

**A Path to Peace**  
**Learning to Lament Series - Part 1**

The Year of Becoming

Jan 9-10, 2021

Psalm 38, 88

**Introduction**

- **What Do We Do When Life Hurts or Wrecks us Emotionally?**
  - **A.) Clear Pain & Problems** - 2020 left some of us with significant challenges that are incredibly obvious, and we could name them immediately. Ex.
    - **Loss of actual income** - business failure, job layoff, sickness without PTO, furlough, etc.
    - **Loss of Loved one** - COVID or non-COVID related during this last season.
    - **Isolation** - feeling physically or emotionally alone.
  - **B.) Ambiguous Loss** - But some of us feel that we got through it relatively okay, but deep down we know we aren't operating the same way. Something is agitating us. Ambiguous loss is more felt than known. Cumulative effect over time. Tend to be unaddressed because we either can't understand it or articulate it.
    - **Can leave us disillusioned, depressed, anxious, edgy, irritated for no reason, or discouraged.**
    - **Can be caused by:**
      - **Missed opportunities** - like no Senior Prom, missed vacation, graduation, playing sports, going away to college, (disappointment).
      - **Loss of significant human contact** - hugs, meaningful conversations, friends (didn't know those things meant so much to us).
      - **Limitation** - sickness, handicap, weakness that restricts us from fulfilling dreams (frustrations)
      - **Loss of friends** - even if we are still angry at them (socially and emotionally emptied)
      - **Loss of freedom and playfulness** - going to the movies, travel, vacation, getting away, celebrating birthdays or holidays, face coverings, working from home, etc. (removal of rejuvenation or escapism processes).
      - **Emotional Exhaustion** - things just add up over time and wear us out. (overly tired)
- **I Have Good News for You!**

**God Made a WAY to Move FORWARD**

- **The Year of Becoming** - reintroduce the theme...
- **Two Halves to This “Learning to Lament” Mini-Series**
  1. **Lament Psalms** - which I will lead you through this week and next
  2. **The Book of Lamentations** - which Pastor Matt and I will lead you through in the following two weeks.
    - In the end you will have a healthy, Biblical process to sort your pain and frustration with the Lord.

## Lesson

- **What Lament is**
  - **Emotionally Processing Distress Through Prayer** - Lament begins with cries of distress, grief, frustration, anger from immediate crises, or an emotional state that faces a person. *It’s a format that transitions the desperation and frustration into a prayer, inviting God into that reality.* As the process moves along it begins to *speak from the confidence that the situation(s) can be changed if God wills to intervene.*<sup>1</sup>
  - **Beyond mere Complaint**
    - **Healthy Middle** - *Lament is the art of Living in the land between Denial and Wallowing.* It neither stuffing it, nor being ruled by it.
    - **Involving the Lord** in the process changes everything.
      - **Who do we address with our concerns?** Society? Other people? Who are we talking to? Will they respond, will they hear us, will they help?
      - **Lament is addressing God in our pain and frustration.**
        - **The moment you address God** you have gone into a different form of processing, it’s a fork in the road. It starts you down a healthier path.
  - **Skills, practices and spiritual disciplines (tools in our spiritual toolbox)**
    - **Personalities and Spiritual Disciplines** - Spiritual Disciplines are tools to help us adjust our behavior and mindset to be healthier spiritually. They are exercises like fasting, solitude, silence, celibacy, etc. Different people/personalities use different spiritual disciplines to different degrees. For some of us who are atmospherically impacted, a walk in nature is soothing. To some of us who are intellectual, the learning of new revelation is transforming. To some of us who live by passion; fasting, celibacy and other disciplines of abstinence are reorienting. But not everyone interacts with all the disciplines the same way. Our goal is to use the disciplines that

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Out of the Depths*, 60.

work for us. Lament is a discipline, a tool, a helpful exercise to make us healthier.

- **Lament is one of the tools that God Made a Way for us to Move Forward.**
- **The Power of Emotional Restoration (walking without a limp)** - Many of us never take the time to process our emotions or grief. We just move on. The problem is that **each trauma impacts us and until we process it properly the damage remains.** You can move forward but usually the impact leaves you with an emotional limp. The power of emotional restoration is that we go back to the trauma and remove the limp through healthy processing. The result is a more vibrant, freeing, light-hearted, healthy emotional system that's stronger than ever.
- **The Process of Lament**
  - **Lament is a Prayer Path to Process our Emotions**
    - **Christianity is designed to USE what we know to be TRUE,** not just store it in the warehouses of our minds. We put it into practice so that it can bring actual help in our times of need.
    - **Lament - Help with What to Say and where to go with it**
      - Christopher Wright explains, *"When we grieve, weep, lament, protest, scream in pain & anger... The Bible says to us, That's Ok, go right ahead. And here are some words that you may like to use when you feel that way."*<sup>2</sup>
  - **To begin to move forward** we need a period of **Healthy Mourning**
    - **Culturally Unacceptable?** - many cultures provide space to mourn<sup>3</sup>. It's actually built into their ceremonies and rituals (think about the professional mourners in the Middle East - in Jesus' time and modern). Most Western Cultures don't have this. There's an expectation to do it quickly, in private and move on. That's not healthy.
      - **Many of us are afraid of negativity** - I know I am at least a little bit. Some of us were trained to avoid, push away or sweep negative emotions under the rug and pretend they aren't there. None of that actually makes them go away and in fact will stunt our emotional development and leave us as less of a human being.
      - **Not saying it doesn't make it less true** - your heart is saying things that your lips are not muttering, but what really matters is the intent of your heart, not the specifics of the lips. To vocalize what's true isn't bad, it's

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<sup>2</sup> Wright, *The God I Don't Understand*, 43.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gallerycollection.com/articles/sympathy/mourningtraditions.htm>

only honest. It's being said already, you can own up to it or pretend around it.

