our need for God's daily compassion is the same. Let's thank Him that His mercies never fail.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Jeremiah said, 'The LORD is my portion' (Lam 3:24).

In the Bible a person's portion could refer to a piece of land, an inheritance, or necessities like daily food and clothing. Jeremiah was saying the Lord was more valuable to him than any of these things. Can you identify with this kind of devotion? It's a question worth thinking and praying about this weekend.

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#### Lamentations 3:22–33

##### God Is Faithful: Constant and Never Changing

Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed... great is your faithfulness.

#### Lamentations 3:22–23

Thomas O. Chisholm was a simple man, born in a log cabin in 1866. He gained little education, money, or fame, but he wanted to serve God. One day, inspired by Lamentations 3:22–23, he wrote the words to the hymn "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." He gave them to his friend William Runyan, who set the words to music. Little did Chisholm know that the hymn would one day be known around the globe. Runyan shared it with his friend Dr. Will Houghton, then president of Moody Bible Institute, who asked musician George Beverly Shea to sing it over the school's radio station. With Billy Graham, Shea would use the hymn in their worldwide evangelistic campaigns.

Chisholm declared that God was faithful, even though his daily life was not always easy. The author of Lamentations recognizes that we may have times of trouble. But even when we are surrounded by affliction, we can still have hope. We can rest assured that though we may face troubling situations, God's faithful love for us will not allow us to be "consumed" (v. 22).

This passage emphasizes daily living. We are reminded to focus on God's faithfulness every day, each morning, to renew our hope and to encourage our souls. There is an emphasis on meditation, which means taking time to sit in silence and reflect on the character of God. By regular times of focusing on God, we will actively place our hope not on our earthly circumstance but on the unchanging, faithful character of the God we serve.

"The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him" (v. 25). We can depend on these character traits of God: His goodness, His care, His unfailing love, His compassion. Great is His faithfulness!

## Apply the Word

If you aren't familiar with the hymn, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness," be sure to look up the lyrics in a hymn book or online. Sing the hymn or listen to a recording and reflect on this characteristic of the God we serve. Consider the ways God has shown His faithfulness to you and to the ones you love. We can be thankful that "there is no shadow of turning" with Him!

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Lamentations 3:27 - It is hard to cast off the devil's yoke when we have worn it long upon our necks. - D L Moody

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Lamentations 3:22-24

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. - 1 Corinthians 13:13

## TODAY IN THE WORD

Just about everyone will be talking about love today on Valentine's Day! Cards will be exchanged, roses received, and chocolates consumed! With pink and red hearts everywhere, it's hard to miss the "love" theme of this day. Yet the world often has no idea what real love is about.

It seems only fitting then that today's verses are all about true love--God's unfailing, compassionate love. As we saw yesterday, only God's merciful love gives hope (Lam 3:21-22). The Hebrew word used for this love is *hesed*, one of the most important Old Testament words. This word describes the constant love that God shows to His people because of His covenantal relationship with them. Whether translated "lovingkindness," "unfailing love," "constant goodness," or simply, "love," this word always refers to God's loyalty.

How comforting to know that God's love is based upon His faithfulness and not ours. Our study thus far in Lamentations has shown quite clearly that neither the northern kingdom, Israel, nor the southern kingdom, Judah, remained faithful to the Lord. Whether through idolatry or immorality, God's people had badly forsaken Him. God's wrathful judgment for this infidelity was clearly stipulated in His Covenant. Thus, the terrible devastation of Jerusalem was to be expected. What was astounding, however, was the outpouring of God's mercy!

What amazed Jeremiah looking out over destroyed Jerusalem--and what amazes us looking out over the failures of our lives--was that God's compassion never fails. We can never reach the end of the Lord's steadfast love; each day offers a new opportunity to experience His mercy. Because this mercy is rooted in His covenantal love, we can count on it ... it's as sure as the rising of the sun!

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY

On this day focused on love, it's good to remember that true love is all about God's faithfulness!

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**Lamentations 3:22-23** - Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

On the desk adjacent to my computer I have a small reproduction of Rembrandt's "The Prophet Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem." (see above) The painting certainly reflects the sorrow expressed in Jeremiah's book of Lamentations. Our text follows eighteen verses of misery and introduces a section on mercy that speaks to us today no matter how difficult life may be.

**Each morning, let's rejoice!** Our circumstances may change and our feelings about our circumstances may change, but our Father in heaven never changes! "I am the LORD, I do not change" (Mal. 3:6). Each sunrise means we are a day older, but the Lord never ages for he is eternal. This means that each of his divine attributes is unchanging and we can depend on him always to be merciful, compassionate, and faithful (Lam. 3:22-23). God in his mercy does not give us what we do deserve, and in his grace and love he gives us what we don't deserve. The Hebrew word translated mercies in our text can also be translated "covenant love" and "loving-kindness." From day to day, we have no idea what our family members, teachers, friends, or bosses will be like, but we know what God will be like, so let's rejoice.

**Each morning, let's remember.** The Jewish people who were lamenting with Jeremiah knew what had happened each morning in Jewish history and at the Jewish temple. They knew that during Israel's wilderness wanderings, each morning the manna fell from heaven to feed the people (Exod. 16); and each morning we need to feed on the Word of God so we have the spiritual strength we need for the tasks of the day. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). The priests each morning stirred up the fire on the altar (Lev. 6:12) so the sacrifices could be offered, and Paul used this activity to encourage Timothy to stir up the fire in his heart (2 Tim. 1:6). The priests offered burnt offerings each morning (Exod. 29:38-46), and we should offer ourselves to the Lord each morning (Rom. 12:1-2). The burning of incense each morning (Exod. 30:7) speaks

of prayer (Ps. 141:1–2), and we must begin the day with prayer and communion with the Lord. And let's be sure to praise and thank God before we lay our day's burdens before him (1 Chron. 23:30). When I was a seminary student, each summer I had a fulltime job that involved shift-work, so I had to adjust my schedule each week; but it worked out fine because no matter what the hour, I could meet with the Lord.

**Each morning, let's receive.** In Lamentations 3:22–24, Jeremiah mentions four attributes of God: mercy, compassion, faithfulness, and hope. Mercy speaks of his forgiveness, so let's not carry yesterday's sins into the new day. Compassion speaks of God's provision for each need, so let's ask and receive, "casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Pet. 5:7). Each morning, pray your way through that day's schedule and tell him what you need. The day will go better. God's faithfulness assures us that he is dependable to be with us and to keep his promises. As for hope, we need it, because matters don't always work out as we planned.

Our daily meeting with the Lord is the secret of "newness of life" for each day's demands (Rom. 6:4), so start walking the "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20). The LORD is good to those who wait for Him, To the soul who seeks Him. Lamentations 3:25 ([Warren Wiersbe Old Testament Words for Today](#))

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Lamentations 3:25-33

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for him! - Isaiah 30:18

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Perhaps you were on a sports team as a teenager and remember long hours after school spent training and practicing. Sit-ups and extra laps never seemed fun, but the coach assured you that they would pay off. So you endured, resisting the temptation to complain and confident that the "gain" would outweigh the "pain."

Although Jeremiah wasn't in athletic training, today's passage addresses the patience required of the soul undergoing God's discipline. Leaving aside his own experiences for the moment, this passage records Jeremiah's encouragement to those who are "trained" by waiting on the Lord (note the switch to the third person).

