

God's Faithfulness: The Pathway out of Depression

Lamentations 3:1-66

In the Classic book, “The Pilgrim’s Progress,” Christian and Hopeful, at one point, find themselves in a rather despairing situation. As they are walking along the King’s path to the Celestial City, their feet begin to get sore and tired, for the path has become rough and difficult to tread. Adjacent to the path is seemingly easier way called Bypass Meadow. Christian observes that the ground of Bypass Meadow seems easier to walk and would be more gentle on their feet. After some deliberation, they decide to pop the fence and walk alongside the narrow path in Bypass Meadow. They found the walk was much easier and more comfortable. A little further along, they see someone up ahead—Vain Confidence. After making the mistake of leaving the narrow path, they make another mistake in following Vain Confidence. After which, they find themselves lost, in the middle of a deluge, and regretting their decision to leave the narrow path. The Pilgrims decide to take some rest. They are startled out of their rest by Giant Despair. Giant Despair tells them they are trespassing on his property and that he is taking them back to Doubting Castle as his prisoners. The pilgrims are locked in the dungeon, denied food and water, and left to their doubt, fear, and despair in the darkness of Doubting Castle’s dungeon. The next day, under the advice of his wife—Distrust, Giant Despair unleashes a relentless and merciless beating upon Hopeful and Christian. The following day, after further counsel from Distrust, Giant Despair tells the Pilgrims that they would be better off dead and leaves their fate to them. Giant Despair leaves a knife, rope, and poison for the Pilgrims to take their own lives. Initially, Christian considers the option, but Hopeful does not allow hopelessness to take hold. He exhorts and encourages Christian to stay the course. After finding the Pilgrims alive, Distrust advises that they behold the bones and skulls of prior pilgrims slain by Giant Despair. After this sight, Christian seems to lose all hope, but Hopeful remains steadfast to the King. Later that night, in the darkness of the dungeon, Christian begins to pray. As he prays, he is reminded of the key of promise in his bosom. Hope floods into the darkness of the dungeon as Christian and Hopeful attempt to open the dungeon with the Key of Promise. After escaping the dungeon with ease, they are able to use the key of promise to open the castle door. They make haste to the castle gate. With some difficulty they open the gate and they flee Doubting castle, rush back through Bypass Meadow, and return to the King’s path to continue their journey to the Celestial City.

As Christians, we often find ourselves in a place of despondency, despair, and depression. Bypath Meadow often leads us to a place of darkness and turmoil. The key to escape is the promises that God has placed in the hearts of all believers—His faithfulness. It was in the darkness of depression that Christian began to pray. As he prayed, he was reminded of the key of promise—God’s Faithfulness: the pathway out of despair.

In the book of Lamentations, the prophet Jeremiah is lamenting over the current state of Jerusalem after being taken into captivity by Babylon. The details of the Judah’s sin, Jeremiah’s prophecy, King Zedekiah and the people’s unwillingness to repent, the gracious warnings of judgment, and God’s destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Babylon are all laid out in the book of Jeremiah.

Here in Lamentations, we find Jeremiah weeping and lamenting over the state of Jerusalem. He is burdened and hopeless by all that unfolded upon his people. It is part way through his lament where Jeremiah has a Doubting Castle dungeon moment like Christian and is reminded of the hope God’s faithfulness brings.

Main Point: We all face depression, But God has faithfully given us a way out.

Breakdown: 5 Checkpoints along the pathway out of depression.

These checkpoints are not to be thought of successively. They should be taken collectively. All five are necessary if we want to live lives of anchored hope in the gospel.

