

# Lament Psalms

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## Introduction

### The importance of lament

- An expression of where we are in the story
- Part of bringing all areas of life to our loving Father
- Words to pray when we struggle to pray

Pain and suffering take language from us – the Psalms help give it back

‘Why do we not have the words to express our pain? Part of the reason seems to be that there is an absence of talking about and expressing our pain in our society and the church, as mentioned earlier, but also – and more deeply – because pain is inherently language shattering. It takes our words away. Pain and suffering suppress us at the deepest level, including our voice. (...) It follows that in the midst of pain and suffering there is a need for the reality of our pain to be expressed. It is greatly comforting to have the words of the psalm to help one understand what one is feeling and thinking.’<sup>1</sup>

## Psalm 13 – a model lament

- <sup>1</sup> How long, LORD? Will you forget me for ever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?
- <sup>2</sup> 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?
- <sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, LORD my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- <sup>4</sup> and my enemy will say, ‘I have overcome him,’  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- <sup>5</sup> But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- <sup>6</sup> I will sing the LORD’s praise,  
for he has been good to me.

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<sup>1</sup> Tara J. Stenhouse. “The Psalms of Lament in the Experience of Suffering Christians,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church* (ed. Andrew G. Sheard; Nottingham: Apollos, 2013), 188-189.

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### **The address (v1)**

- Reverence
- Boldness

### **Telling God the problem (1-2)**

- Ambiguity of the psalms
- Honesty

### **Asking God to answer (3-4)**

- lament v 'be still my soul'
- delegating to junior or deferring to someone senior?

### **Affirmation of trust (5-6)**

- sorrowful yet always rejoicing (2 Cor 6:10)
- joy comes in the morning
- he has been good

## Reflections on lament

→ What are appropriate emotions / feelings / behaviour for a Christian?

'It is overwhelmingly important to reflect on the fact that this psalm [i.e. Ps 6], and dozens of similar ones, are included in Scripture. There is no attempt in Scripture to whitewash the anguish of God's people when they undergo suffering. They argue with God, they complain to God, they weep before God. Theirs is not a faith that leads to dry-eyed stoicism, but a faith so robust it wrestles with God.' (Carson, *How Long O Lord?*, 73)

If we think sorrow and joy cannot coexist, how will this affect:

- How we relate to someone who is grieving / has depression?
- How we understand New Testament commands to 'rejoice'?
- What answer we expect (and permit) to the question 'how are you doing?'

→ No need for \_\_\_\_\_

→ No need to know \_\_\_\_\_

→ No need for things to \_\_\_\_\_

## Laments can help us accompany those who are suffering

'Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.' (Rom 12:15)

'Those who are at ease have contempt for misfortune  
as the fate of those whose feet are slipping.' (Job 12:5)

'Being with people who are not (*aware of how they themselves are also*) broken feels very scary indeed. It feels like you might break even more. BUT... the relief, the joy, the *reassurance* of being with people who are... well that makes it all a little bit more bearable.' Mark Meynell<sup>2</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Mark Meynell. <https://markmeynell.wordpress.com/2015/08/16/the-black-dog-10-years-on-6-so-you-want-to-help/>

## Reflections, resources

- Do we feel able to pray like the Psalmist here? Why / why not?
- What does this psalm teach us about God?
- What is the encouragement from this psalm for situations where we feel 'I don't know what to pray'?
- How might this psalm affect how we walk with those who are struggling?
- How able do people feel to express the sentiments of v1-4
  - with me?
  - in my small group?
  - at church?

Why / why not? How could we change this?

## A psalm-inspired lament hymn – to the tune 'Be thou my vision'

v1 God of all comfort be near us we pray  
When sorrow is rising and hope falls away  
We lift up our voices, and boldly we cry:  
Come bind up our hearts, Lord, with the mercies of Christ

v2 God of compassion we bring you our tears  
Give ear to our groaning and quiet our fears  
Draw near in our darkness and show us your light  
And banish the shadow with the mercies of Christ

v3 God of the nail-wounds, our griefs you have known  
You entered our weakness, the cross was your throne  
You stepped down from heaven to lift us on high  
How tender, how mighty are the mercies of Christ

v4 God of all glory, whom angels still praise  
Your goodness will follow us all of our days  
We look for the morning when dawn lights the sky  
And death is defeated by the mercies of Christ

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## Books

*Dealing with Depression: Trusting God through the Dark Times* – Sarah Collins and Jayne Haynes

*When Darkness Seems My Closest Friend: Reflections On Life And Ministry With Depression* – Mark Meynell

*Tumbling Sky: Psalm Devotions for Weary Souls* – Matt Searles

Anything by Zac Eswine: *Sensing Jesus; Spurgeon's Sorrows*

ESV Study Bible notes on the Psalms – best Psalms commentary I've come across