

Praying the Psalms

Zoom Bible Study | Lesson Four

October 3, 2023

Praying the Psalms of Lament

What times during your spiritual journey have had the most impact on teaching you to trust God?

Two verses from an old hymn, “God Works in a Mysterious Way,” are especially meaningful:

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy, and shall break
In blessings on your head!

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace:
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

Where does lament take us? It should take us to trust the sovereignty of God more and more.

Name someone in your life that you trust. Why do you trust that person?

The Fear of Trusting God

Throughout all your days, you will go through times of lament—big ones and small ones. And as a follower of Jesus Christ, you will need to decide if those times will take you down or cause you to grow-up in your faith.

Failing to trust God is sin!

Isaiah 29:16: *You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, “You did not make me”? Can the pot say to the potter, “You know nothing”?*

Isaiah 45:9: *“Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, ‘What are you making?’ Does your work say, ‘The potter has no hands’?”*

Trusting God is coming to the end of ourselves, and finally settling where we should have been all along:

Isaiah 64:8: *Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*

Lament is our school room to teach us to trust Jesus more.

Psalm 13

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
² How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?
³ Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
⁵ But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
⁶ I will sing the Lord's praise,
for he has been good to me.

David prays for God's answer and for God to "give light to my eyes."

Psalm 119:105: *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.*

Matthew 6:22 – 23: *"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!"*

In a time of lament, if you do not go quickly to God's Word for light—if you rely on your feelings or what others are telling you or what this culture tells you—you can easily be led astray.

Proverbs 15:22: *Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*

Proverbs 24:6: *Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.*

In this Psalm (13:5-6), once David has voiced his lament, then comes the "but":

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord's praise,
for he has been good to me.*

Three specific things David does:

1. He restates his belief that God's love never fails and because of that, God is trustworthy.

What do you believe about God's love for you?

Romans 8:35 – 39:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

"For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2. David rejoices in God's salvation.



In times of lament, you choose joy because the alternative is depression and discouragement, doubt and despair, bitterness and resentment. And it is a daily choice. So, choose joy every day!

Have you told anyone lately how you came to saving faith? Have you lately thought about the pit you were in before you placed your trust in Jesus?

Psalm 40:2 – 3

He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. ³He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear the Lord and put their trust in him.

Rejoice in God's salvation in your life. Tell it, repeat it.

3. David then sings about God's goodness to him.

Frequently David in his psalms of lament couples his lament with singing. From *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, "When we are battling falsehoods in our thinking, sometimes singing has the power to convince our emotions to change."

Psalm 73 – Selected verses

Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

¹³Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.

¹⁶When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply¹⁷till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.

²¹When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered,²²I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you.²³Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.

²⁴You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ²⁷Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.²⁸But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.

This is a psalm which begins with a lament about how the world is treating Asaph and ends with a major mental and memory adjustment. The turning point for Asaph was "until" – until he entered the sanctuary of God.

Often in our sorrow, in our pity parties, we just don't give God a chance to talk to us. We choose instead to keep heaping our sad story on whoever will listen, or repeating it to ourselves, and digging a deeper and deeper hole of bitterness and pity for ourselves.

Keep in mind that Asaph had his story straight. He lived in an evil world full of people who were against God and God's Word. But when he went into the presence of God, he got an eternal viewpoint.

The Bible says we have the mind of Christ, which means that when we give God time to talk to us, through his Spirit and his Word, we start to think the way God thinks and that changes everything.

Asaph went from feeling sorry for himself to repenting of his sin:

When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you (Psalm 73:21-22).

If that's where you are today, you need to enter into God's sanctuary, that sacred place where you meet with the living God! You need God-vision. Confess your lack of trust and pray for God's perspective.

That's what Asaph did, and listen to this changed man:

Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand.²⁴ You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory.²⁵ Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.²⁷ Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.²⁸ But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds (Psalm 73:23-28).

Asaph declares what he knows to be true about God. And he knew this because he knew God and he knew God because he had spent time getting to know God.

Psalm 77 was also written by Asaph. Again, he begins with a cry to God in his day of trouble. But notice what he does, as he laments the conditions of the world in which he lived:

Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"
¹⁰ Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.
¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
¹² I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds."
¹³ Your ways, God, are holy.
What god is as great as our God?
¹⁴ You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.
¹⁵ With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

Asaph bemoans the conditions of his world, and then he changes his thoughts. He determines to appeal to the God that he knows.

This is exactly what we must do in our times of doubt; in times of worry and concern; when we're spiritually dry; when we've sinned and wandered from God; when the world seems to be against us. We must remember God's goodness.

Godly lament is intended to lead us to trust a totally trustworthy God. You come to the end of your lament with this new understanding and you say with Asaph: "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."