

April 3, 2016

“Take A Sad Song And Make It Better”

Lamentations 3:19-26 NIV

Many recording artists have given us sad songs; the Beatles, Pink Floyd, Pearl Jam, Eric Clapton, Green Day, Miley Cyrus, Taylor Swift, Jonny Cash, B.B. King. And for years before them people were singing the Blues? Paul McCarthy told Jude to take a sad song and make it better. I guess most artist will have a sad song to sing. Do you like sad songs? Lamentations is a song, a sad song; the saddest song ever written. Yet, despite the sorrow in the song, the book also contains this hope:

Lamentations 3:19-26 NIV

I remember my affliction and my wandering,
the bitterness and the gall.

I well remember them,
and my soul is downcast within me.

Yet this I call to mind
and therefore I have hope:

Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.

They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.

I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."

The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him;
it is good to wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

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.

How much more faithful is our God Who Jesus said we should address as Heavenly Father (for example He said we should pray like this, Our Father in heaven).

Whether trapped by fallen debris or trapped 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.

What God's Faithfulness Means

Here's a simple definition: "God's faithfulness means that everything He says and does is certain." He says what He means and means what He says and therefore does everything He says He will do.

- Moses believed he was called to rescue the Israelites, killed an Egyptian, and was rejected by Israel, and went into hiding for 40 years. But he said God is faithful.
- David committed adultery, when he discovered that the woman had become pregnant, he had her husband murdered. The child was born, but died. David proclaimed that God was faithful.
- Paul persecuted Christians, then became one, but was himself arrested and put in prison, yet he said God was faithful.
- Jeremiah had a rough time as a prophet for the Lord. He urged people to repent, it caused him much distress. He became known as the weeping prophet. He

lived during a time when Jerusalem and the temple were in ruins and the people were killed or deported. He wrote this sad song called Lamentations, yet it contains words of hope – hope because God is faithful

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.

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."

The book of Lamentations is really a collection of sad songs, or laments. Jeremiah reminds us that sin, in spite of all its allurements and excitement, carries with it heavy weights of sorrow, grief, misery, emptiness and pain.

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.

Perhaps you are experiencing many of the same things Jeremiah did 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

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 ditch his faith, but he didn't. He forced himself to think about God's character in particular he grabbed

onto God's 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.

Take a Sad Song and Make it Better

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..."

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?** 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 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. 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: “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 from the very presence of God. His mercy is full and constant, from wells that never runs dry.

The word *compassion* 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 because of His love for us. 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 wallet full of enough money for the day, your car with just enough gas, your refrigerator full of food for the day, and your vitality fully restored each day? That’s the way it is with God’s compassions and mercies. You can never use them up; they are new every morning

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.

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.

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. 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.

Philippians 4:6-9

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with 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

The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

What tempts you? 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.

God gives to us the gift of forgiveness 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

But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness.

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!

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.