Checkpoint 1, think rightly about the circumstances. Verses 1-20 of Lamentations 3 reveal to us that Jeremiah is not thinking rightly about the circumstances or God. It is easy to understand why Jeremiah is lamenting. Remember, Jeremiah is the prophet who was appointed to warn Judah. He was the one giving the warnings of condemnation and exile, if they refused to repent. Now Judah and all its inhabitants are in bondage, the city has been sacked, and they are on their way to become Babylonian slaves because they sinned and refused to heed the call to repentance. **Jeremiah is not immune from this punishment. Even though he is God’s prophet, he too is on his way to Babylonian bondage. Therefore, he has become hopeless and is thinking wrongly about the current situation.** Look at how Jeremiah describes their current situation.

All throughout the first 20 verses, Jeremiah is describing the scene and his feelings about God. We will not fully examine each statement. We will look at some of the more pointed assaults the prophet speaks about God.

Verse 8 says, “Though I call and cry for help, He shuts out my prayer.” Jeremiah has not been cut off by the Lord. The Lord hears the prayer of His prophet. But this is how Jeremiah is perceiving the situation. If we are honest, we have felt this way at times. There have been seasons in our lives where we have felt that God is distant, far off, and not listening. Jeremiah’s despair runs deeper still. Observe verse 10.

In verse 10, Jeremiah speaks of God as bear that is lying in wait to devour and destroy Jeremiah by tearing him to pieces according to verse 11. Again, there is no doubt that Jeremiah felt this way. But this is wrong thinking. Jeremiah goes even further in verses 17 and 18.

In verses 17 and 18 Jeremiah espouses that God has taken his peace and has taken his hope. Jeremiah writes in Lamentations 3:17-18, “My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, ‘my endurance has perished; so has my hope from the Lord.’” Notice that he does not say, “hope *in* the Lord.” (Emphasis Mine). He says, “hope *from* the Lord.” (Emphasis mine). This is a very different accusation. Jeremiah is saying that God has ceased to give Him hope. This is wrong and faulty thinking on behalf of Jeremiah.

God’s discipline of the people of Judah was just. Further, God had been long-suffering and gracious to His people. God demonstrated such mercy by warning them through the prophet and giving them time to repent. Time and mercy given by God was scorned and rejected by the people of Judah. Therefore, God exacted His promised discipline upon His people.

We must think rightly about our situations. More often than not, we think and process our situations by the world’s standards. Instead, we must think about our situations according to God’s standards. When we think rightly about our circumstances, we begin to remember what is true and preach the truth to ourselves.

Checkpoint 2, speak truth to yourself. Jeremiah takes in turn in verse 21. Here he calls to mind what is true and right about God and circumstances. If despair is waking up in the darkness and assuming it is reality, then the truth of God’s faithfulness is the only light that will dispel such darkness. For it is when Jeremiah recalls the faithfulness of God that he finds hope. He says in verse 21, “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope.” What does he call to mind? The faithful character of God.

He begins speaking truth to his heart by proclaiming the constant and continuous steadfast love of the Lord. “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.” Even in the seemingly darkest of times, God’s love has not ceased. God loves you. God’s love for His people is never ending. It is His covenant that He has made that He will love His people with an unending and steadfast loyalty. Jeremiah finds hope by speaking the truth of God’s constant love to himself.

He continues with truth speaking by exhorting himself with God’s endless mercies. “His mercies never come to an end,” verse 22b says. God continues to show mercy by holding back death and full scale destruction. This is what we deserve. Sin deserves death and destruction. Yet God, in His endless mercy, demonstrates patience and long-suffering. God’s mercy is never ending and new every morning.

According to Lamentations 3:23a, God grants His people new mercies every morning. Just as the hymn says, “Morning by morning, new mercies I see.” God has promised to be merciful and so He is. We can count on God’s new mercies each morning because God’s faithfulness is great.

The simple acknowledgment, “Great is your faithfulness,” is one of which we need constant reminding. Speak it to yourself often. In the morning, “Great is Your faithfulness of God.” In joy, “Great is Your faithfulness, O God.” In sorrow, “Great is Your faithfulness, O God.” In all circumstances and seasons of life, proclaim with a heart of assurance, “Great is Your faithfulness, O God.”

