



August 11, 2019
Pastor Chris Regas

Summer in the Psalms

Lesson Five • Lament Psalms

The Lost Art of Lament

To Cry Is Human But to Lament Is Christian.

Lament is how Christ followers **EXPRESS** their suffering to God.

Recovering the Lost Art of Lamenting

1. LOSING the Art of Lamenting

- **DEFINING** Lament: *What Did We Lose?*

Lament is the **HONEST CRY** of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness.

Lament sets us free to vocalize our **PAIN** as it moves us toward God-centered worship.

Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to **TRUST**.

It is the pathway from heartbreak to **HOPE** in God, whose glory is greater than our groaning.

- **DISCOVERING** Lament: *How Did We Lose it?*

Much of Life Is Lived in a Minor Key!

Yet the minor key of lament is often **MISSING** in our lives.

2. LEARNING to Lament: **"I CRY!"**

- I **INVOKE** Prayerfully – Break the silence of sorrow and suffering by turning to the LORD in prayer and crying out loud to Him!

Psalm 13:1 How long, O LORD?

Psalm 22:1 My God! My God!

- C **COMPLAIN** Honestly – Bring your complaint before the LORD with honesty and humility.

- **BLUNTLY** lay out the specific pain or injustice.

Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 22:1-2, 15

- Admit your **HEART** frustrations by asking the **HARD** questions.

WHY, O LORD?

Why is this happening? What is Your purpose in this?

HOW long, O LORD?

*When will your power kick-in? When will Your promises be fulfilled?
When will my prayers be answered?*

WHERE are you, O LORD?

Where is Your presence in all of this?

- R **REQUEST** Boldly – Specifically and boldly call upon the LORD to act in a manner consistent with His character to resolve your complaint.

Psalm 13:3-4; Psalm 22:11, 19-21

- **BUT, YET,** or **AND** often mark the transition from complaint to request.

- Often it is a bold demand for God to **TAKE ACTION**.

- Y **YIELD** Confidently – By faith choose to trust the LORD before He acts or answers.

Psalm 13:5-6; Psalm 22:3-5, 9-10, 22-24

3. LIVING with Lament

Lament Gives Us a...

Language **for** loss.

Solution **to** silence.

Category **for** complaint.

Framework **for** feelings.

Pilgrimage **for** pain.

Way **to** worship.

Lament Will Finally End in Eternity!

"...will not God bring about justice for His elect who cry to Him day and night, and will He delay long over them? I tell you that He will bring about justice for them quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?"

Luke 18:7-8

Keep Trusting the One Who Keeps You Trusting!

Let your pain drive you to Jesus Christ, the Man of Sorrows.
Repent of sinful self-reliance and trust in Him alone as Your Sovereign Savior!

Let your pain teach you how to lament before your Lord.
Your pain can become a platform for prayer that leads to praise!

Learn to Lament with the Psalms of Lament

The Psalms of Lament are songs of sadness and sorrow due to suffering and sin in a fallen world. A lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God's goodness. It is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. It is the pathway from heartbreak to hope in God, whose glory is greater than our groaning.

Lament set us free to vocalize our pain as it moves us toward God-centered worship. Lament is the way Christians work through their emotions and persevere through pain and loss before their heavenly Father. Lament leads us to trust the One who keeps us trusting.

The Different Types of Lament Psalms		
Personal	An individual vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion to the LORD and His people.	3, 4, 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
Community	A group or nation vocalizing pain, grief, fear, or some other strong emotion to the LORD and His people.	12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, 126
Pentential	An individual or group expressing sorrowful regret and sincere repentance for sin to the LORD and His people.	6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143
Imprecatory	An individual or group expressing outrage and a strong call for the LORD to execute justice on behalf of His people.	35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140
Partial	Sections of lament within other kinds of psalms.	9:13-20; 27:7-14; 40:11-17
Debatable	Psalms that some consider to be lament in total or in part.	14, 36, 41, 52, 53, 63, 78, 81, 89, 106, 125, 129, 139

