

# COMMUNICATOR

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## When God Seems Far Away

**I don't care how pious you may be, chances are that at some point in your Christian life the verses of Lamentations will sound like you could have written them.**

### Read Lamentations 3

Lament is a lost spiritual art in our time. Our culture teaches us to minimize suffering, clean it up, put it away. Let's think happy thoughts. I'm all for positive thinking, but I've also learned that if we don't deal honestly with the "wind chill" times in our lives, we not only lose out on the lessons to be learned, we also lose out on the deepest joy we can ever experience.

Have you ever known the bone-chilling coldness of spiritual doubt? I don't care how pious you may be, chances are that at some point in your Christian life the verses of Lamentations will sound like you could have written them. How do you survive those times when God seems far away?

Reading Lamentations is almost like reading a private journal. You get the sense that these cries were never intended for publication. Maybe the author should have written across the front, "Please destroy if found." I am glad it survived, because this faithful servant of God gives courageous voice to something many of us have experienced. The writer says, "*Now I am walking more in darkness than in light. God has turned his hand against me. He is shutting out my prayer. Everything I had hoped for is gone*" (from verses 2, 3, 8, 18). You're not supposed to talk about God this way, are you? This is not very good faith, is it?

What I find remarkable is that the Bible is completely comfortable with this kind of talk. There is nothing in the Bible that tries to shame us out of having these kinds of thoughts and feelings. We may feel hesitant or even ashamed to confess our feelings of disappointment with God. I think I understand that, but the truth is the Bible has no such hesitation.

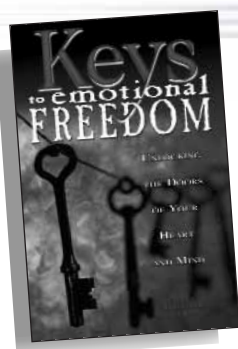
It is important to deal honestly with our dark thoughts and feelings when we are walking through a "Lamentations 3" time in our life. The writer is painfully honest, but neither does he stop with a description of the torment. In the midst of the crushing grief there is a beautiful word of hope: "*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning, great is your faithfulness*" (verses 22-23).

A decision is made. It's a decision based on the purposeful remembrance of God's faithfulness in the past. Out of that memory, the writer commits to wait for the Lord in the confidence that something good can arise out of all this.

But there's another lesson that I think is so important during these "cold wind" days. Did you hear him say, when speaking of God's mercies, "*They are new every morning?*" It sounds to me like he had learned something about taking one day at a time. We say that so much that it almost sounds trite, but this was precisely the advice of our Lord Jesus. "*Don't worry about tomorrow . . . Each day has enough trouble of its own*" (Matthew 6:34). Isn't that the truth? Much of God's peace is experienced through the gift of "one day at a time."

Are you walking through one of those times when God seems far away? Please know that you are not alone. The truth is, no matter how it feels, God has not and never will abandon you. Cry out to God. Tell God exactly how you feel. Confess your fear. Confess your doubt. Then take a lesson from Lamentations. Remember that the "*mercies of God never end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness.*"

—Jeren Rowell



Your Heart and Mind by Robin Martens

**D**o you experience recurring painful or difficult emotions? Do you have a pattern of feeling rejected or lonely? Are you filled with guilt or shame? Do you feel God is distant and uncaring when you experience difficult emotions? In this book, the author shares simple, scriptural keys that will help you deal with obstacles to your emotional well-being as you allow the Creator to invade and restore each area of your emotional realm. Getting free is a habit—a new life

skill. Key truths in this book can be applied to your life so that your heart will begin to mend. There is great spiritual power in these simple principles. God loves you too much to make the path to wholeness unattainable. If you have prayed earnestly about an emotional or relationship struggle and seen little progress, this book may be just what you need.

Robin Martens is a counselor, writer, and in demand as a speaker. She holds a degree in counseling from the University of Nebraska. She lives with her husband in Omaha, Nebraska.

(Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press, 2004, 144pp., \$12.99, paper, COZZ083-412-1743)

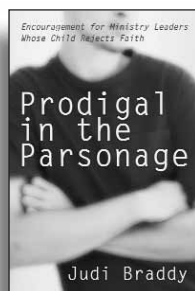
tural keys that will help you deal with obstacles to your emotional well-being as you allow the Creator to invade and restore each area of your emotional realm. Getting free is a habit—a new life

BOOK BRIEFS

Resources for Pastoral Ministry

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

*Prodigal in the Parsonage.* By Judi Braddy. (Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2004, 144pp., \$12.99, paper, COZZ083-412-2065) Parenting is seldom easy. Rebellion may invade the home, forcing parents to recognize and cope with it. But how do parents maintain their peace of mind when rebellion turns into a rejection of faith, especially when the rejection is in the home of a minister? Judi Braddy is an ordained minister and pastor's wife who understands this question and knows firsthand the pain and suffering of watching a beloved child walk away from God. *Prodigal in the Parsonage* offers parents, especially those in ministry, an insider's perspective and time-tested encouragement for struggling with the daily trials that come when their child rejects faith. Braddy addresses topics such as whether or not you can be an effective minister if your own family is in disarray, dealing with the stages of grief as your child slips further from the faith, and remembering that the child is not the enemy. *Prodigal in the Parsonage* offers the insight and encouragement parents need to endure the grief and anxiety of parenting a prodigal.



radical change in the way the Christian world approaches the problem of homosexuality: acceptance of the individual, love, and development of a "new way of communicating", giving occasion for God to work in the life of the struggling person. His call is to "love as Jesus would love". (Reviewed by William Bridges).

PREACHING

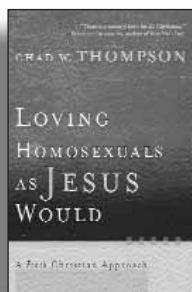
*The Jazz of Preaching: How to Preach with Great Freedom and Joy.* By Kirk Byron Jones. (Abingdon Press, 2004, 176pp., \$16.00, paper, COZZ068-700-2524). From the publisher: "What if preachers were as contagiously joyful in their preaching as Louis Armstrong was in his playing and singing? As rich in their sermonic renderings as Sarah Vaughn was in her musical vocals? As honest about heartache as Billie Holiday was every time she sang about the blues of life? As alluringly clear as the angelic voice of Ella Fitzgerald. As tenaciously uninhibited in the action of creating as Duke Ellington? Kirk Byron Jones explains how to dramatically improve one's preaching through understanding and applying key elements of the musical art form known as jazz. These elements include innovation; improvisation; rhythm; call and response; honesty about heartache; and delight. Drawing on a deep love of jazz and enlivening his discussion with insights drawn from the tradition of African American preaching, Jones introduces the reader to rich and rewarding possibilities for constructing and delivering the sermon."



I liked this book very much, but I am a lover of jazz music. For those uninitiated in the jazz tradition, the connections between Joneses wonderful descriptions of the work of great jazz artists and preaching may be difficult to track. In some chapters, he gets so caught up in the telling of the jazz story that you begin to wonder if he'll ever cross the bridge to preaching. But he always does, and I found the connections to be instructive and helpful. It could be helpful for all, but a real delight for music lovers. (Reviewed by Jeren Rowell).

CURRENT ISSUES

*Loving Homosexuals As Jesus Would.* By Chad W. Thompson. (Brazos Press, 2004, 183pp., \$12.99, paper, COZZ158-743-1211). A thought-provoking book written by a formerly gay man who is now head of an organization that addresses homosexuality on high school and college campuses. After giving his own story of change in his sexual orientation, he covers areas such as the causes of homosexuality (which he believes is developed during childhood and is often a disconnection between a child and the same-sex parent), and methods of bringing about change. This book is sure to "offend some, instruct many, and be relevant to all", as is stated in the foreword. In effect, he calls for



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# A Life Changing Operation

# J-FORCE

to the Rescue

A KIDS' MUSICAL DISCOVERING THE ULTIMATE TRUTH

CREATED BY  
PAM ANDREWS



## J-Force to the Rescue

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By Pam Andrews

With compelling and fun songs, an energetic script, and a strong message, this new musical explores the truths about Jesus and proves that kids can be evangelistic too! Teaching that Jesus is both Savior and Friend, **J-Force to the Rescue** features 9 biblically-based songs and a storyline encouraging children to trust Jesus.

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