Our faithful God is also our portion now and forever. Here, the word, “portion,” refers to the concept of ownership. God is our portion that we have and that satisfies. We are one with God through the person and work of Jesus. **It is important to remember, under the surface of all these checkpoints is the gospel. There is only one cure for depression and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Yahweh is our portion because of what Jesus, the Son of God, accomplished on the cross.** He took away our sin and reconciled us to God. God is our portion; therefore, we have hope in Him. That hope from God can never be taken away. We might lose sight of it in the darkness of the dungeon, but it is always there. We need to remind ourselves of this hope by speaking the truth of God as our portion to ourselves. All the while, we must wait upon the Lord.

Verses 25-26 say, “The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul who seeks Him. It is good that one should wait quietly for the Lord.” We know that God’s faithfulness is great. We know that God is our portion. We know that His love never comes to an end and that His mercies are new every morning. But we

must also wait upon Him. God meets our every need in abundance. However, God usually meets our needs in very different ways that we expect or ask. Thus, it is good for us to wait quietly and allow the Lord to work in His way and in His time. According to verse 27, we take the yoke on us early. We bear up under this idea of trusting and waiting on God. Trusting is, indeed, an intrinsic part of waiting. Sometimes trusting and waiting involves bearing consequences.

Jeremiah speaks, in very poetic terms, to reality of bearing consequences in verses 28-30. We, like Jeremiah, are not immune from the consequences of sin. Nor are we immune from being hurt by the brokenness that fills our sin riddled world. However, we do not bear these consequences and burdens devoid of hope.

God will see us through our seasons of grief, despair, and discipline. Verses 31 and 32 are gushing with encouragement and hope for the despairing Christian, “For the Lord will not cast off forever, but, though He cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of His steadfast love.” God does not abandon us. God will see us through. God pours our out compassion and mercy according to His steadfast love. We have already unpacked the nature of Yahweh’s steadfast love—never ending according to verse 22. We can trust God’s compassion and care because we learn that God is just.

Verses 34-36 speak to the truth of God’s justice. God is not like earthly rulers. In fact, earthly rulers are the antithesis of God because they are sinful. God is holy and God will *always* judge rightly and righteously. Because God is holy and righteous in His judgement, we need not fear His sovereign rule in our lives.

Verses 37-39 say, “Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come? Why should a living man complain, a man, about the punishment of his sins?” God is holy and righteous; He is also sovereign and in control of all things. Therefore, we trust that what He brings to pass is, without any doubt, according to His holy, righteous, and sovereign rule over His creation.

These are the trust we must speak to ourselves. We ought speak these truths often—everyday. These are not reference tools to be shelved and only utilized in specific need. The truth of God’s nature and character is food for our soul and the light that penetrates the darkness of our despair. As Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones once said in a sermon on Psalm 42, “Talk to yourself, don’t listen to yourself.” Don’t listen to the lies of the darkness. Instead, preach the light of the truth of God to your heart. A renewed way of thinking and a truth filled heart leads to action.

Checkpoint 3, repent and return to the Lord (verses 40-42). Our hearts need to be changed. We need to think differently and rightly about our circumstances and God's character in the midst of our circumstances.

Verse 40, "Let us examine our ways and return to the Lord." I love the clarity of this passage. Examine your way according to the truthfulness of Scripture and stacked against the character of Yahweh. When you do, return to the Lord. For it is only in the arms of the Lord that we find, hope, healing, mercy, and forgiveness. In returning to the Lord, we also find worship.

"Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in Heaven," verse 41 says. When we think rightly about God, we worship God. When we think rightly about circumstances, we worship the one who brings us in and out of all the seasons of life. A renewed and changed mind, leads to renewed and changed action. Here we find a sobering reality.

The people of Judah have not repented. They are mourning their circumstances not their actions. In other words, they are lamenting the discipline, but not the repeated action that prompted the discipline. Verse 42, "We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven." God has exacted the promised discipline because the people Judah hardened their hearts against God.

