

How to Process Pain, Loss and Sorrow With God

1. Address

- You are speaking to a Person. This is a relationship not a process or formula.
- The psalmist always makes clear who he is praying to, not just into the “air.”
- Connect first to God in your spirit, through a memory or a sense of Him. Don’t try to do this on your own strength with your own thinking only. Ps 139:⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?* ⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there...* ²³ *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*

Psalm 142

¹ *I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.*

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

³ *When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way.*

Questions:

- Do you feel comfortable addressing God?
- Does anything stand in the way of you being honest with God and yourself?
- Do you feel confident God will hear you through this process even if it is hard?

2. Give an honest recitation of the events/situation.

- The psalmist doesn’t deny any present negative reality. He pours it all out! He begins with the truth of his dire situation and he holds nothing back. [And God listens lovingly].
- This is between you and God. This is not the time to filter whether you are blaming anyone. Just pour out the facts as you see them.

Psalm 142

³ *In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me.*

⁴ *Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.*

Psalm 44

¹³ *You have made us a reproach to our neighbors, the scorn and derision of those around us.* ¹⁷ *All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you; we had not been false to your covenant.* ¹⁸ *Our hearts had not turned back; our feet had not strayed from your path.*

Questions:

- Make a list of the facts of the situation in either short point or a timeline of events.
- Summarize the facts of the beginning, middle and end of the situation.

3. Give an honest expression of fear, anger, doubt, confusion, despair, etc.

- God is not afraid of our emotions, in fact Jesus expressed fear, doubt, exasperation, abandonment.
- An emotion is not a thought. i.e. “I felt they didn’t listen to me” is a thought. An emotion would be sad, angry, discouraged, despondent, frustrated, hurt, insecure, anxious...
- Expression of emotion can be in the form of a question, “*How long, O Lord? Will you utterly forget me?*” (Psalm 13:2) Charles Spurgeon stated “Faith is allowed to enquire of her God the causes of his displeasure, and she is even permitted to expostulate with him and put him in mind of his promises and ask why apparently they are not fulfilled.
- The Psalmist pours out all his emotions to God. [And God listens lovingly].

Psalm 142

I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. ⁶ Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need;

Psalm 55 (about his enemies)

My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught ³because of what my enemy is saying, because of the threats of the wicked; for they bring down suffering on me and assail me in their anger. ⁴ My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen on me. ⁵ Fear and trembling have beset me; horror has overwhelmed me. ⁶ I said, “Oh, that I had the wings of a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.

Psalm 88 (about God)

⁶ You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavily on me; you have overwhelmed me with all your waves. ⁸ You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them. I am confined and cannot escape; my eyes are dim with grief. I call to you, Lord, every day; I spread out my hands to you. ¹⁰ Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do their spirits rise up and praise you? ¹¹ Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? ... ¹⁸ You have taken from me friend and neighbor— darkness is my closest friend.

“How long, O Lord? Will you utterly forget me?” (Psalm 13:2), which implies: I am at the end of my rope, and I cannot hold on much longer; and, “Why, O Lord, do you stand aloof? Why hide in times of distress?” (Psalm 10:1), which implies: “I do not understand what is going on; this makes no sense. How long? Why?” These are not requests for information, but cries of pain.

Questions

- What three things were the hardest for you personally?

- Why were they significant to you?
- How did your emotions progress through the situation?
- What changed inside of you, as a result of those events?
 - What do you believe about yourself?
 - What do you believe about others?
 - What do you believe about God?

At this point you can stop and invite God to show You His response to your beliefs. Ask God to help you feel the emotion and picture the situation. Ask God, “Where are You in this memory?” God may even lead you to an earlier memory where these beliefs were first planted and reveal His heart in the matter.

4. Remember His Goodness

- The psalmist turns his attention to the goodness of God and His unfailing love.
- He remembers the great things God has already done and he gives thanks to God.
- He reminds himself of who God has been for him and he gives thanks.

Psalm 42 ⁴ *“These things I remember, as I pour out my soul...”*

Psalm 70:¹¹ *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.”*

Questions

- What are the things in life you are grateful for?
- Describe your salvation and the care God has given to you.

5. Make a Decision

- The psalmist makes a choice to put his present and future hope in God and God alone.
- The psalmist trust in God to hear and answer his prayer [not necessarily in the way he wishes]

Psalm 142 - ⁵ *I cry to you, Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.”*

Psalm 42:⁵ *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*

Questions

- How do you want to respond to this situation?
- What is your commitment to God?

6. Cry out for Deliverance

- Make your request to God in your time of need (see also Hebrews 4:15-16 – we come boldly)
- The psalmist cries out to God for deliverance again with genuine emotion.
- This is not a hopeless cry. The psalmist has assurance and has made a decision and expression of trust.

Psalm 143 - ⁷ *Answer me quickly, Lord; my spirit fails. Do not hide your face from me or I will be like those who go down to the pit. ¹¹ For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life; in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble. ¹² In your unfailing love, silence my enemies; destroy all my foes, for I am your servant.*

Psalm 31 - ³ *Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me. ⁴ Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge. ⁵ Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God. ⁹ Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.*

Questions

- What are the deepest requests and cries of your heart that you would freely say if no one but God could hear?
- How can God help you with your decision to choose Him and His ways?

7. Make a Choice to Worship

- Our worst day on earth is nothing compared to eternity with Him. (Romans 8:18)
- Worship includes thanksgiving (thanking God for what He has done in the past, present and what He promises to do in the future) and praise (boasting about God)
- Worship also goes to a deep place of recognizing God is God and there is no other. Even before we see the answered prayers, or even feel the burden lifted, the psalmist makes a choice to worship. We see the same from the prophets such as Habakkuk, Jeremiah, etc.

What has God built into you through this trial that you can thank Him for?

Writing Your Personal Psalm of Lament

1. **Address** (I call to the Lord who listens)
2. **Honest recitation of the negative facts**
3. **Honest recitation of negative emotions**
4. **Remember God's Character and Faithfulness**
5. **Make a Decision/Confession of trust**
6. **Petition** (what do you want God to do?)
7. **Worship**