

Lament Psalms

Ely Diocese DEF 22nd February 2022

1) **INTRODUCTION AND SOME SCENARIOS:**

2) **HOW DOES GOD WANT US TO REACT TO SUCH SCENARIOS?**

Lord, how could you let that happen? Why did you abandon me? I'm one of your own. Why didn't you protect me? If you had been there, this never would have happened ([John 11.21](#))! And this hurts your cause too, Lord. People are scoffing at you in your absence. Come and visibly intervene for me! But no matter what, I will trust you forever. No matter what, you are my God forever.

... unless we lament, we're being unbiblical and unhelpful'.

(<https://www.thespiritlife.net/89-corporate/corporate-publications/4783-a-missing-piece-in-north-american-worship-by-eric-ortlund>)

3) **SO WHAT DOES THE WORD 'LAMENT' MEAN?**

Lamenting is...

Whoever is lamenting is expressing great sorrow or regret and even grief about something or someone as in the loss of a life. This lamenting could be verbally expressed in wailing, weeping, and crying. To lament means that something horrific has likely happened in their life and it moves the person deep within their soul and it is outwardly expressed in such a way that it is demonstrative and can't be overseen by others.

And God has given us in the Psalms a way, a means, to express to him our sadness, frustration, grief, even anger, at what has happened to us.

<u>Lament Psalms</u>	
Community	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89*, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129
Individual	3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31, 36*, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52*, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89*, 120, 139, 141, 142
<u>Specialized Lament Psalms</u>	

<u>Penitential</u>	6, 32*, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
<u>Imprecatory</u>	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140

*These Psalms are difficult to classify because they could fit into more than one group or are mixed types.

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4) What does it mean to lament:

What Does It Mean to Lament? By Danielle Ayers Jones -

"God, God, save me! I'm in over my head! I'm hoarse from calling for help, bleary-eyed from searching the sky for God. I've got more enemies than hairs on my head; sneaks and liars are out to knife me in the back. God, you know every sin I've committed; my life's a wide-open book before you. Don't let those who look to you in hope be discouraged by what happens to me, dear Lord! Because of you I look like an idiot, I walk around ashamed to show my face!"

5) Structure of Lament Psalms

<http://www.journey-through-grief.com/god-and-grief-in-lament-psalms.html>

- a. **Address to God.**
- b. **Complaint (Lament).**
- c. **Affirmation / Confession of Trust.**
- d. **Petition – what the Psalmist wants God to do about it.**
- e. **Additional argument – Reasons for God to answer the prayer.**
- f. **Assurance of being heard.**
- g. **Vow or Shout of Praise.**
- h. **Blessing.**
- i.

6) Psalm 142

1. Address and introductory cry

With my voice I cry out to the LORD;

with my voice I plead for mercy to the LORD.

I pour out my complaint before him;

I tell my trouble before him.

When my spirit faints within me,

you know my way!

2. The Lament (the real problem)

*In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.*

Look to the right and see:

*there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.*

3. Confession of trust

I cry to you, O LORD;

*I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."*

4. Prayer—what the psalmist wants God to do about it

*Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me!*

(4a. optional) Reasons given to God for answering the prayer

*Bring me out of prison,
that I may give thanks to your name!*

5. Vow or shout of praise

The righteous will surround me,

(5a. optional) Prophetic statement

for you will deal bountifully with me.

Try now with some other psalms: 3, 6, 13, 28, 56.

7) Concluding comments:

Lament and particularly the Psalms of Lament can enable us to cry out to God in a completely honest way and express our sadness, bewilderment, perplexity, frustration with what is happening to us. And there is always hope!
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Don't Sanitize the Psalms – Steve Cornell (Nov.2012)

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/dont-sanitize-the-psalms>

... Christopher J. H. Wright: <i>It is precisely those who have the closest relationship with God who feel most at liberty to pour out their pain in protest to God—without fear of</i>

reproach. Lament is not only allowed in the Bible; it is modelled in abundance. God seems to want to give us as many words with which to fill out our complaint forms as to write our thank-you notes. (The God I Don't Understand: Reflections on Tough Questions of Faith)

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For Reflection (from Simon Stocks, *Using the Psalms for Prayer through Suffering*, Grove Biblical Series, Cambridge, 2007; Walter Brueggemann, 'The Costly Loss of Lament', JSOT 36 (1986).

- 1) In my own episodes of suffering, what has made prayer difficult?
- 2) Am I willing to express doubts or anger towards God? When have I done or would I do this?
- 3) Have I ever felt guilty about my own suffering, or ashamed of it? Would voicing my distress help to overcome those feelings?
- 4) In my own times of affliction, what would most help me to praise God? What effect does praising God have on me?
- 5) Do I think God is affected by my prayer? If not, what is the alternative?
- 6) Am I able to express negative feelings about God in prayer? What does that imply about the nature of my relationship with God?
- 7) What is my attitude towards those people who have inflicted pain upon me? Is there a gap between my true feelings and how I think I ought to react?
- 8) Has 'sadness, loss, grief and upset' been screened out of your church experience? Your conversations? Your prayers?
- 9) Is your faith characterised by 'docility and submissiveness'? Is that good?
- 10) Are there circumstances in which our lamenting or failing to lament might express a lack of Christian faith? Are there good and bad ways to lament?

John Starke, 'Why we lament when we're not lamenting'

1. We sing songs of lament even when we are not lamenting in order to weep with those who are weeping.
2. We sing songs of lament even when we are not lamenting so that when seasons of mourning come, we know what songs to sing and what prayers to pray.
3. We sing songs of lament even when we are not lamenting because the New Testament calls us to.
4. We sing songs of lament even when we are not lamenting because maybe you should be lamenting more than you are.

