

Psalm 13

Title: The Gift of Lament

Main Point: Lament is a lost gift to much of the American Church. Lamenting is not grumbling. It is complaining to God while trusting Him. Lamenting is trusting in a sovereign God while being honest about the brokenness. Lament is a gift because it opens us to honesty about life while drawing us closer to our kind and loving Father. And because God took on flesh, He understands our complaints. Jesus knows. He invites us to partake of the gift of lament.

SI: Window into what to preach when don't preach weekly...

Early Feb Presbytery meeting... seminar on the psalms of lament... credit to Stephen Cloud
Then I started remembering the many trials and long term sufferings in our congregation –
Some of you are facing long term unemployment, some are dealing with family relational strife,
many of you know what it's like to face a long season of medical issues. Plus it's been winter
time and trials seem like they are worse in winter.

And there are many psalms that are psalms of lament. Biblical scholars have found that up to 50% of them are psalms of lament or contain portions of lament.

Read Ps 13.

Intro:

Not sure what David's circumstances are, but we can enter in to David's mindset:
I've been here a long time. I'm tired. I'm exhausted. I've been enduring, but now I'm spent.
How much longer? (Kids aren't you familiar with this question when you go on car rides?)

So lament is an aspect of God's word that is easy to miss. I mean no one wants to dwell on the suffering, spend time in it, sitting in it, talking about the waiting. But lament is a gift because it enables us not just to endure, but to endure with assurance that rescue is coming.

Broken power pole illustration – right by Third Pres. 22nd Street South > This is a picture of lament> There is brokenness all around us. Sometimes it jumps out at you and affects you personally. Out of all the hundreds of power poles, this one is not right. But it still has power. The power lines are still holding on.

This is a picture of lament. Trusting in God's sovereignty in a world filled with tragedy. You look at this picture and think, how can this possibly work? Or be safe? Alabama Power is this huge company that I know very little about. But they are demonstrating that power can still happen even if the power pole is bent and broken and barely standing.

Let this lead you to look to God. Do we really know how God works? No. Do we know that trusting in Him gives power? Do we believe that He can overcome the brokenness and use it for His larger purposes – for our good and His glory? This is the power of lament!

It is obvious then, from the evidence, from the fact that Psalm 13 is in the Bible, that God gives us invitation, permission, and prescription to lament. And this is a good gift.

1. Invitation to Lament: Bring Your Complaints (vs. 1-2)

Behind the invitation is God's character. He is tender and compassionate (Ps 103:13-14)

He has higher ways: "Only a sovereign Father would allow His suffering children to complain in order to draw them to greater faith." George Robertson (ESV GTSB notes)

David not shying away from how he feels. He's on the edge of the end, feeling like he's going to die. 4 times asks "How Long?"

Sometimes the fight lasts a lot longer than you had anticipated.

A few years into my pastorate in Monroeville, Alabama, an out of town visitor attended with a long time member who was in real estate. In the next county over, they had taken out an option on 5,000 acres of timberland. Their plan was to build a landfill there. We had a couple of families in our church who lived nearby where the landfill was planned. There was a fight brewing.

Over the next several years, a small, vocal and research savvy group raised awareness. The landfill backers had contracts with every state east of the Mississippi to bring in via railroad millions of tons of waste per year. From the apathetic response, many were saying, "what's the big deal?" It's a rural area, very low population, and it's private land.

I wrote a letter to the Montgomery Advertiser because this had gotten the attention of the state legislature. What does love your neighbor mean in the Christ-haunted rural South? Why aren't more people against this? Do we really want a precedent of out of state trash being brought in to our state at this scale?

In our small church, some families were asking How long, oh Lord? Will our enemy be exalted over us?

And I learned something that is key to lamenting as God calls us – empathy.

Frankly, I would not have been near as interested in the prospects of a landfill being built 30 miles away from Monroeville if it did not affect families in my own church.

The reason why more people didn't seem to care that much was because it did not appear to affect them.

Now this is easy to miss because the Psalms of Lament are about pain, sorrow, distress, and well, we don't really like to dwell on those areas. And yet, God invites His people to complain!

God empathizes with His children's pain. Not just sympathy, but empathy. You know the difference, right? Sympathy is wow that looks hard. Empathy is I know that is hard. I identify with it, I have experienced it. I know what it is like to suffer, to have sorrow, to experience pain. This is the God of the Bible. In Christ, God has experienced our pain. He knows. He invites us to complain to Him.

2. Permission to Lament: Hear My Complaint, Lord! (vs. 3-4)

The boldness of David

Like a child pestering her father – please, please, help me!
See where I am, see what I am going through, see me, Lord. Don't you see?

