

Lament with God

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This summer we're considering the meta question of the psalms: *How do I flourish?* This psalm answers the question through lament. *How long will this go on? Does anyone notice? Will things ever be the same again?* Questions that eek out yearning to flourish. We need to know how to *lament*. If you're struggling, listen for yourself. If you're not, listen for others. How can you counsel? Difficulty of Lament, Hopeful Counsel, Jagged Path Forward.

Difficulty of Lament

Consider the artwork [[graphic](#)] for this series: the mind of David exposed, *longing* for something like a deer panting for streams of water. The image puts us in the place of contemplation, but what exactly does the image suggest? *As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God.* Does the panting convey deep satisfaction, like when we gulp down water after a workout? Or is this *unsatisfied* yearning, a painful thirst, parched, dry? The Hebrew word can mean *crave*, associated with the cry of a deer. I was watching a nature show where veterinarians rescue animals. A baby deer was wedged in a gate between two black iron rods, and as the rescuer tried to pry her free the deer let out an awful cry. *"When shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my food, day and night"* (2-3). The writer asks *when*, implying *not* now is there satisfaction, refreshment, joy. Water has become to me, not streams of gladness, *but tears of sorrow*. Eating them implies a sorrow so intense, despair so strong, hunger is weak. Death, loss, disappointment. Day and night he weeps, a figure of speech conveying a state of continual sorrow. These verses are a bold admission of deep emotion...something we react to differently. Eastern cultures are very reluctant to divulge such deep emotion. Desire is to be suppressed, a sign of weakness. Western culture brandishes emotion. Emoticons?! And gender influences how we respond to emotion. **Men** stuff, women emote. It's not hard and fast, when my wife and I were younger I emoted, she stuffed. Now I'm old and callous, but men tend to see emotion as an inconvenience: *Crying about it doesn't fix anything*. We prefer to ignore it. Go for run, fix something, we belittle God-given emotions. We might even say pain is inadmissible. Despair not an option. As false masculinity is erected behind a stoic, unflappable man. A problem with this is that emotion will resurface. I know a man, former college baseball player, father of three boys who talked to his own dad every Sunday, until his father suddenly dropped dead from a heart attack; his mother died six months later. Months after the funerals he felt out of sorts, not himself, until one day he got so inexplicably angry he punched a hole in the wall. Started talking to others about it very helpful. Looking down at a scar on his hand and said to me, "This is a reminder of what happens when I bottle things up." Men, lament. The Son of God pleaded and wept before the Father. So can you. **Women** tend to embrace emotion: *I'm puttin it all out there*. They are more free and in touch with how they feel. But unfiltered, uncorked emotion has its own danger. I think of a woman who always brought her grief into the conversation, unable to listen to others. Emoting drove her into despair. She carried grief around like a purse, a permanent accessory to life. Her emotion ruled her. The danger with people who emote well is they tend to view emotional expression as salvation. It I can just get it out, as though catharsis is the answer. But well into the age of therapy, for the second year in a row, life

expectancy in the US has fallen with by “deaths of despair”: suicide, drug overdoses, alcoholism. Talking about our emotions isn’t enough.

Counsel for Hope

Then what is enough? This psalm encourages us to express emotion, but not as an end in itself, not merely *to others*. The writer says, *My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God (the face of God)?* (2). He knows he needs a face that doesn’t turn away. He needs the God who is alive to get through death. More than emotion he needs, verse 9, a rock to stand on. As you let it out with God, your emotion becomes lament, a prayer of pain, not catharsis, as you summon innermost craving, a cry for your Creator: *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God*” (5). This response shows us four ways to lament. **First, speak back to your emotion:** *Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?* The soul is the whole person, not just emotion, but mind, body, and spirit. To keep from being ruled by one part, he addresses the whole. Emotions speak loudly, so we have to learn how to talk over them, to stop the tape and talk back to ourselves. **Second, ask why?** What is it that you’re down? Try to move beyond circumstance to what’s behind the disappointment. Ask why? What’s behind the grief? What did you expect? Why are you disappointed? Had you hoped for a life without any sorrow? Did you expect God to only give you good things and not hard things? He cares too much to *leave us as is*. Or what injustice do you need to call to his attention: adversaries taunt me. A deadly wound I have in my bones (10)! Three times St. Paul pleaded for God to remove his thorn. **Third, tell yourself the truth**, redirect your hope from your disappointment, to the God of life. Notice the sufferer says *to himself: Hope. In. God.* Not in a life plan, not in retirement, not in a good weekend, the absence of suffering. Hope in God. Everyone suffers. The question isn’t will you suffer; it’s how will you suffer? With hope or lost in despair? The difference between a rant and a lament is hope. A rant emotes to condemn or for catharsis. A lament emotes before the face of God. It includes *him* in the sorrow. It finds hope in his face. And Jesus face is like the sun, *the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ* (2 Cor 4:6). His face warms, comforts, and heals. Your sorrow is an invitation to look into the eyes of Christ and say *you are my salvation*. Say you are feeling blue. You’re not where you want to be as a parent. You see other kids behaving better. Other parents seem to have thriving side-jobs or careers. happier. Being a mom or stay at home dad has you down. You post about how your kids are driving you mad. It doesn’t help. When spouse gets home you’re unengaged. Instead of emoting on SM, *Ask yourself* why you are down. Is it because your standard is too high? Because you are envying someone else? You think being a parent isn’t enough? *Speak back* to yourself. *Tell yourself the truth*. Hope in God not in being like someone else. He is your salvation, not a side-job or career. What if you’re having trouble doing this? Do it out aloud. It silences the other voices. Do it before the face of God. **Fourth, Do it with a friend.** One thing that brings this lamenter comfort is he remembers going with the throng, singing praise with the multitude. Don’t go alone. Don’t isolate. Invite others into your sorrows. Comforter, listen before counseling. Sometimes we just weep. But don’t leave people in their sorrow. Ask why, what’s behind the sorrow? What did you expect? And encourage them to hope in God, not relief. To talk back, and turn their gaze from grief to look Jesus in the face. Psalm 43 continues this lament, adding: *Send out your light and your truth; let*

them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling (3). Even if it's a pinhole follow the light. Grab a piece of the truth, and it will guide you to the face of Jesus.

Jagged Path Up

Finally, the jagged path. Picking up in verse 6, it seems like the lamenter resets: *My soul is cast down within me*. Here we go again, but then followed by talking back: *I will remember you*. Verse 7 *deep calls to deep*. God wants to meet me in all of this. He's calling me into depths of intimacy I can't find on a vacation. But then the *breakers* hit. Verse 9, *You are my rock!* Then, immediately, *Why have you forgotten me?* The second half of the psalm appears neurotic, oscillating between hope and despair. Does this throw the truth of it all into question? No, it reflects our experience. No one laments and then switches to the track of hope overnight. It's a jagged path up, to the face of God. like climbing a mountain, up, to the side, back down, up again. The psalmist is true to both his emotion *and* to the reality of the Rock. It's not perfection overnight but progress over a lifetime. That's hope in God in our imperfect world. He gets to the end of it all and the answer is the same, word for word. Simple and true. *Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God*. Talk Back. Ask Why. Tell Yourself the Truth. Deep is calling to deep so you can flourish before his face.