Select Bibliography:

- 1) Dan Allender, 'The Hidden Hope in Lament', June 2016
<https://theallendercenter.org/2016/06/hidden-hope-lament/>
- 2) W. Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *JSOT* 36 (1986): 57-71; reprinted in *The Poetical Books: A Sheffield Reader* (SAP, 1997), pp. 84-97.
- 3) W. Brueggemann, *Spirituality of the Psalms*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002. This book explores the format of the psalms in an effort to understand their liturgical use in the church today. Brueggemann moves through psalms of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation—noting that psalms of disorientation have become lost to the church as a result of the seduction of wealth and health.
- 4) Christina Fox, *A Heart Set Free – a journey to hope through the Psalms of Lament*, Fearn: Christian Focus, 2016.
- 5) Stacey Gleddiesmith, 'My God, My God, Why? Understanding the Lament Psalms' - <https://www.reformedworship.org/article/june-2010/my-god-my-god-why>
- 6) God and Grief in the Psalms of Lament - <http://www.journey-through-grief.com/god-and-grief-in-lament-psalms.html>
- 7) [Tremper Longman III, 'Getting Brutally Honest with God', *Christianity Today*, 27th April 2015](http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2015/april/getting-brutally-honest-with-god.html)
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- 8) Simon P. Stocks, *Using the Psalms for Prayer Through Suffering*, Grove Biblical Series, Cambridge, 2007.
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- 10) Sandra McCracken on Life, Loss and Longing in the Psalms (21 May 2015) - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sandra-mccracken-psalms>
- 11) Matt Searles, CDs on lament psalms - <http://www.mattsearles.org.uk/>
- 12) Paul Tripp, 'Darkness is my Closest Friend' (23 June 2014) - <https://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/darkness-is-my-closest-friend>

13) Terry L. Smith, 'Darkness is my closest friend: using the Psalms of Lament to address grief issues' (March 2007) - <http://www.nacsw.org/Publications/Proceedings2007/SmithTDarkenessClosestFriendE.pdf>

14) Robert S. Smith, 'Belting out the blues as believers: the importance of singing lament', in *Themelios* 42:1 (2017), 89-111 -

ABSTRACT: Many churches seem to have lost the art of singing lament. This article urges a recovery of this forgotten practice, firstly, by demonstrating from within the Psalter itself the importance of *singing* the psalms (including the laments) and setting them to music; secondly, by exploring some of the obstacles to singing in times of distress; thirdly, by examining the way in which lament enables a singing of pain and sorrow; fourthly, by investigating what can be known of the manifold powers of music and song (for proclaiming and recalling God's word and consoling and uniting God's people); and, finally, by articulating something of the important relationship between lament and praise.

15) Trevin Wax, 'The Worship Song I Can't Bring Myself to Sing', Sept. 2019 - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/true-god-wont-ever-let/> -

'I know of a guy in his 30s whose wife has terminal cancer who has trouble with a line from another worship song that implies that trusting God is easy. His grief reminds me of Psalm 137, where in their lament the exiled people of God hang up their instruments and weep by the waters of Babylon, asking how they could sing the Lord's song in such terrible circumstances.

Psalm 137 is just one of many similar sentiments we find in Scripture. In reading the psalms every month, I'm struck by how many times the psalmist includes feelings of deep disappointment in the same song that offers praise. The psalms of lament express disappointment with God, ask questions about his plan, and display the wondering and wandering heart of a sojourner on earth. But in most of these songs, the psalmist claws his way back to the God he chooses to believe is still there, still good, and still able to fulfill his promises. Unlike some contemporary songs, the psalmist doesn't say, "God, you're good because you'll never let me down," but "God, even though I feel like you've let me down, I still believe you're good."

16) Chris Llewellyn, 'Christians don't tell lies, they sing them', Aug. 2021 - <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/christians-dont-tell-lies-they-sing-them/5447.article>

17) G. Packiam, 'Five Things to Know About Lament' - <https://www.ntwrightonline.org/five-things-to-know-about-lament/> - 1) Lament is a form of *praise*; 2) Lament is *proof* of the relationship; 3) Lament is a *pathway* to intimacy with God; 4) Lament is a *prayer* for God to act; 5) Lament is a *participation* in the pain of others.

18) Mark Vroegop, 'Dare to Hope in God – How to Lament Well' - <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dare-to-hope-in-god>

19) Mark Vroegop, 'Strong Churches Speak the Language of Lament' - <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/strong-churches-language-lament/> -

- a) Turn to prayer; b) Bring our complaints; c) Ask boldly; d) Choose to trust.

Psalm 13 - Turn to God. Often a lament begins by an address to God: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (1). The point is that the person in pain chooses to talk to God about what is happening.

Bring your complaint. Every lament features some kind of complaint: "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?" (v.2)). More than a sinful rehearsing of our anger, biblical lament humbly and honestly identifies the pain, questions, and frustrations raging in our souls.

Ask boldly for help. Seeking God's help while in pain is an act of faith: "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" (v.3-4)). Unremitting sorrow can create a deadly silence as we give in to despair ("there's no hope") or denial ("everything's fine"). But lament invites us to dare to hope in God's promises as we ask for his help.

Choose to trust. This is the destination for our laments. All roads lead here: "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" (v.5-6). More than the stages of grief, this prayer language moves us to renew our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life. Lament is the prayer language for God's people as they live in a world marred by sin. It is how we talk to God about our sorrows as we renew our hope in his sovereign care. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.

20) Claire Musters, 'Lament as a Means of Survival' - <https://amyboucherpye.com/2021/12/03/lament-as-a-means-of-survival-by-claire-musters-7-ways-to-pray-blog-series/>