Some of you need to pause and sit in this and allow yourself a little bit of permission to say and to hear yourself say, “this hurts. This is hard. I really don't like this.”

God is giving David, giving us, permission to lament. Come to me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Invitation, permission, beckoning, welcoming. Bring your complaints. God will not only endure them, but welcome them. This psalm and the many other psalms of lament are the proof.

And by the way, the world is longing for this permission, too.
Story of Braxton at BMB. > Talking with friend at my favorite “restaurant” and another guy overheard us talking. I was talking about lamenting and what I was discovering about it – basically giving a 2 minute version of this sermon. So this other guy said, man, what church are you at? I would go there. (He said: “You are not ashamed to be here” !!)

Is this something that large swaths of the Church have missed out on? Is American love of growth and success damaging to our souls? Has the American church lied to ourselves and to the world?

And by the way, this is one of the reasons why there is still separation between the races in the Church. Many in the black community long for whites to sit with them, to lament with them, to give them permission to grieve, not just to defend the police or the government. The black church has a gift for us – it is dependence upon the Lord won through the hard, long, dark night of unjust suffering.

*Psalms of Lament are a corrective, a nudge back, a crack in the façade of ‘we are all fine.’ (I hate to say it but the way it seems is that No one is fine. Take the time to peel a few layers and you will find, True Sadness – Avett Bros.)

... Now wait a minute. I thought God said to do everything without complaining... yes.

For years I missed this! Phil 2:14-16 – “Do everything without grumbling or disputing (complaining or arguing), that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation...” Paul is referencing the Israelites’ 40 year journey through the desert wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. They did a lot of grumbling.

What I missed was the difference between grumbling and lamenting.
Story of how I had to apologize to my kids for shutting them down...

Quote from Gordon Bals > “Lamenting is not grumbling. A grumbler is indifferent or hard towards God and has built a defensive fortress around his heart. A lamenter remains receptive to God but confused about life, which causes him to search out God and wrestle with Him.”

Lamenting and grumbling are similar b/c the feelings are the same. This is hard, I don't like this, I don't want to go through this, I wish this were over. Grumbling is whining without God in the picture. It is self-focused and anger based. Grumbling says, "I don't deserve this."

The lamenter keeps bringing his honest feelings to God and is reaching, stumbling towards God.

The Israelites who complained – grumbled—against God in the desert were punished for it. Because their grumbling was not of faith, but of fear, discontent, unbelief. **Numbers 14:2-4** > 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, "Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?" 4 And they said to one another, "Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt."

They did not choose to trust... trans to 3. Don't let that be you. Don't look at your circumstances, your unmet dreams and desires, and then interpret them as God is against you.

God tests His children - **Deut 8:15-16**: 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

3. Lament Prescribed: Choose to Trust (vs. 5-6)

David is remembering God's covenant to His people - Exodus 34:6-7, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

David chooses to expect rescue. Freedom from having to lament, salvation, rescue is the end of the story. He is honest about the difficulty of the enduring in v. 1, and yet able to sing because he remembers and renews his mind with the truth.

What are you going through that has you asking "How long?" We don't know how long it will be. But it is the truth all Christians stand upon: God means to do us good in the end. Rescue, freedom, salvation is our end. Therefore you can, you must, you will endure.

*Some of you are tempted to grit your teeth and bare it, suck it up, stiff upper lip, stoicism, resolve to endure and keep marching. When that is near its end, God invites us to lament. And to receive it as gift. He knows life is hard and not how He made it to be.

Do you know that? Do you believe there is a Great Physician whose mission is to heal? To heal you at the heart level, at the seat of your emotions, your drive, your reason for living? To heal y

our heart in such a way that regardless of your circumstances, regardless of whether anything changes you can sing songs of rejoicing. Do you believe that? Or are you just faking it?

How could THIS, this that I am going through, this that I am watching my friend go through, how could THIS bring about good?? This is the gift of lament... You have permission and invitation to ask God these questions! And you have assurance that even if you are walking towards your own execution, God has a good end for you.

How? How can this be? Look hard again at the substitutionary atoning sacrifice of Christ for all who will trust in Him. God says that He will by no means clear the guilty. There has to be payment for our distrust, our going our own way. So Jesus put Himself in our place, to take our guilt upon Himself, to absorb the punishment we deserve. And if you look full on at the cross and don't turn away from the bloody sacrifice, the ugliness and horror of it, you have to say, "how could THIS turn out for good?" "How could THIS be part of God's good plan?"

David knew – not to the extent that we know now – but David chose to trust in a good future because of what God had done in the past. (look at the verses!)