First of all, those who hope in the Lord can expect His goodness (Lam 3:25). Second, those who persevere quietly, accepting the Lord's discipline without complaint and with humility (Lam 3:28–30), can expect salvation, or healing. Third, those who receive the Lord's affliction can expect His compassion (Lam 3:32).

Verse 30 provides another clear picture of our Lord Jesus Christ, who endured insults and mistreatment (cf. Isa. 50:6) and encouraged his followers to do the same (Matt. 5:39). If the sinless One learned obedience from suffering (Heb. 5:8), how much more do we, who are sinful, need the discipline of suffering to learn obedience?

Spiritual discipline enables one to see the Lord's character more clearly. It is not in the Lord's nature to reject forever (v. 31), but to show compassion (Lam 3:32). Contrary to the hissing lies of the Evil One, the Lord takes no delight in bringing grief to His children (Lam 3:33). That's because the Lord's final goal is never suffering, but the redemptive purposes He accomplishes through suffering, even suffering resulting from our own sinful actions. Hebrews 12:10–11 says, "God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Waiting on the Lord is difficult, especially in our fast-paced world! Here's a way to keep focused on God while you wait on the Lord.

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**Lamentations 3:28** When told that most North American women had water piped into their homes, a Nigerian woman grew somber. "How do the women speak to one another? If I didn't talk with the women at the village well, I wouldn't know about their lives."

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Lamentations 3:33-39

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. - Psalm 103:19

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

When Queen Esther found out about the plot to kill her people, she knew that she had to seek the king's help. If she hadn't believed that the king had the authority to intervene, she never would have risked her life and approached him without an official summons. But she trusted God and bravely proceeded to the one human with the power to help.

The same is true in our lives: we rarely seek someone's help without confidence in that person's ability. Today's passage concerns God's nature and presents three essential truths about our Heavenly Father, one of which is His sovereignty.

The first truth is assumed throughout all of Lamentations: God is just. God takes no pleasure in our suffering, but His justice compels Him to punish our sin (Lam 3:33). To underscore God's justice, Jeremiah listed three violations of human dignity that never go unnoticed by the Most High: mistreatment of prisoners (Lam 3:34); denial of basic human rights (Lam 3:35); and abrogation of justice (Lam 3:36).

But echoing faintly from verses 34 through 36 is the haunting question, "What if God isn't really in control?" Verses 37 and 38 answer this terrifying thought by emphasizing a second essential truth about God: He is sovereign. Psalm 33:9 teaches that the Lord God sovereignly created: "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." Verse 37 extends this idea and teaches that God sovereignly rules: nothing can happen without the Lord allowing it.

In light of God's justice and sovereignty, the final question posed centers not on God's character, but on the response of every living human being (Lam 3:39). This suggests a third aspect of the Lord's nature: God is holy. Because sin is ultimately an affront to God's holiness, His justice demands sin's punishment and His sovereignty ensures that punishment. Yet it is also God's holiness that desires that we be holy as He is holy (1 Peter 1:16).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

"[God] makes the releasing of captives one of the most important aspects of [Christ's] work," wrote one commentator. This refers to release from sin's bondage, but today's passage also reminds us of God's concern for prisoners behind physical bars.

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#### Lamentations 3:40

I have more trouble with D.L. Moody than any other man I know. —D.L. Moody

Take delight in being unknown and unregarded. A true understanding and humble estimate of oneself is the highest and most valuable of all lessons. To take no account of oneself, but always to think well and highly of others, is the highest wisdom... We are all frail; consider none more frail than yourself. —Thomas à Kempis

If we don't know ourselves and what shaped us, what neutralizes us, and what our limits are, we invite disaster. —Gordon MacDonald

Behind much of the rat-race of modern life is the unexamined assumption that what I do determines who I am. In this way, we define ourselves by what we do, rather than by any quality of what we are inside. It is typical in a party for one stranger to approach another with the question "What do you do?" Perhaps we wouldn't have a clue how to reply to the deeper question, "Who are you?" —James Houston in *The Transforming Power of Prayer*

Look outward. You have been rightly taught Socrates' dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living. I would add: The too examined life is not worth living either. —Charles Krauthammer

A little boy once told his mother that he was six feet tall. When she doubted the statement, he assured her that he had just measured himself. His calculations were right but his ruler was not; it was only about six inches long. This is the sort of rule by which many Christians measure themselves. —A.B. Simpson

When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. —C. S. Lewis,

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#### Lamentations 3:40-47

Come, let us return to the Lord ... he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. - Hosea 6:1

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

For the past few days, we have been considering the nature of God--His justice, His sovereignty, and His holiness. If you've been following the pronouns in this chapter, you may recall a shift from the first person singular of Jeremiah himself (Lam 3:1–24) to the third person of his instruction on God's character (Lam 3:25–39). Today's passage shifts to the first person plural indicating the people's response.

It's not surprising that a prayer of confession is the soul's response to God's character. Isaiah responded similarly when he beheld the Lord's holiness (Isa. 6). Today's passage opens with a call to self-examination and repentance (Lam 3:40–41). A renewed vision

of God revealed to the people that God had not left them but that they had left Him, and they needed to return to Him and respond with wholehearted prayer.

As with the prayer in chapter 2 (see Feb. 11), you may be surprised by today's prayer (Lam 3:42–47). Keep in mind that the people had just begun to repent and that their perspective was still influenced by past sinful thinking. For one thing, they expected an immediate feeling of forgiveness and restoration the moment they confessed (Lam 3:42). Although the fact of forgiveness is true as soon as we confess our sins (1 John 1:9), the consequences of years of sinful living cannot be erased immediately. Restoration entails complete confession and patient acceptance of divine judgment.

Secondly, although they had begun to return to God, true intimacy with Him would take time. The staggering effects of God's resounding judgment had deeply shaken the people, but they were not yet fully broken. And until the sin that had caused the Holy One to turn away had been fully confessed and renounced, the Lord God would continue to seem distant (Lam 3:43) and silent (Lam 3:44). Pending full acceptance of God's righteous judgment, the people would continue to lament their debased state (Lam 3:45–47).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Twice this month, we have encouraged confession of sin. We hope that these times have yielded much fruit.

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#### Lamentations 3:48-54

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows. - Isaiah 53:4a

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Imagine reading the following classified ad in a Christian magazine: Preacher wanted. Must have unquestioned integrity and exceptional personal strength. Required to proclaim God's word unwaveringly to a rebellious, ungrateful congregation. Personal harm and imprisonment guaranteed. Success extremely unlikely. Deepened relationship with God only payment.

It's hard to envision crowds rushing to respond to such an offer! Yet this "ad" only covers a small part of Jeremiah's "job description." Of all the Old Testament prophets, only Jeremiah lived his entire life without ever seeing any success in his ministry. To the very end, the people refused to listen to him. But to the very end, Jeremiah loved his people. Today's passage reveals how deeply he identified with them and bore their pain.

Their prayer of lament (Lam 3:42–47) released torrents of grief in the prophet (Lam 3:48). Although Jeremiah knew that relief was in the sovereign Lord's hands (Lam 3:49–50), the prophet could not help but be overwhelmed by the desperate plight of his people and wept deeply. (The "women" in verse 51 most likely refers to people in general.)

