

Lament Homework

WHAT IS LAMENT?

Definition: A prayer in pain that leads to trust in God.

At least a third of the Psalms are psalms of lament. *Examples:* Psalms 3-5, 7, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25-26, 28, 31, 39, 42-43, 54-57, 59, 61, 64, 70-71, 77, 86, 120, 141-142

Why is lamenting important? Lamenting prevents us from stuffing emotion and growing hopeless or bitter and forces us to converse with God in our pain. Each step of lament is part of a pathway toward hope.

HOW TO LAMENT?

The biblical pattern of lament – *Turn, Complain, Ask, Trust*

Turn to God – An address to God such that what follows is a prayer, sometimes combined with complaint.

- Psalm 77:1: “I cry out to God...”
- What makes lamenting unique is that you are bringing your pain, struggles, questions to God. He can take it! And he is the only one powerful enough to do anything about it. Therefore, take all of it directly to Him through prayer.

Bring Your Complaints – Identifying in blunt language the specifics of pain or injustice. “Why?” or “How?” are often part of the complaint.

- Lament is the language of people who believe in God’s sovereignty but still live in a world where really hard, oftentimes tragic things happen.
- Psalm 10:1: “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”
- The Psalms give us permission (even encouragement!) to lay out our struggles in the form of questions to God Himself.
- How do we complain biblically without falling into unbelief? Key elements to follow: Come humbly. Pray the Bible (use the Psalms of lament). Be honest (God knows anyway!) And finally, don’t just complain, but move to the next step of lament.

Ask Boldly – Specifically calling upon God to act in a manner that fits with His character and resolves the previous complaint.

- Because we know God loves his children and has power over all things, we can boldly approach Him with big asks regarding our pain and complaints.
- Here are some bold things that the psalmists (and we!) can ask of God: Arise O Lord! (i.e. Do something!) Help us! Remember your covenant (i.e. Connect your

¹ Adapted from Mark Vroegop’s excellent book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*

present struggle with His historic faithfulness)! Let justice be done! Don't remember my sins (i.e. Don't treat me as my sins deserve)! Restore my family, relationships, etc! Don't be silent – listen to me! Teach me! Vindicate me!

- The Yet Bridge. The key word “yet” becomes the bridge from the end of complaint to the beginning of trust.
- Psalm 22:1-3: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?... O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. *YET* you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel...”

Choose to Trust – An affirmation of God's worthiness to be trusted and a commitment to praise Him.

- Trust = Active Patience. As we wait for future deliverance, our spiritual posture need not be passive. We actively entrust our pain and struggles to Him.
- Psalm 13 follows the familiar pattern of lament – from turning to complaining to asking... and then, to trusting God in hope that He hears and acts because of who He is.
- Psalm 13:1-2 turns to God and complains: “How long, O Lord?”
- Psalm 13:3 asks: “Consider and answer me, O Lord my God...”
- Psalm 13:5 chooses to trust: “But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart will rejoice in your salvation.”

HOMEWORK

Any time you experience some form of significant pain, deep grief, or harmful injustice, set aside some dedicated time alone with the Lord to work through the following homework assignment.

- Identify with specific language each pain or injustice you are grieving. A helpful question to consider: What are you grieving the loss of? Examples could be the loss of relationship, trust, joy, etc.
- Write out each pain or injustice on the front-side of a 3x5 notecard.
- On the back-side, write out a prayer of lament to the Lord following the Turn, Complain, Ask, Trust pattern.
- As you write out your prayer of lament for each pain/injustice, take your time. Be raw and intimate with the Lord. Let Him meet you. He is with you. He deeply loves you. He will comfort you. He can take your emotions and rawness.
- After completing your notecards, you now have something tangible to work through when the pain returns. Some grief and pain takes a long time to heal. That's ok. When it returns, walk through the pattern of lament again – Turn, Complain, Ask, Trust. Use these notecards as a guide. The more your practice, the easier it will become, and the more God will continue to comfort, love, and heal you.

Remember: The goal of lament is *not* to achieve a change in your circumstances. The goal of lament is to process through your grief with the God who loves you and entrust it all to Him.