

# Lament: A Sorrow Expressed

We all experience pain. Deep pain comes in different forms: failing health, economic hardship, troubled children, strained relationships, loss of a loved one, terminal illness, unfair treatment, fearsome odds, pain without answers or pain without easy fixes.

Experiencing such pain gives us a kinship with a long list of faithful ones - Job, Hannah, Jeremiah, David, Habakkuk, Moses, Mary, Martha, Daniel, Jacob, Naomi to name a few. Pain is knit into the fabric of life here below and we will not leave this place without it.

To support us in this raw reality, God knits something else into the fabric of our faith – Lament. Lament is a sorrow or pain expressed or a cry that springs from and proceeds to faith. This prayer should lead us to trust. It has both a shape and is shaping. Lament has often been used by our faithful forefathers and a well-worn pattern has emerged. It looks something like this: turn, complain, ask, trust.

First the grieving one turns to God. They direct their lament to the Father. God is the recipient of our sorrow. Next the grieving one complains. Full and unreserved protest is leveled at God. It's the honesty of our heart released. Third, the grieving one asks. Direct requests are made to God. Unabashed appeals are submitted. Finally, the grieving one trusts. A resignation is laid at the Father's feet. A "no-matter-what" reckless abandoned commitment to God results. The above represents the shape of lament, and this is the shaping it does in our souls. It takes us from pain to promise through the gut wrenching realities of brokenness.

Consider the current matters that trouble you. Would you fill in the prompts below and begin to lament?

- **Turn:** "Father, I bring the important matter of \_\_\_\_\_ to you."
- **Complain:** "Have you forgotten me? Do you not hear my frequent groanings? So often I have spoken to you about \_\_\_\_\_ and it seems hope is lost. My heart grieves."
- **Ask:** "Father, I boldly ask you to \_\_\_\_\_. Speedily come to my defense. With your mighty arm, \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Trust:** "I resign \_\_\_\_\_ to you Father. For where else shall I turn? Nowhere. My hope is in you."

Because laments are so practiced, rehearsed, reviewed and repeated in Israel's history, they have imprinted themselves in the hymnody of the Hebrew culture. One out of every three Psalms is a lament. By this we learn that not only are laments personal, they are communal also. God intends the community of believers to lament with your brothers and sisters in sorrow. Lamenting as a community is important when our abilities to help fall short or when our wisdom to fix is insufficient or when our capacity to "make it better" is overrun. Lament is what we can offer. And when we do, our hearts in a small way are aligned with God's heart. In that moment we help carry the sorrow.

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Consider the matters that currently trouble your community of believers or your close friends around you. Consider using prompts like the ones below and begin to lament together - listening to each other's cries of pain and together turning these cries into trust.

- **Turn:** "Father, the brokenness of \_\_\_\_\_ is urgent and dire."
- **Complain:** "How long will \_\_\_\_\_ toil under the weight of these circumstances? Because you do not \_\_\_\_\_, people wonder if you are real. They wonder if you are trustworthy."
- **Ask:** "Father, I ask You to mightily \_\_\_\_\_. Show your glory by \_\_\_\_\_. Silence the mocker by \_\_\_\_\_. Win the faithless to you by \_\_\_\_\_."
- **Trust:** "I will cling to your promises. I will never abandon you. The circumstances of \_\_\_\_\_ will only embolden my faith whatever the outcome."

God gave us lament because He personally understands grief. Jesus was known for His sorrows. Isaiah announces Him as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief (*Is. 53*). Lament to Jesus is not just a nice idea. It is much deeper than that. Lament is the cry of truth. An honest heart's cry rising from the seedbed of pain to God because the Father is real. After all, it was this honesty, this pain, this love of the Father that birthed Jesus's famous lament on the cross... "*My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?*" (*Matt 27:46*) May we as a body of believers be bold in our lamenting to the Father who understands our pain, and then may we, in turn, be shaped by these prayers of lament.