It's hard not to think of our Lord Jesus Christ when we read this passage. Today's verse is taken from an extended passage in Isaiah predicting the suffering and pain that our Lord would take upon Himself in His incarnation. Perhaps more than any other prophet, Jeremiah's experience paralleled that of Christ.

Like Jesus, Jeremiah was badly mistreated by the very ones he loved so dearly. Just as hunted animals were driven into pits and stoned to death (Lam 3:52–53), so too Jeremiah's enemies had tried to kill him by throwing him into a mud-filled cistern during the height of the city's famine (see Jeremiah 38). Sadly, tradition tells us that Jeremiah was eventually stoned to death while exiled in Egypt.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although Jeremiah did not commit the heinous sins for which his people were being punished, he completely identified himself with them. Few of us are called to such a national level of ministry, but each of us can seek a deepened burden for our community.

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#### Lamentations 3:55-66

The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. - Psalm 145:18

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

Bill Carr served the Lord in Bulgaria while the Iron Curtain was still entrenched across Eastern Europe. He knew that this was enemy territory--most of the people had never heard the gospel and were very superstitious. One night he woke suddenly, gasping for breath. It was as if someone were standing on him. A sickening sense of evil filled the room. At last he was able to call out, "Jesus!", and the evil presence fled. He spent the rest of the night praising Jesus for delivering him and anticipating the good work that He was launching and would finish.

Jeremiah also mourned the terrible suffering of his people and memories of his own life-threatening mistreatment. Like Bill Carr, he must have felt suffocated. But Jeremiah also called upon the Lord (Lam 3:55–57).

You may have noticed that these verses are all in the past tense. This suggests an important principle: confidence in prayer grows as we consider God's previous faithfulness. As Jeremiah recalled times the Lord had mercifully rescued him, his faith was bolstered and he cried out once again to his Heavenly Father.

Not only is our Lord our Protector, He is also our Advocate (Lam 3:58–60). Sometimes it's hard to resist that strong desire to help the Lord avenge the wrongs done to us! But this passage is clear that our Redeemer is well aware of our hurts and the vindictiveness of those who do us harm (Lam 3:60). He is the only One who can take up our case (Lam 3:58); only He is our redemption.

Christ is also the One to whom we can completely unload our burdens (Lam 3:61–63). As stinging taunts ring in our ears, Christ is the tenderhearted One who patiently listens. That's because He has heard all this jeering and mockery before--when He hung on the cross. And it was there that He paid the price for all sin, including nasty jabs and hissing taunts.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's care for us is such that He declares, "Before they call I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24).

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#### LAMENTATIONS 3:22, 23.

His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness.

It is the glory of God's love that it is always fresh and new. It is never the same in its expression any two days. We have to patch up our old things and keep using them over and over again; but God never does. He never gives us the old leaves a second time; each spring every tree gets new foliage, new garments of beauty. He does not revive last year's withered flowers, and give them to us again for this year; He gives us new flowers for each summer.

So He does with His messages of love—they are not repeated over and over again, always the same old ones. Every time the reverent heart reads the Bible, its words come fresh from the lips of God, always new. They never get old. They are like the water that bubbles up in living streams from the depths in the wayside spring, always fresh, sweet, and new.

So it is with the blessings of prayer. Morning by morning we kneel before God, seeking His benediction and favor. He does not give us always the same blessing, but has a new one ready for each new day. Our needs are not the same any two mornings when we bow before Him, and He always suits the blessing to the need. We are taught to live day by day. God's goodness comes to us new every morning. J. R. MILLER.

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So thick do Heaven's mercies fly that the arrow of prayer can never be shot aright without bringing down some blessing. If it bring not that which we seek, it shall bring us that which we need.

MARK GUY PEARSE.

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#### LAMENTATIONS 3:33.

He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

It is the rough work that polishes. Look at the pebbles on the shore! Far inland, where some arm of the sea thrusts itself deep into the bosom of the land, and expanding into a salt loch, lies girdled by the mountains, sheltered from the storms that agitate the deep, the pebbles on the beach are rough, not beautiful; angular, not rounded. It is where long white lines of breakers roar, and the rattling shingle is rolled about the strand, that its pebbles are rounded and polished. As in nature, as in the arts, so in grace; it is rough treatment that gives souls as well as stones their lustre; the more the diamond is cut the brighter it sparkles; and in what seems hard dealing, their God has no end in view but to perfect His people's graces. Our Father, and kindest of fathers. He afflicts not willingly; He sends tribulations, but hear Paul tell their purpose: "Tribulation worketh patience, patience experience, experience hope."

GUTHRIE.

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O ye children of poverty and toil, of misfortune and sorrow! God is better to you than ye know. Ye see but one side of the veil now; and that is fretted with troubles, and dark with adversity. But it has another side. On that side are angel faces and the smile of God. Your worldly plans are thwarted, and you are tempted to think the Lord unkind. Your business becomes entangled in events, which shift, ye see not how. A sudden blast sweeps all your goods away: ye think it hard, and ye sigh. O weeping followers of Jesus, look! Faithful amid misfortune, gaze! Your crowns are gathering lustre. Your harps are being attuned to sweeter notes and deeper melodies of joy. Your trials project their shadows upon the walls of your heavenly mansion; and, lo! they are transformed into images of seraphic loveliness that shall gleam in beauty there forever.

J. ATKINSON.

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**Lamentations 3:39 A Model of Obedience** - Never excuse. Never explain. Never complain. —motto of the British Foreign Service. Leadership, Vol. 16, no. 3. (Today's Best Illustrations)

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**Lamentations 3:39 - No Sympathy** - Don't complain and talk about all your problems—80 percent of people don't care; the other 20 percent will think you deserve them.

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### **A Poor Man's One Eye - May 29**

Misery loves company; we can often better face our trials when we discover biblical characters who encountered similar troubles. Thus Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, comforted Samuel Rutherford.

Rutherford was a Scottish pastor in the town of Anwoth, who was attacked by the government for not conforming to the Established Church. Found guilty, he was stripped of his pastorate and banished to Aberdeen. His letters back to his flock have become classics. One of them is dated 13 July 1637:

Dearly beloved and longed-for in the Lord, Grace be to you and peace. God knoweth the sad and heavy Sabbaths I have had since I laid down my shepherd's staves. I have been often saying, as it is written, "My enemies chased me sore like a bird, without cause: they have cut off my life in the dungeon, and cast a stone upon me." For next to Christ, I have but one joy, to preach Christ my Lord; and they have violently plucked that away from me. It was to me like the poor man's one eye; and they have put out that eye, and quenched my light. But my eye is toward the Lord. I know I shall see the salvation of God and that my hope shall not always be forgotten.

O if I had paper as broad as heaven and earth, and ink as the sea and all the rivers and fountains of the earth, and were able to write the love, the worth, the excellency, the sweetness and due praises of our dearest and fairest Well-beloved! And then if you could read and understand it!