- **Raw and honest** - honest with God about what's really happening and how we are feeling about it. Sharing our real hearts with someone who can handle it.
  - **D.A. Carson** writes, "There is no attempt in Scripture to whitewash the anguish of God's people when they undergo suffering. They argue with God; they complain to God; they weep before God. Theirs is not a faith that leads to dry-eyed stoicism, *but to a faith so robust it wrestles with God*".
- **Multiple Phases** - it's not a simple, pat answer, instantaneous cure-all. It's a holistic, healthy process to move forward. I view the process in **4 phases**.
  - **Phase 1 - Heart Dump - Honest Personal Revelation**
    - **When Relationship Really Matters** - Those closest to God feel the greatest freedom to speak to Him honestly.
    - **Phase 2 - Realignment of Reality - Reaffirming Trust in God**
    - **Phase 3 - Personal Contact - Meeting God in the Mess** - Experiencing His Presence in a new and profound way
    - **Phase 4 - Restoration - Letting the Holy Spirit Minister** - He begins to put us emotionally back together and helps us sift our thoughts.
  - **Lots of Resources** - Here at Bridgeway our Discipleship Department has put up a Resource webpage set up specifically to help us all learn how to do this process well so that we can move forward in our lives.
    - **Where to find the page** - You can go directly there at [BridgewayResources.church](http://BridgewayResources.church), OR, at the bottom of our main front website page at [Bridgeway.church](http://Bridgeway.church), you will see "Bridgeway Resource Website" click there.
    - **What it has** - videos, documents
    - **"How to Write a Lament"** - leads you through a personal journey of journaling out your thoughts with the Lord.
- **Psalms of Lament** - Did you know that a **significant percentage (44%)** of the Book of Psalms is directly about lament?
  - **"Lament Psalms", but many of them are also classified as "Praise Psalms". Fascinating.**

- **Psalms has 150 chapters** of laments<sup>4</sup> and hymns broken into **5 “books”** (66 are laments<sup>5</sup> = 44%).
  - **Book 1 - 59%** Laments of 41 Psalms - Intro wisdom in chapters 1 & 2 to get started, then right into 11 Laments<sup>6</sup>
  - **Book 2 - 65%** Laments of 31 Psalms
  - **Book 3 - 47%** Laments of 17 Psalms
  - **Book 4 - 24%** Laments of 17 Psalms
  - **Book 5 - 23%** Laments of 44 Psalms
    - **The Movement through the book of Psalms** - From Lament to increasing Praise.
- **The Typical Structure<sup>7</sup> of the Individual Lament Psalms**
  - **1.) Crying out to God about how terrible things are in general**
  - **2.) Pointing fingers** - Mad at God, mad at situation, mad at what’s causing the pain.
  - **3.) Review of the past** - Stepping back into reality and reviewing who God really is and what He really does.
  - **4.) Admitting and setting intention of trusting God** - despite the problem at hand
  - **5.) Asking for God to help** - sometimes reminding God and ourselves why He should
  - **6.) A Promise of Praise** - when God does intervene, and He will.
- **One Example<sup>8</sup> - we will do more next week**
  - **Psalm 88**
    - Ps 88:title–18 – *“A SONG. A PSALM OF THE SONS OF KORAH. TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO MAHALATH LEANNOTH. A MASKIL OF HEMAN THE EZRAHITE. <sup>1</sup> O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you. <sup>2</sup> Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry! <sup>3</sup> For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. <sup>4</sup> I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, <sup>5</sup> like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. <sup>6</sup> You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. <sup>7</sup> Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah <sup>8</sup> You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; <sup>9</sup> my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you. <sup>10</sup> Do you*

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<sup>4</sup> Some are individual laments (ex. 3, 4, 7, 13, 22, 28, 31, 39, 42-43, 55-57, 61, 142, 143) and some are communal/community laments (ex. 12,44, 58, 60, 74, 84, 85, 90, 92, 94)

<sup>5</sup> Some scholars only classify 42 as official ‘Lament Psalms’.

<sup>6</sup> Broken only by Creation Psalm 8

<sup>7</sup> Most of them have these elements, but order is not as important or consistent.

<sup>8</sup> The others I considered strongly were 10, 22, 38, 69.

*work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah <sup>11</sup> Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? <sup>12</sup> Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? <sup>13</sup> But I, O LORD, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. <sup>14</sup> O LORD, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? <sup>15</sup> Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. <sup>16</sup> Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. <sup>17</sup> They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together. <sup>18</sup> You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.”*

- **Look at the raw language and heart processing.**
  - **Look at the blame and Assumptions**
  - **The author is trying to move forward.** He can't stand where he's at. He knows God is both His closest friend and His only hope of moving forward.
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- **Lament Plus** - Jesus said that He was the Way, the Truth and the Life. The Old Testament didn't have that perspective. **As Christians we are immediately advanced further down the road in the Lament Process by knowing Christ and what He's done.** We know the end of the story (through Revelation in Scripture), which the Old Testament saints didn't.
    - **We still grieve**, but not like those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13-14)
    - **We begin Lament with asking Why so often - but we won't stay here. Next week we learn how to shift to the next phase from why, to Anticipation of Rescue (How Long?)**

### **Conclusion**

- **Don't miss next week!** - Each week we are walking further and further down the road to healthy and vibrant living.
- **As we Close** - I have 2 personal reflection questions, I'd like you to ponder this week:
  1. What emotional limps am I walking with?
  2. What am I really upset about deep down?