

WNBS: Foundations & Formation

The Psalms of Lament

Participant Outline

The Psalms of Lament teach us how to bring our whole lives into the presence of God, including our praise, pain, questions, grief, repentance, and hope.

Key Thought: Lament is not a lack of faith. It is faith that brings the questions to God rather than walking away from God.

I. What is a Psalm of Lament?

A Psalm of Lament is a prayer or song that expresses deep distress and calls upon God for help, deliverance, justice, forgiveness, or restoration.

- Personal suffering
- Sickness or danger
- Grief and loss
- Betrayal or rejection
- Sin and spiritual failure
- Injustice or oppression
- National crisis
- Feeling forgotten or abandoned by God

Note: The psalmist does not pretend that everything is fine. Instead, the psalmist honestly brings the situation before God. Lament is directed toward God, not away from Him.

II. Types of Psalms of Lament

A. Individual Lament

An individual lament expresses the suffering and prayer of one person.

- Psalm 3 - Trouble from enemies
- Psalm 6 - Sickness and distress
- Psalm 13 - Feeling forgotten by God
- Psalm 22 - Abandonment and suffering
- Psalm 51 - Repentance and restoration
- Psalm 55 - Betrayal
- Psalm 88 - Deep sorrow and darkness

B. Communal Lament

A communal lament expresses the suffering of God's people as a nation or community.

- Psalm 44 - National defeat and confusion
- Psalm 60 - Military crisis

- Psalm 74 - Destruction of the sanctuary
- Psalm 79 - National devastation
- Psalm 80 - A plea for restoration
- Psalm 85 - Prayer for renewal and restoration

III. Authors Associated with the Psalms of Lament

- **David:** Many individual laments concerning persecution, fear, betrayal, danger, repentance, and dependence on God. Examples include Psalms 3, 6, 13, 22, 31, 51, 55, and 69.
- **Asaph and the Asaphite writers:** National suffering, injustice, spiritual confusion, and questions about God's justice. Examples include Psalms 73, 74, 77, 79, and 80.
- **The sons of Korah:** Spiritual discouragement, national distress, and longing for God's presence. Examples include Psalms 42, 43, and 44.
- **Moses:** Psalm 90 reflects on human weakness, the brevity of life, and the need for God's mercy.
- **Heman the Ezrahite:** Psalm 88 gives language to prolonged sorrow and spiritual darkness.
- **Anonymous writers:** Their psalms remind us that suffering and faith are shared by God's people across generations.

IV. The Structure of a Psalm of Lament

The structure of lament is not rigid. Some psalms contain every element, while others emphasize only certain parts.

1. **Address** - The psalmist speaks directly to God. See Psalms 13:1; 22:1; and 86:6.
2. **Complaint** - The psalmist describes the situation honestly, including enemies, sickness, sin, injustice, grief, loneliness, or God's apparent silence.
3. **Petition** - The psalmist asks God to hear, answer, save, deliver, heal, remember, restore, or show mercy.
4. **Confession or Declaration of Trust** - The psalmist remembers God's character and chooses to trust His faithfulness.
5. **Vow or Expression of Praise** - The psalmist promises to praise God or declares His faithfulness.

Common movement: Address -> Complaint -> Petition -> Trust -> Praise

V. Major Themes in the Psalms of Lament

- God welcomes honest prayer.
- Pain does not disqualify us from God's presence.
- God is the source of help.
- Waiting is part of faith.
- God's character is the foundation of hope.
- Lament can lead to worship.

VI. Psalm 13: A Model of Individual Lament

- Verses 1-2 - The crisis: David feels forgotten and overwhelmed.
- Verses 3-4 - The petition: David asks God to consider him and answer him.
- Verse 5 - The trust: David remembers God's mercy.
- Verse 6 - The praise: David declares that he will sing because God has dealt bountifully with him.

Reflection: Psalm 13 begins with “How long?” and ends with “I will _____.”

Note: The circumstances may not have been fully resolved, but David's prayer brought him into renewed confidence in God.

VII. Psalm 22: Lament and Messianic Hope

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” - Psalm 22:1 (KJV)

- Deep anguish
- Rejection
- Mockery
- Physical suffering
- A plea for deliverance

Key Thought: Psalm 22 points prophetically to the suffering of _____ on the cross. The psalm ultimately moves toward _____ and testimony.

Note: Psalm 22 describes anguish, rejection, mockery, physical suffering, and a plea for deliverance. Its opening words are echoed by Jesus Christ on the cross, connecting the psalm to His suffering and redemptive work. The psalm ultimately moves toward praise and testimony.

VIII. Psalm 51: Lament Over Sin

“Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” – Psalm 51:10 (KJV)

- Have mercy
- Blot out his transgressions
- Wash and cleanse him
- Create a clean heart
- Renew a right spirit
- Restore the joy of salvation
- Use him again

Key Thought: Lament is not only about what has happened _____ us. It also gives us language for grieving what we have done and returning to God.

Note: Psalm 51 is a penitential lament. David acknowledges his sin and asks God for mercy, cleansing, a clean heart, a renewed spirit, restored joy, and renewed usefulness.

IX. Psalm 88: Lament in the Midst of Darkness

Psalm 88 does not conclude with a clear expression of relief or celebration. Yet the psalmist continues to pray to God. Even when the answer has not come, continuing to call on God is an expression of faith.

X. Central Message

The Psalms of Lament teach us that God invites His people to bring their deepest pain, questions, failures, and fears to Him.

- Pray honestly
- Wait on God's timing
- Remember God's faithfulness
- Seek God's intervention
- Trust God in uncertainty
- Worship before the _____

Note: God invites His people to bring their deepest pain, questions, failures, and fears to Him. Through lament, believers learn to pray honestly, wait on God's mercy, remember His faithfulness, seek His intervention, trust Him in uncertainty, and worship before the breakthrough.

XI. Personal Application

When I face grief, disappointment, sickness, betrayal, or uncertainty, I can:

1. Bring my honest feelings to _____.
2. Describe my situation truthfully.
3. Ask God to intervene.
4. Remember God's character and past faithfulness.
5. Continue waiting and _____ Him.

XII. Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to bring our honest emotions before God?
2. How is lament different from complaining without faith?
3. Why is it important for the church to make room for people who are grieving or struggling?
4. What can we remember about God when He seems silent?
5. How can lament lead us back to worship?

XIII. Personal Reflection

What situation do I need to bring honestly before God?

What truth about God can I remember while I wait?

Final Takeaway

Faith does not require us to deny our pain. Faith gives us a place to take our pain. When we lament, we acknowledge the reality of our circumstances while holding on to the character of God. Through prayer, remembrance, and trust, God leads us from sorrow toward hope and from questioning toward worship.