Let heaven and earth be consolidated into pure gold, it will not weigh the thousandth part of Christ's love to a soul, even to me a poor prisoner. ... Keep in mind what I taught you. ... Remember me to God in your prayers; I cannot forget you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Today's Suggested Reading Lamentations 3:52–53 (Robert Morgan - From This Verse)

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**Lamentations 3:56. Groaning Prayers** - The best prayers have often been more groans than words. —John Bunyan, Men of Integrity, Vol. 2, no. 2. (6000 Plus Illustrations)

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## LAMENTATIONS 4

Lamentations 4:1-10

... Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ... - Joshua 24:15

### TODAY IN THE WORD

In the 1940s a young man set out with a burning desire to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. Nearly six decades later, Billy Graham has become a household name. His worldwide ministry has ushered millions into the kingdom of God. Billy Graham is a wonderful example of a commitment to integrity that has been powerfully used by God.

How different were the inhabitants of Jerusalem! Years of sinful indulgence eroded their effectiveness to the point where they were like gold that had lost its luster, an expression to stress the depths to which Jerusalem had fallen. The precious people of Zion, once highly valued, had become like ordinary clay pots (Lam 4:2). Sin diminishes esteem!

Oscar Wilde once said, "To suffer for one's own faults--ah!--there is the sting of life!" Jerusalem was suffering for its many faults, including its steadfast refusal to surrender to Babylon as God had urged through Jere-miah. Persistent sin had rendered the people utterly heartless (Lam 4:3). Nature's worst nurturers--jackals and ostriches--were more caring than God's people! Callused to God's word and cruel to their offspring, they brought the horrendous eighteen-month siege on themselves.

With the siege came severe food and water shortages. Starving children begged vainly for food, but adults consumed whatever was available (Lam 4:4). Although innocent children were the first to suffer, eventually everyone suffered--the wealthy were reduced to scavenging through garbage heaps (Lam 4:5). Even Jerusalem's leaders and rulers--whose appearance had been as fine as precious jewels (Lam 4:7)--had the same gaunt appearance as everyone else.

How sinful Jerusalem had become! Sodom, proverbial for wickedness, had been destroyed instantly (Lam 4:6), but Jerusalem's punishment was long and harsh. Jerusalem's sin was not worse, but because Judah had forsaken its covenant responsibilities, its level of accountability was higher.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

People don't just wake up one morning either shamefully embroiled in sin or tremendously effective in ministry. Moral direction in life is determined by thousands of seemingly insignificant choices made along the way.

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Lamentations 4:11-16

Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me. - Psalm 31:2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The tragic events of December 7, 1941, destroyed many Americans' belief that the United States was geographically protected from enemy attack. The surprise Japanese attack sank eighteen U.S. ships and inflicted nearly 3,700 casualties. This exposure of vulnerability propelled the United States into World War II.

A similar perception of invulnerability explains Jerusalem's utter shock over its fall. Both verses 11 and 16 underscore the sad truth that when Jerusalem became the object of God's wrath no earthly force could prevent its destruction. Verse 12 reflects Jerusalem's arrogance that her supposed impregnability was evident to all.

We have seen all along that sin brought on the city's ruin, but the sins of its religious leaders (Lam 4:13) were especially blameworthy. Lam 2 revealed the prophet's passivity regarding the people's sin; today's passage shows that both the prophets and priests actively led the people into sin.

More than any other part of ancient Jewish society, these two groups were supposed to foster and preserve spiritual well-being. Prophets revealed insights into God's word and interpreted His law. Priests offered sacrifices for sin. The high priest alone was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies on the annual Day of Atonement.

Yet deplorably the blood shed in the Temple was not for atonement but from murder--the murder of the righteous (Lam 4:13)! This refers either to the actual murder of individuals who resisted the false prophets or to the spiritual death of idolatry. Either way, the blame for Jerusalem's ruin fell squarely on the religious leadership.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

James 3:1 states, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly." This verse is a recognition of the tremendous influence spiritual leaders have on people.

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**Lamentations 4:2** - Preachers used to say that the materials in the human body had been analyzed and their worth came to about 98 cents. Then a 1980 almanac raised the figure to \$7.28. Recently the Los Angeles Times reported that just seven of the chemicals in the human body were worth \$169,834! We're making progress or else inflation is worse than we thought. But the worth of a man can never be determined by the worth of his body. We must ask "What is the worth of a human mind? What is the value of a human soul?"

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Lamentations 4:17-20

I lift up my eyes to the hills--where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. - Psalm 121:1-2

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

The aggressive aims of Germany and Russia forced Poland--a country caught in between--to seek promises of help from Great Britain in the mid-1930s. In violation of an earlier signed pact, Hitler invaded Poland September 1, 1939. Seventeen days later Russia attacked from the east, at which point England was unable to protect the overrun Poland.

Just like Poland, Jerusalem also waited in vain for outside help (Lam 4:17). Today's passage reflects on events just prior to Jerusalem's fall. (Notice again Jeremiah's identification with his people in his use of "we.")

Agreements with Egypt had encouraged Jerusalem to expect assistance from that country when Nebuchadnezzar began his final march on Jerusalem. In the end, however, Egyptian help did not materialize, and Jerusalem bore the full brunt of Nebuchadnezzar's

attack. Another country, Edom, also refused to help Jerusalem.

After the city fell, foreign oppression hemmed its inhabitants in on all sides (Lam 4:18). Survivors of the attack who remained in the city had to sneak through back allies to avoid being stalked. Those who managed to escape were hunted in the harsh wilderness outside Jerusalem like wild animals (Lam 4:19).

Even the king, the “Lord’s anointed” (Lam 4:20), was not spared. Most likely this refers to King Zedekiah, who was captured and tortured by the Babylonians outside Jerusalem (see Jer. 52:7-11). The poetic expression, “our very life breath,” poignantly describes the king’s role as the nation’s protector. Like the priests and prophets, however, the final kings of Judah had badly forsaken their God-given responsibilities. As one commentator says, “Far from enabling the people to live safely among the nations, [the king] himself has been ensnared by them.”

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

You probably haven’t signed any protection treaties with foreign powers lately! Yet all of us are tempted at some point to look for help far and near, but not up.

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#### Lamentations 4:21-22

For ... sins of Edom ... I will not turn back my wrath ... because he pursued his brother with a sword, stifling all compassion. - Amos 1:11

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

For years it seemed like the Communists had gotten away with their deception. Official statistics boasted complete employment and high productivity. But beginning in 1989, the floodgates of freedom opened and country after country broke from oppressive regimes. Deceitful communist-era statistics and officially perpetrated crimes were exposed. Many people in Communist regimes could hardly believe that this day had finally come.

God’s justice is never mocked. Eventually--and not according to human timetables--God’s judgment falls upon those who commit flagrant evil (Lam 4:21). When Jeremiah considered neighboring Edom perversely delighting in Judah’s destruction, he chided it not to “rejoice and be glad,” knowing that no sin escapes punishment.

Edom, land of the descendants from Esau, was located in Uz, southeast of Jerusalem. Because of its relationship to Judah, Edom should have been an ally; but Psalm 137:7 records the bitter antagonism between the two countries: “Remember, O Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. ‘Tear it down,’ they cried, ‘tear it down to its foundations.’ ” Ancient documents also reveal that Nebuchadnezzar gave allotments of rural Judah to Edomites as a reward for neutrality.