Laments follow a general pattern that can be summarized as **"I CRY!"**

- I INVOKE Prayerfully** – Break the silence of sorrow and suffering by turning to the LORD in prayer and crying out loud to Him: **O LORD!**
- C COMPLAIN Honestly** – Bring your complaint before the LORD with honesty and humility. Bluntly lay out the specific pain or injustice. Admit your heart frustrations and ask your hard questions: **WHY, O LORD? HOW long, O LORD? WHERE are you, O LORD?**
- R REQUEST Boldly** – Specifically and boldly call upon the LORD to act in a manner that is consistent with His character and will resolve your complaint. **BUT, YET, or AND** mark this transition and the next one.
- Y YIELD Confidently** – Choose to trust the LORD by faith before He acts or answers. Affirm His worthiness to be trusted. Yield yourself completely and repeatedly as you patiently wait on Him. Commit to publicly praising Him with His people when He does answer or act.

Even though laments follow a general pattern that is summarized by **"I CRY!"**

- I INVOKE Prayerfully**
- C COMPLAIN Honestly**
- R REQUEST Boldly**
- Y YIELD Confidently**

It is important to remember that this order is not rigidly followed in the Psalms of Lament. **Invoking** and **complaining** are often combined. Sometimes **yielding** comes before **requesting** (e.g., Psalms 3). Our sorrow cannot be legislated by rules or limited to one particular pattern.

Nevertheless, it is important that each of these elements are a part of our lament in order to move us from pain to praise, from heartbreak to hope, from sorrow to singing, from our groaning to His glory! We never want to get stuck simply complaining to the LORD. Whining is not lamenting!

Psalm 13 is a great example of all the elements of **"I CRY!"**

"I CRY" with Psalm 13	
INVOKE Prayerfully	1 How long, O LORD?
COMPLAIN Honestly	1 How long , O LORD? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? 2 How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart all the day? How long will my enemy be exalted over me?
REQUEST Boldly	3 Consider and answer me , O LORD my God; Enlighten my eyes , or I will sleep the sleep of death, 4 And my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," And my adversaries will rejoice when I am shaken.
YEILD Confidently	5 But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; My heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. 6 I will sing to the LORD, Because He has dealt bountifully with me.

Read through the Psalms of Lament and look for this pattern. Then begin to cry out to the LORD using this pattern on your path from pain to praise. It will help you to keep trusting the One who keeps you trusting!

This study was adapted from and is indebted to Mark Vroegop's excellent book, **Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament**.



“My God, My God, Why?”

Understanding the Lament Psalms

By Stacey Gleddiesmith

My quest to understand the psalms of lament began in the midst of a deep period of depression. I had spent a wonderfully rich two months in Ethiopia, recording Christian Somali music for broadcast from Ethiopia over Somalia. During my time there I received numerous “prophetic words” that doors would open for me when I returned to Canada. But within a few short months of my return I was unemployed and living in the basement of a friend’s parent’s house. My familial home had burned down and a friend of mine had committed suicide. These were not the doors I wanted opened.

I was deeply disillusioned with God, completely buried under my grief, and spent most of my days either in a futile job search or sleeping. During this time I was still leading worship at church, and my depression inevitably deepened on the weeks I was to lead worship. At the time, I was unable to pinpoint the reason for this, but when I finally began to come out of my depression, I realized that I felt I could not worship God on Sunday mornings—not as I was. Although many individuals and families in the church supported me in critical ways during this time, I felt wholly excluded when the church gathered for worship. In the midst of my depression, I did not feel I could bring my whole self into a context in which only praise seemed acceptable.

Eventually, as I grew well enough to talk these thoughts over with my pastor and others in the congregation, I began to realize that perhaps the difficulty was not so much with me but with the way I was leading worship. If one of the purposes of the gathered worship of the church is to unify, surely there had to be something wrong with worship services that created feelings of separation from God and God’s people. This conviction grew stronger as I talked with others who had been feeling the same way.

During my depression, the only Scripture passages I had felt able to read were the psalms—specifically the psalms of lament. It seemed right, then, to begin to include in the gathered worship of the church the Scriptures that had made me feel included in God’s story even in the midst of my depression. I was amazed by the response I received. I began to hear from others who felt they had to leave a part of themselves at the door if they were going to be able to worship God. Not only did these individuals now feel included in the worship of the church, they also discovered a new capacity for praise.

