

# Hard Hearts

## Read Lamentations 4:1–4

*Whoever hardens their hearts  
falls into trouble.—Proverbs 28:14*

The phrase “pull yourself up by your bootstraps” is used to speak of the self-made person who rises out of difficulty or obscurity by the sheer force of personal effort. We like to think that hard times build character in us the same way weight resistance builds muscle. Unfortunately, this isn’t automatically the case. When the weight is too heavy, we can strain a muscle, or it may tear. Likewise, hard times may sometimes harden hearts.

This is the sad case Jeremiah describes in his fourth lament over Jerusalem. Lamentations 4 opens with a vision of the city looted by its enemies. Its golden sheen has dulled and sacred gems are “scattered at every street corner” (v. 1). This is a metaphor. It is doubtful that the Babylonians would have left such treasure behind. Indeed, the image of scattered gems seems to allude to the more tragic image of verse 2, which describes “the precious children of Zion” who were “once worth their weight in gold” but are now

merely pots of clay, easily cast aside and shattered by the potter’s hand.

The harsh reality Judah now faces has so hardened the survivors that people have become “heartless.” Their treatment of those who deserved care was not only subhuman, it was sub animal, compared here to jackals and ostriches (v. 3). Jackals were considered wild scavengers. Ostriches are depicted elsewhere as less than nurturing (compare with Job 39:14–17). In Jerusalem, the infant’s tongue cleaves to the roof of its mouth, while the children beg for bread in vain (v. 4). Much of this was circumstantial. There was no food available. Circumstances had become so destitute that the survivors could not even live like animals.

### Go Deeper

Has hardship made your heart hard or softened it toward the things of God? If your heart has hardened, what steps might you take to soften it again?

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### Pray with Us

Lord, forgive us for the times when we hardened our hearts—to Your voice and to the needs of our neighbors—under the weight of life’s struggles. Soften our hearts and help us walk in humility and compassion.