That is how lament is a good gift to us and how you can choose to trust – Look at the cross again. Look at how God has been good to us in the past and has guaranteed a good future by the Resurrection.

CONC:

Doesn't He claim to be the Great Physician? So He writes you a prescription here. Take it in. Give it time to work in prayer, and more prayer. Take another dose, and another. Take in the gift of lament. Choose to trust God who gives us this gift.

Small Group Discussion Questions from Psalm 13 – The Gift of Lament

1. What first comes to mind when you hear the word lament?
2. If God invites and welcomes lament, how does that help you deal with suffering, or help others in your life face it?
3. Read Philippians 2: 14-16. (and reference Number 14:2-4) Discuss the difference between lamenting and grumbling. What is the focus on lamenting? What is the focus of grumbling? How can you tell the difference?
4. Ask for honesty with yourself – what keeps you from turning to God with your pain or struggles or frustrations?

5. Proposal: Since we have all been through some level of pain and suffering, we have the tools to be empathetic, not just sympathetic, with anyone. Discuss whether you think this is true, and what difference empathy makes in your interactions with others, especially those who don't yet know Christ.
6. See Psalm 13:5-6. How does the cross and the Resurrection of Jesus enable us to sing, regardless of our circumstances?

ILLUS of Demi Lovato's song at the Grammy's.

ILLUS of never, never, never give up / ILLUS of football game where your team wins against all odds in the end – these tastes of heaven.

Trust the Doctor – the Great Physician – the Prescription still has to be written, picked up and taken home and taken in.

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[Jeremiah 12:1](#) - Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

Several families going through the 'vale' ... dealing with death of elderly parents ... (see prayer chain)

Lament = For those who believe in God's sovereignty and live in a world of tragedy.

CONC: Here is a prescription from the Great Physician – Your choice whether you get it filled and if you actually take the medicine. And remember – prescriptions take time to work...

CONC: In the valley is where you are taught to see. Where you experience what it means that to be low is to be high, that your losses are your gain.

From James Montgomery Boice's book *Christ's Call to Discipleship*: "Most Westerners live in a tragically mindless environment. Life is too fast, and our contact with other persons too impersonal for any real thought or reflection. Even in the church we are far more often encouraged to join this committee, back this project, or serve on this board than we are counseled to examine our relationship with God and His Son Jesus Christ. So long as we are performing for the church, few question whether our profession is genuine or spurious. ... Teachers should stress that a personal, self-denying, costly, and persistent following of Christ is necessary if a person is to be acknowledged by Jesus at the final day. Discipleship is not a supposed second step in Christianity. Jesus' call is 'follow me.'

Jon Foreman: "I look around and I know there's a lot in the world that I want to see changed – and I want to be part of something bigger than myself. I want to see things change, in myself as much as in the world around me."

(Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament by Mark Vroegop, Appendix 2)

Laments have four parts:

- TURNING – Keep turning in prayer
 - Pray your struggles Psalm 77:2-4
 - Pray your questions Psalm 77:5-6
 - Prayer turns you around Psalm 77:10-13
- COMPLAINING – Bring your complaint

- Bring your questions Psalm 10:1; Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 35:17; Psalm 74:10; Psalm 94:3; Psalm 137:4
- ASK BOLDLY
 - The “yet” or “but” bridge Psalm 22
 - What do you ask for?
 - “Arise O Lord” “Do something, Lord! Please!” (Psalm 3, 7, 9, 10, 17, 74, 94)
 - “Grant us help” (Psalm 60:11-12)
 - Remember Your covenant (Psalm 25:6)
 - Let justice be done (Psalm 83:16-18)
 - Don’t remember our sins (Psalm 51:1; Psalm 79:8-9)
 - Restore us (Psalm 80:3)
 - Don’t be silent-listen to us (Psalm 28:1-2; Psalm 86:6)
 - Teach me. (Psalms 143:10; Psalm 90:12; Psalm 86:11)
 - Vindicate me (Psalm 35:23-24)
- TRUSTING: Choosing to trust
 - Psalm 13:5-6
 - Psalm 42:4
 - Psalm 42:5, 11; 43:5
 - Psalm 143:5-6

LEARNING TO LAMENT WORKSHEET

Movements of Lament

Psalm

My Lament

Turn to God

Address God as

you come to Him in

prayer. This is some-

times combined with
complaint.

Bring your complaint

Identify in blunt
language the specific
pain or injustice.
Why? or how? is
often part of the
complaint.

Ask Boldly

Specifically call
upon God to act
in a manner that
fits his character
and resolves your
complaint.

Choose to Trust

Affirm God's

worthiness to be
trusted, and commit
to praising Him.



