

Trusting God When It Hurts

The Grace of Lament

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Two objectives this morning

1. Define and describe the biblical practice of lament
2. Work through an exercise on lament

FOREWORD BY JONI EARECKSON TADA

DARK
CLOUDS



DEEP
MERCY

DISCOVERING THE GRACE OF
LAMENT

MARK
VROEGOP

To my wife, Sarah,
who courageously walked with me
through our pilgrimage of lament.
I love you.

To my daughter, Sylvia,
whom God used to teach me that
hard is hard; hard is not bad.
We miss you.

What is lament?

- “... a prayer in pain that leads to trust,” (Mark Vroegop in *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, pg. 28).
- “Lament is the wailing of the heart before a God who hears, who listens, and who responds to our cries.”
(Rob Brockman)
- Lament holds in tension both the reality of our suffering and the reality of God’s goodness, yet the reality of God’s goodness eclipses the reality of our suffering.

Why should we practice lament?

- Jesus lamented
 - Psalm 22 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- Scripture contains many laments for our instruction and example.
 - All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
 - There are around 65 Psalms (that is nearly half of the Psalms) that are Psalms of lament. Psalm 3, 13, 22, 42, 44, and 60 are just a few of them.
 - Some wonder that if lament is so common in the Bible, why is it so uncommon in our practice?

Types of Lament in the Bible

There are two major types of laments in the Bible: Corporate and Individual.

- Corporate laments are “a group or nation vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion.
 - The book of Lamentations, for example.
- Personal laments are an individual vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion.

Other Types of Lament in the Bible

- Repentant: an individual or group expressing regret or sorrow for sin.
- Imprecatory: an individual or group expressing outrage and a strong desire for justice.
- Partial: sections of lament within other psalms. (e.g., Ps. 9:13–20)
- Debatable: Psalms that some consider to be lament in total or in part. (e.g., Psalm 139:19-22)

More on Lament

- Lament gives voice to the strong emotions that believers feel because of suffering.
- Lament typically asks at least two questions: (1) “Where are you, God?” (2) “If you love me, why is this happening?”
- To lament does include sadness and it includes hope. To lament also includes some type of un-surety about the future but it also includes a resolve to hope in God. To lament includes a way to approach God with rightly ordered emotions and a resolve to trust God.
- Pain has a way of awakening us to our need for God’s help. It shines a spotlight on our powerlessness to control everything. We are never more aware of our frailty than when hardship comes our way. This is one of the blessings of suffering if we allow lament to lead us.

Lament asks hard questions

Psalm 77:7-9

- “Will the Lord spurn forever?” (v. 7).
- “Will [he] never again be favorable?” (v. 7).
- “Has his steadfast love forever ceased?” (v. 8).
- “Are his promises at an end for all time?” (v. 8).
- “Has God forgotten to be gracious?” (v. 9).
- “Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” (v. 9).

More on Lament

A survey of the unique petitions in these songs of sorrow shows us at least nine different prayers. Together these serve as a model for what we can pray.

Arise, O Lord!	Grant us help	Remember your covenant
Let justice be done!	Don't remember our sins!	Restore us!
Don't be silent – listen to me!	Teach me.	Vindicate me!

More on Lament

- Suffering refines what we trust in and how we talk about it.
- Pain can become a platform for worship. Suffering can lead to trust. Lament is the language for this transition. Songs of sorrow are meant to move us from complaint to confidence in God.
- Lament allows us to embrace an endurance that is not passive. Lament helps us to practice active patience.

More on Lament

- Words such as “but” and “however” are found in every lament because lamenting trust is not merely a belief or conviction; it is trusting despite what circumstances might lead one to believe. Words like “but”, “however”, and “yet” mark the intentional shift from the cause of the lament to trusting in who God is, what he has done, and the promises of Scripture.
- “The psalms are given to us as a divine pedagogy for our affections—God’s way of reshaping our desires and perceptions so that they learn to lament in the right things and take joy in the right things.” Lament tunes the heart so it can sing about trust.

More on Lament

- You might think lament is the opposite of praise. It isn't. Instead, lament is a path to praise as we are led through our brokenness and disappointment.⁶ The space between brokenness and God's mercy is where this song is sung. Think of lament as the transition between pain and promise. It is the path from heartbreak to hope.
- I've found that many people are afraid of lament. They find it too honest, too open, or too risky.
 - Have you ever noticed when you are more honest about your sin that your offense becomes greater to you and God's mercy is magnified?
- The lament psalms teach us that these feelings should not be dismissed as invalid or sinful. They are part of the journey—an aspect of genuine faith.

More on Lament

- Lament does not always lead to an immediate solution. It does not always bring a quick or timely answer. Grief is not tame. Lament is not a simplistic formula. Instead, lament is the song you sing believing that one day God will answer and restore. Lament invites us to pray through our struggle with a life that is far from perfect.
- The character of God—his sovereignty, goodness, and love—creates a tension when we face painful circumstances. Lament is how we learn to live between the poles of a hard life and God's goodness. It is an opportunity to remind our hearts about God's faithfulness in the past, especially when the immediate events of life are overwhelmingly negative. While we're still in pain, lament reminds our hearts of what we believe to be true.
- Lament is the language of a people who believe in God's sovereignty but live in a world with tragedy.

