

Praying the Psalms

Zoom Bible Study | Lesson Three

September 26, 2023

Praying the Psalms of Lament

When you lament to God, as we are instructed to do, God enters into your pain with you; he feels your pain as no one else can and meets your need in the way that's right for you.

Psalm 142:2: *I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble.*

Psalm 55:22: *Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken.*

And from the New Testament as well:

1 Peter 5:7: *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*

Cast means to throw—a decisive and emphatic decision to make a move.

This is what Jesus taught us about lament:

Matthew 11:28 – 30: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."*

If you don't lament as you should, it comes out as griping and complaining—to whoever will listen. Or worse, turns into bitterness.

Lament is a gift from God to us.



We all have troubles and sorrows in this life journey, some more than others. But no one avoids those seasons and times when heartache and heartbreak come on you like a tsunami. No matter how strong your faith is, how long you've been walking with God, how well you know your Bible, when grief or sorrow strike you, it seems to take out your underpinnings; it shakes your faith.

Lament is what God gives us as his children for times of overwhelming grief or sorrow.

Biblical lament is not just a gripe session. It is intended to draw us close to God in times of suffering and pain. And praise is part of lament.

In his book, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, Mark Vroegop defines lament as, “a prayer of pain that leads to trust.” Lament is the wailing of the heart before a God who hears, who listens, and who responds to our cries.

Just as much as the Christian ought to come before God with songs of thanksgiving and praise, we ought to come before God with lament. It is more than a suggestion; it is an instruction. The laments of the Bible are similar in many ways:

- **The psalmists direct their complaint to God.**

Psalm 3:1: *Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!*

Psalm 74:1: *O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture.*

Psalm 22:1: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?*

- **The psalmists describe their suffering in plain language.**

Psalm 42:3: *My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, “Where is your God?”*

Psalm 31:9 – 10: *Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.*

- **They call on God for help.**

Psalm 44:23 – 24: *Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?*

Psalm 74:19, 23: *Do not hand over the life of your dove to wild beasts; do not forget the lives of your afflicted people forever. ²³ Do not ignore the clamor of your adversaries, the uproar of your enemies, which rises continually.*

- **Eventually the psalmists return to and remember God’s faithfulness and goodness and declare their intention to trust God.**

Psalm 13:5 – 6: *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.*

Psalm 69:29 – 30: *But as for me, afflicted and in pain—may your salvation, God, protect me. I will praise God’s name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.*

Psalm 31:14 – 15: *But I trust in you, Lord; I say, “You are my God.” My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.*

Jesus Lamented

He lamented on the cross from **Psalm 22:1:** “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

He lamented over Jerusalem and his people:

Matthew 23:37 – 38:

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.

He lamented over the death of Lazarus:

John 11:33 - 36

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. ³⁴ "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ Then the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"

He lamented in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his crucifixion:

Matthew 26:36 – 39:

Then Jesus came with them to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, "Sit here while I go and pray over there." ³⁷ And He took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and He began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed. ³⁸ Then He said to them, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me." ³⁹ He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."

Two psalms of lament that address our sorrow when you feel abandoned.

Psalms 6

Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. ² Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint; heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony. ³ My soul is in deep anguish. How long, Lord, how long?

⁴ Turn, Lord, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailing love. ⁵ Among the dead no one proclaims your name. Who praises you from the grave? ⁶ I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. ⁷ My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes.

⁸ Away from me, all you who do evil, for the Lord has heard my weeping.

⁹ The Lord has heard my cry for mercy; the Lord accepts my prayer. ¹⁰ All my enemies will be overwhelmed with shame and anguish; they will turn back and suddenly be put to shame.

Sometimes you may be lamenting over something in which you recognize that your hands are not totally clean.

Psalms 103:

As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

You are coming to a compassionate Father, so, never let your guilty conscience prevent you from taking your lament to the Lord.

Claim God's deliverance based on who God is—because. . .

- You are a God of compassion
- Your love never fails, and nothing can cause you to stop loving me
- You are patient and longsuffering
- You have promised never to leave me or forsake me

Next David seems to go into his own pity party:

- I am worn out from moaning.
- My bed is flooded with my tears (a slight exaggeration?).
- My eyesight is failing me.

If you wanted to use this Psalm in a lament to the Lord, how would you use it? What words would you pray?

Books of the Psalms:

Book 1 – Psalms 1 – 41

Book 2 – Psalms 42 – 72

Book 3 – Psalms 73 – 89

Book 4 – Psalms 90 – 106

Book 5 – Psalm 107 – 150

They are marked off by concluding doxologies. For example:

Psalm 41:13: Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.
Amen and Amen.

Psalm 42 is titled: For the director of music. A *maskil* of the Sons of Korah.

The sons of Korah were Levites, from the family of Kohath. By David's time it seems they served in the musical aspect of the temple worship. Korah led a rebellion of 250 community leaders against Moses during the wilderness days of the Exodus (Numbers 16). God judged Korah and his leaders and they all died, but the sons of Korah remained (Numbers 26:9-11).

Psalm 42

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. ²My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? ³My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" ⁴These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.

⁵Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

⁶My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. ⁷Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. ⁸By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" ¹⁰My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

¹¹Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

Someone has called this an honest prayer from a discouraged saint. He is lamenting his need for God and the fact that he doesn't feel close to God.

Ever been there? Remembering how it used to be—wanting once again to know the presence of God in your life; to have that joy again? Whatever is causing or has caused those times of being in a desert time of your life, this is definitely a time and a reason to lament.

“The next best thing to living in the light of the Lord’s love is to be unhappy till we have it, and to pant hourly after it.” (Spurgeon)

Notice how this Psalmist talks to himself:

Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

True, he just talked about the reasons he was discouraged:

- Distance from God – “Where can I go and meet God?”
- Taunting unbelievers – People say all day, “Where is your God?”
- Memories of better days – He remembers the land of Jordan
- No longer had the good spiritual feelings he used to have – mourning all the time
- Many trials of life – oppressed by the enemy
- God’s slow response – Why have you forgotten me?

Still, it was as if the psalmist said, “Those are not good enough reasons to be cast down when I think of the greatness of God and the help of His favor and presence.”

Are you cast down?

Are you discouraged?

If so, make yourself say why; demand a reason of yourself.

He closes this lament with a declaration:

Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God (Psalm 42:11).

Are you in a dry place right now? Have you lost the wonder of your salvation? Have you allowed this sinful world to so wrap it’s tenacles around you and smother you so you just can’t hear God’s voice, you can’t feel his love? You need to lament.