Beloved, this need not be the case for us. Call upon the Lord while He may be found (Isaiah 55:6). Do not harden your hearts against God's merciful call for you to come unto Him. It is only through cross of Christ that we find true hope through the forgiveness of our sins. Christ has cancelled our record of debt by taking it upon Himself and being nailed to the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). I urge you, beloved, repent and return to the Lord. Think back to the words we sang earlier, "Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, thine own dear pleasure to cheer and to guide. Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow. Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside." In this life, there may be consequences to bear. But better to bear consequences in this life and spend eternity with Yahweh, than dodge consequences now and spend eternity separated from God.

Checkpoint 4, bear the consequences of sin (43-54). We spoke previously about bearing the consequences of sin. In verses 43-54, Jeremiah gives a clearer and further exhortation to bear the consequences of our sin. Verse 45 gives a very clear picture, "You have made us scum and garbage among the peoples." God has and is humbling them. It is often that God must bring us low so that we can see our need of Him. "Pride goes before the fall" (Proverbs 16:18).

Do not shun the consequences of sin. For it is in the midst of chastisement that we discover two very important truths: God's grace and God's love. Believe it or not, God is showing us favor when He disciplines us. He is showing us that we are His children according to Hebrews 12. We have done nothing to merit such benevolence from God. But God is gracious toward His people. He shows us undeserved favor when He disciplines because His discipline is always instructive for His people. The discipline of the Lord helps us to identify God's expectations. It is gracious and kind for God to discipline us as His children. God shows us this favor because He loves us.

It was not until I became a parent and had to enact discipline that I started to appreciate the phrase, "I'm doing this because I love you," right before a paddling. It is so true. We discipline our children because we love them. We want them to be good functioning members of society. We want them to know, love, and please the Lord. We want them to know how to act in relationships. Therefore, we discipline them. For it is only through this discipline that they learn what is expected and how to behave. We are no different, beloved. God wants us to obey and honor Him out of love. Therefore, He disciplines us. It is good for us to bear the consequences of our sin, for in the chambers of God's discipline, rebellion may be dislodged from our hearts.

Now that we have put off wrong thinking and replaced it with right thinking by speaking truth to ourselves; repented and returned to Yahweh as we bear the consequences of our sin; there is one thing to do—Cling to God.

Checkpoint 5, cling to God and His goodness (verses 55-66). This is a constant process we will walk again and again in this life. But may we hold on tight to God and His character. For only then, we will begin to truly weather the storms of this life. Remember, it was when Hopeful and Christian got into Bypath Meadow that they landed in doubting castle. We avoid Bypath Meadow by clinging to God even when the path gets rocky, uneven, and causes our feet to hurt and swell. Stay the course and cling to God, for God is not silent in the darkness of despair.

Verses 55-59 make it so clear, "I called on Your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; You heard my plea, 'do not close Your ear to my cry for help!' You came near when I called on You, you said, 'do not fear!' You have taken up my cause, O Lord; you have redeemed my life, You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord." The Lord knows. The Lord cares. The Lord hears. Cling to God. Cling to the hope

the gospel brings. Cling to the reality that, even in the midst of sorrow and discipline, God has not forsaken you.

There is going to be difficulty in this life. It is not a question of if, but when. The real question is how will you respond when it comes. Are you going to think rightly about your circumstances? Are you going to speak truth to yourself? Are you going to repent and return to Yahweh? Are you going to bear the consequences of your sin? Are you going to cling to God and His goodness? God's faithfulness to His people is the pathway out of despair and God's faithfulness is displayed most clearly in the person and work of Jesus. Christ died so that we could live with hope in the midst of the seemingly darkest dungeon.

In the darkness of doubting castle's dungeon, hope was sparked as Christian prayed. Beloved, the greenhouse of God's grace does not require the light of day, only the light of God.