Edom’s gloating would be short-lived--it too would drink the cup of God’s wrath and suffer humiliation (Lam 4:21–22). This cup anticipates the One who ultimately drank the cup of divine wrath--Jesus. He revealed that His willingness to do this inaugurated the promised new covenant (Luke 22:20). Yet drinking this cup was more terrifying than any judgment ever experienced in all of history, for this alone fulfilled God’s righteous judgment on sin. Only Jesus’ sacrificial submission to the Father (Luke 22:42) enabled Him to consume this awful cup when He poured out His blood on the cross.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even the coldest, snowiest winter day can’t nullify the fact that, at some point, spring will come again! Right about now, you are probably ready for this--unless you are reading this in the southern hemisphere!

## LAMENTATIONS 5

#### Lamentations 5:1-10

Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt. - Psalm 123:3

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In Charles Dickens’s novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, the arrogant Marquis de Saint Evrémonde killed a small peasant boy during a reckless carriage ride. This insensitive man did not know that his transgression would one day be repaid by his nephew, Charles Darnay. In the upheaval following the French Revolution, a poor shopkeeper related to the peasant boy gladly found herself in the

position to condemn Darnay, though innocent, to the guillotine.

Today's passage speaks of the sins of one generation falling upon the next, although as we have seen, Jerusalem brought misery upon itself. Chapter 5 describes daily life for the meager few left in Jerusalem after the exile. The mere fact that this chapter opens with an appeal to the Lord (Lam 5:1) highlights the important change in the people's perspective--they now sought the Lord.

The worst hardship was the loss of their inheritance (Lam 5:2), which was promised to Abraham and secured by Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land. But Israel's inheritance went far beyond the physical land--it was an outward sign of God's favor. To lose the land was, in some measure, to lose the Lord.

Bereft of protection, the people were as vulnerable as widows and orphans (Lam 5:3). The loss of their land also meant that staples of life, such as water and wood, once rightfully theirs now came at a bitter price (Lam 5:4). Finally, without their own land, rest was impossible (Lam 5:5).

Contributing to their grief were the unfaithful political activities of previous generations (Lam 5:6-7). Treaties with Assyria and Egypt had promised military protection and financial gain, but, in the end, such alliances proved ruinous.

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The "generational" aspect of sin is difficult for many Christians to understand. Although we may think that our actions affect only us, it's sobering to recognize that sin sets in motion unknown consequences.

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**Lamentations 5:3 Children Want a Father** - Children not only need a father, they long for one, irrationally, with all the undiluted strength of a child's hopeful heart.

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#### Lamentations 5:11-18

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation - Psalm 118:14

#### TODAY IN THE WORD

In his allegorical trilogy, *The Singer, The Song, and The Finale*, Calvin Miller portrays Jesus Christ as the divinely-sent Troubadour of the Ancient Star-Song that saves humans from the Canyon of the Damned. On the day that the Hater succeeded in having the Troubadour put to death, it seemed as if the song had been silenced. But in the end, the "song that can set Terra free" prevailed and began to be heard around the world.

It seems clear from the numerous musical instruments mentioned in the Old Testament that music was a key part of ancient Israel. That's what makes today's passage so moving; when Jerusalem fell, its joyful music stopped (Lam 5:14). The only "song" was the wail, "Woe to us, for we have sinned" (Lam 5:16).

And the only melody was the lament over the unspeakable horrors inflicted on its people, including the rape of its women (Lam 5:11) and the torture of its leaders (Lam 5:12). Young boys were forced to do the work of full-grown men (Lam 5:13). Indeed, the job of grinding grain was so hard that it was often relegated to animals or slaves.

You may recall that elders held important responsibilities, including settling legal disputes and giving advice. The city gate functioned like a town square, often brimming with young men playing instruments and old men talking (Lam 5:14). Festivals frequently filled the gates with joyous celebration. But after its fall, silence settled over Jerusalem. The crushed community could only despair, "Joy is gone" (Lam 5:15), bitterly aware of the effect of its sin (Lam 5:16).

Only the most hardened heart could fail to grow faint at the desolate state of Jerusalem! Unclean animals (Lam 5:18) prowled through the once glorious city, and its beleaguered survivors could hardly see through their copious tears (Lam 5:17).

#### TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Have you ever really pondered what it would be like without any music? Perhaps you are listening to music right now, or you are humming music from this morning's church service or a song you heard earlier this week.

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#### Lamentations 5:19-22

For the Lord will rebuild Zion and appear in his glory. He will respond to the prayer of the destitute; he will not despise their plea. - Psalm 102:16-17

## TODAY IN THE WORD

Six-year-old Mark was sent to his room for talking back to his mother. The long minutes left alone to consider his wrongdoing seemed like an eternity—he was sure his mother had forgotten him. Standing silently outside his bedroom door, she could hear him crying. She entered the room and sat down, gently taking his hands in hers. With red eyes, little Mark blurted out, “Please, Mommy, don’t be mad at me anymore!”

Sometimes the Lord’s discipline can feel the same way. It certainly seemed to Jerusalem’s chastised inhabitants that the Lord had forgotten them (Lam 5:20) and would remain angry forever (Lam 5:22). It can be hard at times to admit wrestling with the same questions, because such honesty can be frightening.

Yet one of the most encouraging aspects of the Bible is its completely realistic portrayal of the human condition. Far from being irrelevant, the Bible illumines the human heart as no other book can.

Consider the vacillations in today’s passage! After a wonderful affirmation of God’s sovereignty (Lam 5:19), the cruelties of conquest and exile made the people doubt the Lord’s loyal love ... the same loyal love praised in chapter 3! To their charge of forgetfulness, they added abandonment.

Yet the fear of being forsaken led to an amazing prayer for restoration (Lam 5:21). One scholar summarizes this prayer as follows: “The only hope for the people is that God Himself will enable them to do what they cannot do by themselves...”

Surprisingly, however, the prayer—and the entire book—ends rather pessimistically (Lam 5:22). In fact, the Jewish liturgical custom was to repeat verse 21 after verse 22! When Jeremiah wrote Lamentations, however, the nation was still exiled and there were few glimmers of hope. Furthermore, Jeremiah had personally witnessed some of the worst atrocities of human history.

## TODAY ALONG THE WAY

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me; it has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.” Martin Luther clearly understood the Bible’s relevance! Today concludes our study in this powerful portion of God’s Word. (The next two days we will consider the restoration of Jerusalem.)

## LAMENTATIONS DEVOTIONALS CHARLES HADDON SPURGEON

### Lamentations 1:12 “is it nothing to you!”

One thing I would say to all of you to whom it seems to be nothing that Jesus should die—that personally to me it is something that he should die. It is more than something, it is everything, and I will tell you why. It is much to me that Jesus died, for I know I slew him. But then I know another thing, that by that death I am delivered from the very guilt that put him to death.

