

## Daily Devotional Guide

**Monday** – Read Lamentations 3:17-18. Ever felt this way? We don't know who the writer of Lamentations was – some have suggested the prophet Jeremiah. We are not sure. What we are sure of is that the writer of Lamentations was a traumatized Jewish person being held captive in Babylon. He is hundreds of miles from home and he is depressed. Sometimes we have to be honest about how we feel. Our emotions help us process our situation in life. It can be cathartic to share our sadness with others. Do you have someone in your life you can be vulnerable with?

**Tuesday** – Read Lamentations 3:19-22. In the midst of his depression, the writer of Lamentations saw a rainbow of hope – the love and compassion of the Lord. We cannot go so low that God is not there with us surrounding us with love and compassion. Let us remember that God knows what sadness feels like. God in Jesus wept over the tomb of Lazarus. Jesus struggled mightily in the garden of Gethsemane as he faced his own death. Jesus was betrayed by his closest friends. When we pray to God in our sadness, we remember that our God understands and has compassion on us.

**Wednesday** – Read Lamentations 3:23-24. The writer of Lamentations remembered something very important in the midst of his depression – God is always faithful. Whenever we face deep sadness, it would do us good to recall those times in our past when God pulled us out of the pit. God is faithful and will revive us again. We simply need to “wait for him.” Take some time today to remember those times when God bought you back to life.

**Thursday** – Read Lamentations 3:25. God desires that we share our sadness with him and ask for his help. What goods parents would not want their child to come to them for help? In your sadness, have you spent some time seeking God? Have you taken the time to notice the different ways God may be answering your prayers? That phone call from a friend that you did not feel like taking or that kind word from a neighbor just may be the help you need.

**Friday** – Read Lamentations 3:26. Don't miss the wisdom in this short verse. “Waiting quietly” for God is an important part to overcoming our sadness. Sometimes getting out of the pit is a process. There are key lessons that need to be learned and these lessons take time. God will give us the grace to receive his wisdom if we will simply wait quietly for him.



### PASADENA COMMUNITY CHURCH

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## Pasadena Community Church

### Always Look for the Rainbow ~ Depression ~

Sunday, February 5, 2012

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Lamentations 3:17-26

#### A Failure to Communicate?

We lost a great actor a few years ago – Paul Newman. He played some of the best roles in motion picture history. One of those roles was *Cool Hand Luke* in the movie by the same name. It is an important film with layers of meaning. Newman plays an unruly prisoner in a Southern chain gang during the 1930's.

Vic Pentz has suggested that Newman's character is somewhat of a Christ figure. For example, Luke surrounds himself with a band of followers. He also performs miracles, like a death defying escape during a football game. He catches the football, scores a touchdown, and just keeps on running. Eventually, they do find him, however.

One defining characteristic of Luke is his aching search for an absent God. One day he receives a letter in his prison cell informing him of the death of his mother. He tries to comfort himself by grabbing his guitar and singing the only religious song he knows: “*I don't care if it rains or freezes, long as I got my plastic Jesus, riding on the dashboard of my car. I can go a hundred miles an hour, long as I got the almighty power, tacked up there with my pair of fuzzy dice.*”

At the end of the movie he makes his last escape. The state marshals catch up to him and discover that he has locked himself in a small chapel. He is so desperate he gets down on his knees at the altar and begins to pray. He prays and prays. Then he begins to laugh and as he laughs he goes to one of the windows of the chapel, flings it open and shouts into the void the theme of the movie, “What we have here is a failure to communicate!” The marshals hear Luke, and one of them fires. Luke falls dead.

#### Praying to a Plastic Jesus

Do you ever feel like Luke? Do you ever feel like you are praying to a plastic Jesus – an impersonal, unfeeling, uncaring, silent God who does not listen to you? Do you ever go through despair and hopelessness and feel like no one is listening to your fervent prayers? If you have, you are in good company. The Bible is filled with characters who were depressed and discouraged and expressed how they felt that God had a communication problem. One of those characters was the writer of Lamentations.