Features of a lament

- Turn to God: Address God with your complaint.
- Complaint: Identify in blunt language the specific pain or injustice or fear and how you feel about it.
- Ask boldly: Specifically call upon God to act in a manner that fits his character and resolves your complaint.
- Choose to trust: Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted and commit to praising him.

Psalm 3 Example

A PSALM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM ABSALOM HIS SON.

1-2 O LORD, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, “There is no salvation for him in God. Selah

3-4 But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, my glory, and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah

5-6 I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the LORD sustained me. I will not be afraid of many thousands of people who have set themselves against me all around.

7-8 Arise, O LORD! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked. Salvation belongs to the LORD; your blessing be on your people! Selah

Questions about features of the lament

To whom does the author complain?

How does the psalmist describe their suffering?

What does the psalmist want?

On whom does the psalmist depend for help?

What aspects of God's character does the psalmist exalt and rely on?

How is the psalmist's hope affected?

Psalm 13 Example

1-2 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3-4 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

5-6 But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

How does lament differ from grumbling?

- What are our temptations when we are suffering?
- Grumbling is when our grief and anguish drives us not further into the promises and comfort of God, but rather farther from God.
 - <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/what-is-the-difference-between-grumbling-and-lament/>
- In the long dark nights of suffering, comfort and ease can quietly become idols that we look to for hope. We long for easier days. We wish we could go back. We become angry at God for all the hardships we are encountering, and this forms a hardened heart and a deep lack of satisfaction in God and His purposes alone.

Exercise: Learning to Lament Worksheet

- Four movements
 - Turn to God
 - Bring your complaint
 - Ask boldly
 - Choose to trust
- Movements are not always organized in this order in the psalm.
- My lament
 - This is where you use the language of the lament in the psalm to express your own lament.

Psalms of Lament

<p>Personal An individual vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion.</p>	3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 28, 31, 39, 42, 43, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 120, 141, 142
<p>Corporate A group or nation vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion</p>	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126
<p>Repentant An individual or group expressing regret or sorrow for sin</p>	6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
<p>Imprecatory An individual or group expressing outrage and a strong desire for justice</p>	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140
<p>Partial Sections of lament within other psalms</p>	9:13–20; 27:7–14; 40:11–17
<p>Debatable Psalms that some consider to be lament in total or in part</p>	14, 36, 41, 52, 53, 63, 78, 81, 89, 106, 125, 129, 139

Learning to Lament Worksheet

Movements of Lament	Psalm ____	My Lament
<p><i>Turn to God</i> Address God as you come to him in prayer. This is sometimes combined with complaint.</p>		
<p><i>Bring Your Complaint</i> Identify in blunt language the specific pain or injustice. Why or how is often part of the complaint.</p>		
<p><i>Ask Boldly</i> Specifically call upon God to act in a manner that fits his character and resolves your complaint.</p>		
<p><i>Choose to Trust</i> Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted, and commit to praising him.</p>		

Example: Learning to Lament Worksheet

Movements of Lament	Psalm 86	My Lament
<p><i>Turn to God</i> Address God as you come to him in prayer. This is sometimes combined with complaint.</p>	<p>v. 1: "Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me, / for I am poor and needy." v. 6: "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; / listen to my plea for grace."</p>	<p>God, I need you to hear me. I'm hurting and in pain. I'm asking for you to listen to my lament. I desperately need your grace today.</p>
<p><i>Bring Your Complaint</i> Identify in blunt language the specific pain or injustice. Why or how is often part of the complaint.</p>	<p>v. 14: "O God, insolent men have risen up against me; / a band of ruthless men seeks my life, / and they do not set you before them."</p>	<p>You've heard every unfair word, and you know how I've been misunderstood. I'm upset. I'm defensive. I want to strike back with more words. I don't feel like they care. It doesn't end. I don't know what to do.</p>
<p><i>Ask Boldly</i> Specifically call upon God to act in a manner that fits his character and resolves your complaint.</p>	<p>v. 2: "Preserve my life . . . / save your servant." v. 3: "Be gracious to me, O Lord." v. 11: "Teach me your way, O Lord . . . / unite my heart to fear your name." v. 16: "Turn to me and be gracious to me; / give your strength to your servant." v. 17: "Show me a sign of your favor." Teach me every lesson you want me to learn through this.</p>	<p>Help me know what to say or not to say. Make my heart love your purposes more than I love my reputation. Help me know that you are listening and that you care for me. I need help, God. My heart is so divided. One minute I think good thoughts. The next, ugly thoughts. Pour out your grace on me, please!</p>
<p><i>Choose to Trust</i> Affirm God's worthiness to be trusted, and commit to praising him.</p>	<p>v. 8: "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord." v. 12: "I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart." v. 13: "Great is your steadfast love." v. 15: "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, / slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" v. 17: "You, Lord, have helped me and comforted me."</p>	<p>None of this is a surprise to you. You've heard every word. You know what I'm feeling, and you are greater than anything I face. You can supply what I need and give me strength if others don't understand. I can trust you with what people say about me. You've helped me through many worse situations. So I'm going to keep my eyes on you. I'm trusting you. I'm still going to worship you. Thank you.</p>