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**‘Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.’ Lamentations 1:12**

What power the cross has had on other men’s minds to gird them to heroic deeds. I shall never forget when I shook the hand of Livingstone. I count it one of the great honours of my life to have known him, and even men of the world will join in doing homage to his name. But it was the love of Christ that made him tread pathless Africa and die among the heathen. He was not the first by many a thousand who counted it all joy to succumb to climate and to perish among strangers for the cross of Christ. Moffat still lives, and what a life! There was John Williams, who laid down his life at Erromanga for Christ’s sake. These are but the later ranks of a mighty host that counted not life dear to them for Jesus’ sake. Look at the first centuries, how men marched to the rack to be tortured, to the stake to be burned, to the amphitheatre to be devoured of beasts for Christ’s sake. The lifting up of the little finger of Christ was enough to move hosts of men and women to court death and defy the flames. The Roman empire, with all its legions and cruelties, could not stand against the insignificant, unlettered, humble, but earnest and intense followers of Jesus. The sufferings of Christ made them strong to suffer. Later ages tell the same story. Our own land has seen the heroes of the cross enduring unto the end. Over there at Smithfield there were men and women, who early in the morning, while the sun was scarcely up, were summoned to stand at fiery stakes and burn; they were seen to clap their hands, when every finger was a candle, and cry, ‘None but Christ! None but Christ!’

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**“Arise, cry out in the night: in the beginning of the watches pour out thine heart like water before the face of the Lord.”**

**Lamentations 2:19**

Dear friends, may grace be given unto you, that ye may be able to pour out your hearts this night! Remember, my hearers, it may seem a light thing for us to assemble tonight at such an hour, but listen for one moment to the ticking of that clock!... It is the beating of the pulse of eternity. You hear the ticking of that clock!—It is the footstep of death pursuing you. Each time the clock ticks, death’s footsteps are falling on the ground close behind you. You will soon enter another year. This year will have gone in a few seconds. 1855 is almost gone; where will the next year be spent, my friends? One has been spent on earth; where will you spend the next? “In heaven!” says one, “I trust.” Another murmurs, “Perhaps I shall spend mine in hell!” Ah! Solemn is the thought, but before that clock strikes twelve, some here may be in hell; and, blessed be the name of God, some of us may be in heaven! But oh do you know how to estimate your time, my hearers? Do you know how to measure your days? Oh! I have not words to speak tonight. Do you know that every hour you are nearing the tomb? That every hour you are nearing judgment? That the archangel is flapping his wings every second of your life, and, trumpet at his mouth, is approaching you? That you do not live stationary lives, but always going on, on, on, towards the grave? Do you know where the stream of life is hastening some of you? To the rapids—to the rapids of woe and destruction! What shall the end of those be who obey not the gospel of God? You will not have so many years to live as you had last year!

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**“This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” —Lamentations 3:21**

Memory is frequently the bond slave of despondency. Despairing minds call to remembrance every dark foreboding in the past, and dilate upon every gloomy feature in the present; thus memory, clothed in sackcloth, presents to the mind a cup of mingled gall and wormwood. There is, however, no necessity for this. Wisdom can readily transform memory into an angel of comfort. That same recollection which in its left hand brings so many gloomy omens, may be trained to bear in its right a wealth of hopeful signs. She need not wear a crown of iron, she may encircle her brow with a fillet of gold, all spangled with stars. Thus it was in Jeremiah’s experience: in the previous verse memory had brought him to deep humiliation of soul: “My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me;” and now this same memory restored him to life and comfort. “This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” Like a two-edged sword, his memory first killed his pride with one edge, and then slew his despair with the other. As a general principle, if we would exercise our memories more wisely, we might, in our very darkest distress, strike a match which would instantaneously kindle the lamp of comfort. There is no need for God to create a new thing upon the earth in order to restore believers to joy; if they would prayerfully rake the ashes of the past, they would find light for the present; and if they would turn to the book of truth and the throne of grace, their candle would soon shine as aforesaid. Be it ours to remember the lovingkindness of the Lord, and to rehearse his deeds of grace. Let us open the volume of recollection which is so richly illuminated with memorials of mercy, and we shall soon be happy. Thus memory may be, as Coleridge calls it, “the bosom-spring of joy,” and when the Divine Comforter bends it to his service, it may be chief among earthly comforters.

**This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.’ Lamentations 3:21**

In a lamentable accident which occurred in the North, in one of the coal pits, when a considerable number of the miners were down below, the top of the pit fell in, and the shaft was completely blocked up. Those who were down below sat together in the dark, and sang and prayed. They gathered to a spot where the last remains of air could be breathed. There they sat and sang after the lights had gone out, because the air would not support the flame. They were in total darkness, but one of them said he had heard that there was a connection between that pit and an old pit that had been worked years ago. He said it was a low passage, through which a man might get by crawling all the way, lying flat upon the ground—he would go and see; the passage was very long, but they crept through it, and at last they came out to light at the bottom of the other pit and their lives were saved. If my present way to Christ as a saint gets blocked up, if I cannot go straight up the shaft and see the light of my Father up yonder, there is an old working, the old fashioned way by which sinners go, by which poor thieves go, by which harlots go—come, I will crawl along lowly and humbly, flat upon the ground—I will crawl along till I see my Father, and cry, ‘Father, I am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants, so long as I may but dwell in thy house.’ In your very worst case you can still come as sinners. ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;’ call this to mind and you may have hope.

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**GOD’S FAITHFULNESS. Lamentations 3:23**

“Great is Your faithfulness,” so great that there has never been an exception. Through the ages, our God has had billions of people to deal with. Yet there does not stand under heaven’s cover, or above the stars, or in hell itself a single soul who can say that God is not absolutely faithful. No item in the list of our divine promises is unfulfilled. God remembers every promise that He ever made, and He honors each in the experience of those who believe in Him. They who trust in the Lord will find Him faithful, not only in great things, but also in little things. His faintest word will stand firm and steadfast. His least truth will never grow dim.

The glory of God's faithfulness is that no sin of ours has ever made Him unfaithful. Unbelief is a damning thing, yet even when we do not believe, God is faithful. His children might rebel. They might wander far from His statutes and be chastened with many stripes. Nevertheless, He says, "My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips" (Ps. 89:33–34). God's saints may fall under the cloud of His displeasure and provoke the Most High by their transgressions, still He will have compassion on them. He says, "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins" (Is. 43:25). Thus, no sin of ours can make God unfaithful.

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### **I HOPE IN HIM. Lamentations 3:24**

What can threaten God's existence? Who can oppose His purpose? What can weaken His power? What can dim the clearness of His eye? What can diminish the tenderness of His heart? What can distract the wisdom of His judgment? "You are the same, and Your years will have no end" (Ps. 102:27).

Remember, child of God, you are a sheep that can never lose its Shepherd, a child that can never lose its Father. "I will never leave you nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5), said Jesus as He revealed the Eternal Father's heart.

In dire straits, we still have a Father in heaven. A widow had been inconsolable at the loss of her husband, and her little child asked, "Mother, is God dead?" That question rebuked the woman and reminded her that she had a Guardian and Friend. "Your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is His name" (Is. 54:5).

Listen, child of God, you can lose your possessions, but you cannot lose your God. Like Jonah, you can see your plant wither (Jon. 4:7), but your God remains. You may lose your land, but not your God. You may lose your savings, but not your Savior. Even if it came to the worst and you were left for a while as one forsaken by God, you still would not lose Him. Like the Lord Jesus on the cross, you may still call Him, "My God" (Matt. 27:46).

" 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I hope in Him' " (Lam. 3:24). The Lord is a portion from which we can never be alienated. He lives! He reigns! He will be our guide even unto death.