We don't know who the writer of Lamentations was – some have suggested the prophet Jeremiah. We are not sure. What we are sure of is that the writer of Lamentations was a traumatized Jewish person being held captive in Babylon, and he writes some of the most depressing words in all of the Bible. You can't blame him really. He is captured and held captive in a pagan city, hundreds of miles from his home. To make matters worse, his fellow Jews chastise him for having any faith in God!

#### Depression

The writer of Lamentations suffered from what some call “situational depression.” Many experience this kind of depression. In fact, many are experiencing it right now in our bad economy. A lost job can trigger it. Losing a loved one can trigger it. Going through a divorce can trigger it. Sometimes life presents us with some hard blows and the only way we can process these difficulties is through depression.

Of course, sometimes depression hits us after being at the height of ecstasy and success. The immediate low after a glorious high can throw

many into downward spiral. Take Elijah, for instance. He was on top of the world, literally! High atop Mount Carmel Elijah he had taken on 850 pagan priests and won. Clint Eastwood had nothing on him! He asked God to make known his supreme power over the god Baal, and God did with a big bolt of lightning. A crowd rose up and yelled, “God is Lord in Israel!” Immediately, Queen Jezebel, who worshipped Baal, ran after Elijah. The prophet ran and ran and finally collapsed under a tree. And what did Elijah do? Did he celebrate? No. He curled up and screamed, “Oh God I want to die.”

Great highs can sometimes lead to great lows. I agree with one of my colleagues when he said, “I love Easter, but you don’t want to be anywhere near me on the Monday morning after Easter. I am the creature from the black lagoon.” It’s true. There’s a reason why I take Mondays off! Many experience an “emotional hang over” after being at the peak of bliss. Many new mothers experience this. There is the great anticipation and joy of having a baby and then the baby comes and there is the post-partum blues.

Depression can hit us after experiencing the thrill of victory and depression can hit us when we experience the agony of defeat. For others, depression can be a form of suppressed anger. Something happens to us that really “tees” us off, but we never deal with that anger, and so we get depressed. The late great psychiatrist M. Scott Peck suggested in his book, “The Road Less Traveled,” that much mental illness, including chronic depression, occurs as a result of our unwillingness to go through the necessary pain of facing the truth in our lives.

### **Depression Can Hit Any of Us**

Depression can hit any of us for a variety of reasons. It is a fact of life. If you are suffering from it right now, you are not alone! The writer of Lamentations suffered from depression. So did Elijah, as did Martin Luther, Abraham Lincoln, Winston Churchill, and the great preacher Charles Spurgeon.

Also know that depression is not a sign of spiritual weakness. It is not a sign that we are not praying enough or that we don’t have enough faith. And it is never a sign that God is punishing us. Everyone needs to be sensitive to this issue. Too

often I have heard well intended but misinformed people of faith demean others who suffer from depression. They say, “Snap out of it! If you really were a Christian you would not act like this!” There is no room for this kind of insensitivity in the church.

-Today, suicide is the third leading cause of death among young people. The third leading cause of death!

-Depression is the number one cause of suicide

-Men are four times more likely than women to commit suicide largely because men try to tough out their depression and do not seek help

-Depression is the leading cause of alcoholism, drug abuse, and other addictions

-1 out of 18 adults will experience a severe clinical depression

-1 in 5 adults will experience some form of depression

### **Get Help!**

Some depressions just need to take their course. A time of grief, stress, or illness has come and the brain has released chemicals that serve to numb the mind and body. It is like a shock absorber. Eventually it will wear off. For others it doesn’t wear off. In some people the brain and its chemicals get so out of balance that clinical depression may occur. If you or someone you know is showing even the slightest signs of chronic or clinical depression, please seek help as soon as possible. Call our church and we will refer you to the right counselor who can help lead you to wholeness and joy.

