



lament *a discipline*



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the discipline of lament

“Lament is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: trust. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God.”

Mark Vroegop

We live in a society that spends a great deal of time and attention on the idea of avoiding pain. The most profound proof of this is the multi-billion-dollar pain-killer industry. There are also more subtle ways we try to avoid pain through numerous other “remedies,” such as overeating, overspending, overcommitting, and dozens more overdoing behaviors. All these attempts are only a temporary fix as the pain always resurfaces.

Pope John Paul II was the international head of the Catholic Church from 1978 until he died in 2005. In 2001 he was diagnosed as suffering from Parkinson’s Disease. In his later days, he was seen sitting hunched over while strapped into his seat atop the “pope-mobile,” with body trembling, unable to wave to adoring pilgrims lining the streets. Despite difficulty speaking, trouble hearing, and severe osteoarthritis, he continued to tour the world. Through this journey in declining health, he showed, in a very public way, suffering and pain can be the spiritual discipline of lament.

There is no getting around it...in this world, we will face suffering of all kinds, and we need those who model how it is to lean in on God through the time of pain. Jesus encourages us, *“In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”* (John 16:33)

Jesus didn’t circumnavigate suffering, he embraced it as part of this life on earth and therefore met every situation in the power of his Heavenly Father. If we want to be like Christ, we must do the same. *“I want to know Him inside and out. I want to experience the power of His resurrection and join in His suffering, shaped by His death.”* (Philippians 3:10, VOICE)

Once you have turned to God, voiced your complaint, asked boldly for help, and chosen to trust, rest in the following, “Here’s what I’ve learned through it all: Don’t give up; don’t be impatient; be entwined as one with the Lord. Be brave and courageous and never lose hope. Yes, keep on waiting—for he will never disappoint you!” (Psalm 27:14. TPT)

pray:

“O God,
this is a hard time,
a season of confusion,
a frantic rush
to fill my closets,
my schedule,
and my mind,
only to find myself empty.

Give me hope, Lord,
and remind me
of your steady power
and gracious purposes
that I may live fully.
Renew my faith
that the earth is not destined
for dust and darkness,
but for frolicking life
and deep joy
that, being set free
from my anxiety for the future,
I may take the risks of love
today.” Amen

Ted Loder – Guerrillas of Grace

choose to trust.

This is the destination for our laments.

“Lord, I have always trusted in your kindness, so answer me. I will yet celebrate with passion and joy when your salvation lifts me up. I will sing my song of joy to you, the Most High, for in all of this you have strengthened my soul. My enemies say that I have no Savior, but I know that I have one in you!” (Psalm 13:5–6, TPT)

More than the stages of grief, this prayer language moves us to renew our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life.

Remember....there is no timetable to grief. Your heart may still be very tender, and you may feel trust is not there. Be assured that the Lord is carrying you at this time, and he has enough faith for the both of you! Trust is a choice, *“I will give thanks to you, Lord, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High.”* (Psalm 9:1-2, NIV)

When you are ready, state your trust in him, confident that as you heal, your faith will grow stronger and stronger.

Tell the Lord why and how you trust him.

the discipline of lament

Lament is not only an outdated word in our vocabulary but a lost art in the Christian community. We come together as a body of Christ on Sunday morning with bright, shining faces when there quite possibly is pain and suffering on the inside. Why is that? Is it that we believe we are not representing Christ well when we express pain and suffering? Maybe we feel a bit too vulnerable when we reveal a struggle to someone else. Possibly you have said one or more of the following:

- “It’s not a big deal.”
- “I’ll never make myself vulnerable to getting hurt (again).”
- “I’ll just put the past behind me and move on.”
- “These feelings are not to be trusted, so I will suck it up.”
- “Fake it ‘til you make it.”

Have you ever found yourself using one of the above phrases or any others to not dwell on pain and suffering? What is your go-to phrase?

When we train our hearts not to lament, we begin to see ourselves as the protectors and keepers of our hearts instead of leaving that responsibility to God.

When our knee-jerk reaction is to “stuff down” any feelings that are contrary to joy in the Lord, we misrepresent God. Our souls become burdened with unresolved pain and suffering, which eventually becomes a reservoir so full that it overflows into all areas of our lives. When we do not lean into lament, to wrestle with God over the difficult circumstances and feeling of our experience, our impulse will be to play the “blame game,” and we blame ourselves, blame God, or blame others. Suffering makes us feel like we’ve lost all control in our lives, so finding a scapegoat is appealing because it feels like we’re taking back control. This pattern does not allow unresolved pain to surface, so that we can get to the root of it.

The ears of the Lord are always tuned to the suffering and laments of his people. Moses, leader of the Children of Israel, heard the Lord’s

call to take His people out of slavery in Egypt and bring them into the Promised Land. There were the sufferings of his people, and “The Lord said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering.” (Exodus 3:7)

There is no safer place to “unload” our pain and suffering than in Christ’s presence.

The Psalms are a perfect roadmap on how to engage in godly lamenting. Over and over again, we read how writers of the Psalms are willing to voice their deep-seated cry of agony, frustration, and anger over the pain in their lives to God. As the Psalmists shake their fists, they are confident that God Almighty has big enough shoulders to handle their cries.

The Roadmap to *lament* - Psalm 13

Turn to God.

Often a lament begins by an address to God.

“I’m hurting, Lord—will you forget me forever? How much longer, Lord? Will you look the other way when I’m in need?” (Psalm 13:1, TPT).

The person in pain must choose to talk to God about what is happening. We serve an all-knowing God who is well-aware of our circumstances, feelings, and pain. “This is the kind of life you’ve been invited into, the kind of life Christ lived. He suffered everything that came his way so you would know that it could be done, and also know how to do it, step-by-step...” (1 Peter 2:21, MSG)

Look to the Lord right now in your state of suffering. You do not have to “get it together” before you come. Simply be a soul in God’s presence. Quiet yourself for a few moments and sense that he is with you. Tell him what you are feeling.

bring your complaint.

Every lament features some kind of complaint.

“How much longer must I cling to this constant grief? I’ve endured this shaking of my soul. So how much longer will my enemy have the upper hand? It’s been long enough!” (Psalm 13:2, TPT).

More than a sinful rehearsing of our anger, biblical lament humbly and honestly identifies the pain, questions, and frustrations raging in our souls. Often when we hurt, we will talk to a trusted friend, a spiritual leader, a spouse, or maybe anyone who will listen! Well-intentioned listeners encourage you to “get it off your chest...you’ll feel better.” This advice is valid, but the listener can only take you as far as they have gone themselves in the area of suffering.

Voice your complaint to God. Remember, he can handle any grievance that is on your heart.

Ask boldly for help.

Seeking God’s help while in pain is an act of faith:

“Take a good look at me, God, and answer me! Breathe your life into my spirit. Bring light to my eyes in this pitch-black darkness, or I will sleep the sleep of death. Don’t let my enemy proclaim, ‘I’ve prevailed over him’ For all my adversaries will celebrate when I fall.” (Psalm 13:3-4, TPT)

Constant sorrow can create a deadly silence as we give in to despair (“there’s no hope”) or denial (“everything’s fine”). But lament invites us to dare to hope in God’s promises as we ask for his help.

Ask the Lord for help as you journey through this time of lament, remembering that his will is always for your “better good.”