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### **'The LORD is my portion, saith my soul.' Lamentations 3:24**

The love of God changes us into its own image, so that what the Lord says concerning us, we can also declare concerning him. God is love essentially, and when this essential love shines forth freely upon us, we reflect it back upon him. He is like the sun, the great father of lights, and we are as the moon and the planets, we shine in rays borrowed from his brightness. He is the golden seal, and we, his people, are the wax receiving the impression. Our heaven is to be likeness to Christ, and our preparation for heaven consists in a growing imitation of him in all things. See, brethren, how the Lord gives the word, and our heart, like an echo, repeats every syllable. The Lord loves his people, and we love him because he first loved us; he has chosen his saints, and they have also made him their chosen heritage. The saints are precious to Jesus, and unto us who believe he is precious; Christ lived for us, and for us to live is Christ; we gain all things by his death, and for us to die is gain. The church is the looking-glass in which Christ sees himself reflected; she is like a fair songstress taking up the refrain of Jesus' canticles of love; while he sings, 'My sister, my spouse,' she answers, 'My beloved is mine, and I am his.' It is most delightful to perceive how, through divine grace, believers come to have the same feeling towards their God which their gracious Lord has towards them. Our two texts present us with an interesting instance: the church is God's portion, he delights in her, he finds in her his solace and his joy; but God is also, as the result of this, the church's portion, her full delight and bliss. Beloved, the love is mutual.

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### **"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul." —Lamentations 3:24**

It is not "The Lord is partly my portion," nor "The Lord is in my portion"; but he himself makes up the sum total of my soul's inheritance. Within the circumference of that circle lies all that we possess or desire. The Lord is my portion. Not his grace merely, nor his love, nor his covenant, but Jehovah himself. He has chosen us for his portion, and we have chosen him for ours. It is true that the Lord must first choose our inheritance for us, or else we shall never choose it for ourselves; but if we are really called according to the purpose of electing love, we can sing—

"Lov'd of my God for him again  
With love intense I burn;  
Chosen of him ere time began,  
I choose him in return."

The Lord is our all-sufficient portion. God fills himself; and if God is all-sufficient in himself, he must be all-sufficient for us. It is not easy to satisfy man's desires. When he dreams that he is satisfied, anon he wakes to the perception that there is somewhat yet beyond, and straightway the horse-leech in his heart cries, "Give, give." But all that we can wish for is to be found in our divine portion, so that we ask, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Well may we

“delight ourselves in the Lord” who makes us to drink of the river of his pleasures. Our faith stretches her wings and mounts like an eagle into the heaven of divine love as to her proper dwelling-place. “The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places; yea, we have a goodly heritage.” Let us rejoice in the Lord always; let us show to the world that we are a happy and a blessed people, and thus induce them to exclaim, “We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.”

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### **Sufferers Make Strong Believers "It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth" (Lamentations 3:27).**

This is as good as a promise. It has been good, it is good, and it will be good for me to bear the yoke. Early in life I had to feel the weight of conviction, and ever since it has proved a soul-enriching burden. Should I have loved the gospel so well had I not learned by deep experience the need of salvation by grace? Jabez was more honorable than his brethren because his mother bare him with sorrow, and those who suffer much in being born unto God make strong believers in sovereign grace. The yoke of censure is an irksome one, but it prepares a man for future honor. He is not fit to be a leader who has not run the gauntlet of contempt. Praise intoxicates if it be not preceded by abuse. Men who rise to eminence without struggle usually fall into dishonor. The yoke of affliction, disappointment, and excessive labor is by no means to be sought for; but when the LORD lays it on us in our youth, it frequently develops a character which glorifies God and blesses the church. Come, my soul, bow thy neck; take up thy cross. It was good for thee when young; it will not harm thee now. For Jesus' sake, shoulder it carefully.

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I do not know what your particular trouble is, but I do believe that He who appointed it, He who measured it, He who has set its bounds and will bring you to the end of it—has a gracious design in it all! Do not think that God deals roughly with His children and gives them needless pain. It grieves Him to grieve you! "He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." Lamentations 3:33

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### **Loved unto the End" "For the LORD will not cast off for ever" (Lamentations 3:31).**

He may cast away for a season but not forever. A woman may leave off her ornaments for a few days, but she will not forget them or throw them upon the dunghill. It is not like the LORD to cast off those whom He loves, for "having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end." Some talk of our being in grace and out of it, as if we were like rabbits that run in and out of their burrows; but, indeed, it is not so. The LORD's love is a far more serious and abiding matter than this. He chose us from eternity, and He will love us throughout eternity. He loved us so as to die for us, and we may therefore be sure that His love will never die. His honor is so wrapped up in the salvation of the believer that He can no more cast him off than He can cast off His own robes of office as King of glory. No, no! The LORD Jesus, as a Head, never casts off His members; as a Husband, He never casts off His bride. Did you think you were cast off? Why did you think so evil of the LORD who has betrothed you to Himself? Cast off such thoughts, and never let them lodge in your soul again. "The LORD hath not cast away his people which he foreknew" (Romans 11:2). "He hateth putting away" (Malachi 2:16).

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### **HIS COMPASSION. Lamentations 3:32**

Great sorrow can stun, and it can make you forget the best source of consolation. A little blow can cause great pain. Yet I have heard that in assaults serious blows do not cause pain because they have destroyed consciousness. Extreme distress can rob you of your wits and make you forget your source of relief. Under the chastening rod, the pain is remembered and the healing promise is forgotten.

The people of Israel, when they were under God's affliction, failed to remember His covenant because of the crushing effect of their sorrow and despair. Is that how it is with you? Has your ear grown dull through grief? Has your heart forgotten because of heaviness? Does your affliction seem more real than God? Does the black sorrow that covers you eclipse all the light of heaven and earth?

May I be my Master's messenger? Let me remind you that He is still in covenant with you. "Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies" (Lam. 3:32). It is written, "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). He will keep His Word!

He has also said, "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" (Is. 43:2).

Depend on it; He will sustain you. Brush those tears away, anoint your head, wash your face, and be of good courage (2 Sam. 12:20). The Lord will strengthen your heart.

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### **"Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord." —Lamentations 3:40**

The spouse who fondly loves her absent husband longs for his return; a long protracted separation from her lord is a semi-death to her spirit: and so with souls who love the Saviour much, they must see his face, they cannot bear that he should be away upon the

mountains of Bether, and no more hold communion with them. A reproaching glance, an uplifted finger will be grievous to loving children, who fear to offend their tender father, and are only happy in his smile. Beloved, it was so once with you. A text of Scripture, a threatening, a touch of the rod of affliction, and you went to your Father's feet, crying, "Show me wherefore thou contendest with me?" Is it so now? Are you content to follow Jesus afar off? Can you contemplate suspended communion with Christ without alarm? Can you bear to have your Beloved walking contrary to you, because you walk contrary to him? Have your sins separated between you and your God, and is your heart at rest? O let me affectionately warn you, for it is a grievous thing when we can live contentedly without the present enjoyment of the Saviour's face. Let us labour to feel what an evil thing this is—little love to our own dying Saviour, little joy in our precious Jesus, little fellowship with the Beloved! Hold a true Lent in your souls, while you sorrow over your hardness of heart. Do not stop at sorrow! Remember where you first received salvation. Go at once to the cross. There, and there only, can you get your spirit quickened. No matter how hard, how insensible, how dead we may have become, let us go again in all the rags and poverty, and defilement of our natural condition. Let us clasp that cross, let us look into those languid eyes, let us bathe in that fountain filled with blood—this will bring back to us our first love; this will restore the simplicity of our faith, and the tenderness of our heart.