### **Rainbows**

I want to say something now that I really want all of you to hear. Yes, we need to get help if we are depressed. God does not want us to be depressed. He did not create us to be depressed. He wants us to live life with joy and peace. However, I need to tell you from my heart this morning that God meets us in the great depths of our depression and, if we allow him, can teach us profound truths that are key lessons for healing and wholeness. God has a rainbow for us when the dark clouds of depression set in.

### **The Rainbow of God’s Compassion**

*Read Lamentations 3:21-22.* In the midst of his depression, the writer of Lamentations saw a rainbow of hope – the love and compassion of the

Lord. We cannot go so low that God is not there with us surrounding us with love and compassion. Let us remember that God knows what sadness feels like. God in Jesus wept over the tomb of Lazarus. God in Jesus struggled mightily in the garden of Gethsemane as he faced his own death. God in Jesus was betrayed by his closest friends. Our Lord cried out on the cross Psalm 22, “My, my God why have you forsaken me?” When we pray to God in our sadness, we remember that our God understands and has compassion on us. We need to allow ourselves to experience God’s compassion.

### **The Rainbow of God’s Faithfulness**

*Read Lamentations 3:23-24.* The writer of Lamentations remembered something very important in the midst of his depression – God is always faithful. Whenever we face deep sadness, it would do us good to recall those times in our past when God pulled us out of the pit. God is faithful and will revive us again. We simply need to “wait for him.” Take some time today to remember those times when God brought you back to life. God will do it again!

### **The Rainbow of God’s Wisdom**

*Read Lamentations 3:26.* Don’t miss the wisdom in this short verse. “Waiting quietly” for God is an important part to overcoming our sadness. Sometimes getting out of the pit is a process. There are key lessons that need to be learned and these lessons take time. God will give us the grace to receive his wisdom if we will simply wait quietly for him.

### **What if You Have Never Suffered From Depression?**

You may be in church today thinking, “I imagine this is helpful for some people but I have never suffered from depression. How does this sermon speak to me?” Oh, let me tell you how. Your joy and encouragement can make more difference to those who are depressed than you will ever know. You can be God’s rainbow for someone who is depressed.

### **You Can Make A Difference!**

Vic Pentz, Senior Pastor at Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, tells an unforgettable story of how one man’s simple gesture of encouragement saved the life of his depressed colleague. One of Pentz’s friends is a

pastor in Seattle near Microsoft headquarters. He tells how a manager at Microsoft decided to live out his faith at work. The strategy he decided on was that instead of emailing and texting people who sat just 10 feet away from him, he would actually get up and go speak with them, you know, like they mattered!

A few weeks after he started doing this one of his employees came into his office and gave him a brand new version of a computer gaming system, Xbox Live. The manager said, “Where did you get the money to buy this?” because he knew what he was paying the guy, and it wasn’t that much. The employee said, “Well, I sold my gun.” The employee continued, “You see six months ago my mother died and I was depressed. Then I started working here thinking it would help, but nobody ever talked to me except on email. So I looked up ‘coping with dead mother’ on the internet but what I found instead were suicide chat rooms. So I went out and I bought a gun and I have been practicing ever since. Every night I put the gun to my head with Kurt Cobain music playing in the background. And for the last month the safety has been off. And I knew that the only way you would ever know that I died would be if payroll notified you.”

He continued and said, “But then last week you freaked me out. You came to my desk and you put your arm around me and you told me I was funny even over email, which is hard to do. And you told me I always get my projects done on time which helps you to sleep better at night. So I went home and sold my gun and I bought you this. Because for the last few months you have been complaining how much you want Xbox Live, but that your financial advisor, a.k.a. your wife, won’t let you have it. So I bought this for you. So for my life, here, this is yours.”

Someone once said, “Be kind to everyone because everyone is fighting some kind of battle.” God may be calling you to lift up someone who is depressed. God may be calling you to be a rainbow of hope. God may be calling you to save someone’s life. Amen.

*I am grateful to Dr. Vic Pentz, Senior Pastor of Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, Ga, for his insights as I prepared this message. His sermon on “Depression: I Hate My Life” was an important source for me.*