Israel’s Songbook

The book of Psalms exists today because the people of Israel used these songs, including the songs of lament, in their worship, and they sang them often enough that the psalms were remembered and recorded for future generations.

This songbook of Israel contains more psalms of lament than any other type of psalm. There are so many psalms of lament that they can be broken into subcategories: individual lament, corporate lament, psalms of confession, illness, political complaint, and the like.

Today, however, the psalms of lament are used infrequently by the church. And when we do use them in worship, all too often we skip over the complaint, reading or singing only the expression of trust and praise with which so many of the lament psalms conclude.

It seems strange that the church today would find lament so difficult, when it was such an integral expression of worship for Israel, but perhaps we do not use lament because we do not understand it. We make lament synonymous with grieving, and therefore fail to understand its significance and its use.

Structure of a Lament

Address. A biblical lament cries out *to God*. This is not an internally focused process of grieving, it is first and foremost a prayer, a conversation. When we further consider the God to whom we cry, this aspect of a lament psalm, brief as it may be (“My God, my God”; Ps. 22) takes on even greater significance. We cry to an omnipotent God, a good and merciful God, a just God, a God who grants us access to himself and invites us into personal relationship with him.

Complaint. A lament honestly and specifically names a situation or circumstance that is painful, wrong, or unjust—in other words, a circumstance that does not align with God’s character and therefore does not make sense within God’s kingdom. The emotional tone of the complaint varies, depending on the type of lament psalm. It may express sorrow, remorse, weariness, anger, disappointment, or doubt.

Request. A lament expects a response or an answer. It expects that God will be able to do something about the situation. Most often the request sounds like a demand: it is the psalmist’s essential heart-rending cry, “God, *do something!*”

Expression of trust. A lament generally includes an explicit expression of trust, sometimes woven through the complaint and request, and other times concluding the psalm with an almost jarring note of praise. Some expressions of trust are such a startling departure from the rest of the psalm (“I am in the midst of lions; I lie among ravenous beasts—men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens; let your glory be over all the earth,” Ps. 57:4-5) that they seem to sharply divide the psalm into two parts: lament and praise. But to understand biblical lament properly, we must acknowledge that the expression of trust, with all its praise and joy, is *part* of a psalm of lament.

Biblical lament, then, is an honest cry to a God who is powerful, good, and just—a cry that this situation is not in alignment with God’s person or purposes. It’s a cry that expects an answer from God, and therefore results in hope, trust, and joy rather than despair.

This understanding of lament makes it much easier for us to apply the psalms of lament to our own lives and to the life of our congregation.

Indeed, we begin to see that biblical lament is *necessary* in a world that does not always operate according to God's purposes.

The Lord Reigns

In his book *In the House of the Lord*, Michael Jenkins suggests that the central assertion of the psalms is “the Lord reigns.” If we take this central assertion to be true—and I think it is, both in the time of Israel and today in our own congregations—then the lament psalms should hold a very special place in the Psalter. Through lament, we affirm that God reigns, even in the midst of circumstances that might suggest otherwise. By crying out in our pain to a powerful, merciful, and good God, by asking him to intervene, we proclaim the day of Christ's coming. We affirm our trust in his ability to transform this world. We proclaim that even death has been answered, even death is *lamentable*.

At its very heart, a lament is an expression of trust in the character, power, and previous action of God—an expression of trust that looks beyond our current circumstances to *what will be* and *what is*—the reality behind the reality.

It is our challenge then, as worship leaders, to take up the cry of lament for our congregations, for our communities, for a world that is not aligned with God's person and purpose. It is our challenge to continue to cry out to God, to continue to expect an answer, and therefore continue to live in hope, trusting that our good, powerful, and just God does indeed reign.

A Prayer of Lament

This example uses Psalm 22* to illustrate each of the elements of a psalm of lament: address, complaint, request, and expression of trust.

Address

“My God, my God” (v. 1).

Complaint

“Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest... My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death” (vv. 1-2, 15).

Request

“Lord, do not be far from me....Come quickly to help me. Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen” (vv. 19-21).

Expression of Trust

“Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.... Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me feel secure on my mother's breast...I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you.... For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help” (vv. 3-4, 9, 22, 24).

* Jesus Himself cried out with this lament while on the cross.



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