

HEART: Emotions

Handout #2: Psalms of Lament (Kayla Andersen)

What Is a Lament Psalm?

A lament psalm is a prayer of pain. Unlike psalms of praise or thanksgiving, lament psalms come from places of grief, betrayal, fear, or unanswered prayer. Instead of hiding those emotions, the psalmist brings them directly to God. Lament psalms are not faithless grumbling - they are faith-filled cries. It means we are still turning to God, even when He feels silent. They show us that true faith does not avoid hard questions but takes them to the Lord.

What Does a Lament Psalm Include?

Not every psalm includes every element, but most contain these movements:

- Address to God
- Complaint: honest expression of suffering or injustice
- Petition: asking God to act, to rescue, to heal, to answer
- Statement of trust: affirming God's character, even if nothing has changed
- Praise or vow: many laments end with worship or a renewed commitment

Which Psalms Are Lament Psalms?

Most scholars agree on a core group of individual lament psalms that clearly follow the lament pattern: 3; 6, 13, **22**, 31, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54-57, 59, 61, 64, **69**, 71, 77, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140-143.

Why Are Lament Psalms Helpful?

Most of us were never taught to pray this way. We learned how to give thanks, how to ask politely, and how to praise. But few of us ever learned how to wrestle.

Lament psalms are powerful because they give us permission to be honest with God. When our words fail or we struggle to put our emotions into sentences, we can utilize the language given to us in the laments. This category of psalms demonstrates to us that God welcomes our tears. In fact, as Psalm 56:8 says, He numbers each one in his book...He collects each one in a bottle.

In addition to providing us with language to engage with God in pain, these psalms also show us how God engages with us. He is not absent. He has not forgotten us. He has not turned His face away. Instead, lament itself is evidence that we believe He is still listening.

How to Use Lament Psalms in Prayer

If you are in a season of sadness, grief, or longing, these are some ways you can begin integrating the lament psalms into your prayer life:

- Read them aloud as your prayer when you do not have words of your own
- Journal them in your own words, following the structure of complaint, petition, and trust
- Personalize them by inserting your situation ("How long, O Lord, will my body hurt like this?")
- Pray them in community during seasons of corporate grief
- The purpose is not to "fix" your pain quickly. The purpose is to bring your full heart into the presence of God.

Example: Psalm 22 excerpts

- 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?
- ² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest...
- ⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
- ⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
- ⁸ "He trusts in the Lord," they say,
"let the Lord rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him...."
- ¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help...
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
- ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations...

Example: Psalm 69 excerpts

- ¹ Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.
- ² I sink in the miry depths,
where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.
- ³ I am worn out calling for help;
my throat is parched.
My eyes fail,
looking for my God...
- ⁵ You, God, know my folly;
my guilt is not hidden from you.
- ⁶ Lord, the Lord Almighty,
may those who hope in you
not be disgraced because of me;...
- ¹³ But I pray to you, Lord,
in the time of your favor;
in your great love, O God,
answer me with your sure salvation.
- ¹⁴ Rescue me from the mire,
do not let me sink;
deliver me from those who hate me,
from the deep waters.
- ¹⁵ Do not let the floodwaters engulf me
or the depths swallow me up...