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**"Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens."—Lamentations 3:41**

The act of prayer teaches us our unworthiness, which is a very salutary lesson for such proud beings as we are. If God gave us favours without constraining us to pray for them we should never know how poor we are, but a true prayer is an inventory of wants, a catalogue of necessities, a revelation of hidden poverty. While it is an application to divine wealth, it is a confession of human emptiness. The most healthy state of a Christian is to be always empty in self and constantly depending upon the Lord for supplies; to be always poor in self and rich in Jesus; weak as water personally, but mighty through God to do great exploits; and hence the use of prayer, because, while it adores God, it lays the creature where it should be, in the very dust. Prayer is in itself, apart from the answer which it brings, a great benefit to the Christian. As the runner gains strength for the race by daily exercise, so for the great race of life we acquire energy by the hallowed labour of prayer. Prayer plumes the wings of God's young eaglets, that they may learn to mount above the clouds. Prayer girds the loins of God's warriors, and sends them forth to combat with their sinews braced and their muscles firm. An earnest pleader cometh out of his closet, even as the sun ariseth from the chambers of the east, rejoicing like a strong man to run his race. Prayer is that uplifted hand of Moses which routs the Amalekites more than the sword of Joshua; it is the arrow shot from the chamber of the prophet foreboding defeat to the Syrians. Prayer girds human weakness with divine strength, turns human folly into heavenly wisdom, and gives to troubled mortals the peace of God. We know not what prayer cannot do! We thank thee, great God, for the mercy-seat, a choice proof of thy marvellous lovingkindness. Help us to use it aright throughout this day!

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**Thou drewest near in the day that I called upon thee: thou saidst, Fear not.' Lamentations 3:57**

Jesus was the most manlike of all men. I could propound to you today the theory that Jesus was an Englishman, and prove it from many points of his character, if I did not know that he was of the seed of Abraham. Jesus of Nazareth is a Jew, but there is no Jewish peculiarity about him. He is a man in the broadest, truest sense. It matters not to you or me what nationality he actually came from, for the most cosmopolitan of men was the Christ of God. I know several excellent men whom I love and revere, but I despair of imitating them: the colour of their virtue has a tint in it peculiar to themselves: I am not made of such stuff as would ever work up into their fashion, admirable though it be. But I never thought thus concerning the Lord Jesus: I always feel that by his grace I can become like him. He is infinitely superior to those admirable friends of whom I have spoken, and yet he is more imitable. The hill is higher, but in his case there are ways and steps which invite, whereas in the other case there are crags which warn us off. I have known good men with whom I shall never be thoroughly at home until we meet in heaven: at least, we shall agree best on earth when they go their way and I go mine. One never feels so with regard to the all-glorious Lord Jesus. There our cry is, 'Nearer, my Lord, to thee. Nearer to thee.' He draws us to himself, and the nearer we come the more fully we appreciate him. If Jesus came thus near to men in his life on earth, do you wonder that he draws near to them now?

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**O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul." —Lamentations 3:58**

Observe how positively the prophet speaks. He doth not say, "I hope, I trust, I sometimes think, that God hath pleaded the causes of my soul"; but he speaks of it as a matter of fact not to be disputed. "Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul." Let us, by the aid of the gracious Comforter, shake off those doubts and fears which so much mar our peace and comfort. Be this our prayer, that we may have done with the harsh croaking voice of surmise and suspicion, and may be able to speak with the clear, melodious voice of full assurance. Notice how gratefully the prophet speaks, ascribing all the glory to God alone! You perceive there is not a word concerning himself or his own pleadings. He doth not ascribe his deliverance in any measure to any man, much less to his own merit; but it is "thou"—"O Lord, thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life." A grateful spirit should ever be cultivated by the Christian; and especially after deliverances we should prepare a song for our God. Earth should be a temple

filled with the songs of grateful saints, and every day should be a censor smoking with the sweet incense of thanksgiving. How joyful Jeremiah seems to be while he records the Lord's mercy. How triumphantly he lifts up the strain! He has been in the low dungeon, and is even now no other than the weeping prophet; and yet in the very book which is called "Lamentations," clear as the song of Miriam when she dashed her fingers against the tabor, shrill as the note of Deborah when she met Barak with shouts of victory, we hear the voice of Jeremy going up to heaven—"Thou hast pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life." O children of God, seek after a vital experience of the Lord's lovingkindness, and when you have it, speak positively of it; sing gratefully; shout triumphantly.

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**'O Lord, thou has pleaded the causes of my soul; thou hast redeemed my life.' Lamentations 3:58**

A man went to preach for seven summers on the village green, and good was done. Joseph sometimes listened to the preacher, but he remained as hard as ever. A certain John who had felt the power of truth, worked with him in the barn, and one day, between the strokes of the flail, John spoke a word for truth and for God, but Joseph laughed at him. Now, John was very sensitive, and his whole soul was filled with grief at Joseph's banter; so after he had spoken, he turned to the corner of the barn and hid his face, while a flood of tears came streaming from his eyes. He wiped them away with the corner of his smock-frock, and came back to his flail; but Joseph had noticed the tears though the other tried to hide them; and what argument could not do, those tears through God the Holy Spirit did effectually, for Joseph thought, 'What! does John care for my soul, and weep for my soul? then it is time I should care and weep for it too.' Beloved, witness thus for Christ! Be it mine to weep for the sins of the times, and prophesy against them. Be it yours in your own private walk and conversation to rebuke private sin; and by your loving earnestness to make Jesus Christ dear to many souls! Tell them that Jesus Christ came to save sinners; that he is able to save to the uttermost all who come to him, and that 'whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life;' and in this way you shall plead the cause of God, who has pleaded the causes of your soul.

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**'The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion.' Lamentations 4:22**

In the case of the kingdom of Judah, the people had suffered so much in their captivity that their God, who in his anger had put them from him, considered that they had suffered enough; 'For she hath received of the Lord's hand,' said the prophet Isaiah, 'double for all her sins.' Brethren, in our case we have not been punished at all, for the punishment of our iniquity is accomplished. Remember that sin must be punished. Any theology which offers the pardon of sin without a punishment, ignores part of the character of God. God is love, but God is also just, as severely just as if he had no love, and yet as intensely loving as if he had no justice. To gain a just view of the character of God you must perceive all his attributes as infinitely developed; justice must have its infinity acknowledged as much as mercy. This is the voice which thunders from the midst of the smoke and the fire of Sinai—"The soul that sinneth it shall die." 'Sin must be punished' is written on the base of the eternal throne in letters of fire; and as the damned in hell behold it, their hopes are burned to ashes. Sin must be punished, or God must cease to be. The testimony of the gospel is not that the punishment has been mitigated or foregone, or that justice has had a sop given it to close its mouth. The consolation is far more sure and effectual. Christ has for his people borne all the punishment which they deserved; and now every soul for whom Christ died may read with exultation, 'The punishment of her iniquity is accomplished.'