

Lamenting

Psalm 22

Open to Psalm 22.

Lament—expressing passionate grief or sorrow for something. And we in America are terrible at lament. We're good at complaining, but we're not good at lamenting. Look at people at funerals—half are sad, half are like “Let's get out of hear.” That's what we're talking today—being sad. Not good at it for two reasons:

A Cultural Problem: Our society thrives on being “happy” and “comfortable”. Our strategy when it comes to grieving is avoiding it at all costs and when it does come, to immediately seek a distraction. Ellen Degeneres “So while we're all stuck here, I want to take your mind off of everything that's going on in the world. I always wanted to have this show as a distraction, as a break for whatever's going on out there that may be unpleasant.”—this is our lifestyles, not just Ellen's show. We don't walk through it and grow through it as much as we just try to wake up from a bad dream. So that's one reason...

Theological Problem: I think that in many cases what we've been led to believe is that if you are in a season where you have the intense sorrow and grief, it's because you're faith isn't strong enough. That these feelings of intense longing and sadness are really just a result of your spiritual immaturity and if you were more of a spiritual adult you wouldn't have such a hard time. But I'm surprised at how often I see it.

Another funeral example: “Guys, this is a celebration. We shouldn't be sad. We should be happy that sister so and so is in a better place.” And you almost get the idea that if you really believed that sister so and so was in heaven with Jesus you wouldn't be sad. Is that true? No! Story of Jesus weeping with Mary in Jn. 11.

I want to say that it is ok for mature believers who love God, who believe that he is faithful, who trust is working for their good, to be really really sad! The Bible is filled with godly, mature believers who are really sad! We have an entire book called lamentations—this is instructive. It's important for us to acknowledge pain and...

It's important that we acknowledge it to God. He wants to know about our feelings. He wants us to tell him how we feel. I mentioned Lamentations as an example of lament, but there's probably not a better examples of individuals lamenting than the ones we see in the Psalms.

Now, the Psalter was Israel's prayer book. And when you read the Psalter, it's not long before you run into a lament. Someone who's having a rough go. Someone who's suffering. Someone who's crying out to God in confusion and grief. And they're not making this tame, polite, tidy, well-polished prayers. These are R-rated prayers! Complaining. Questioning God. Even in some cases being rude to God. Disrespectful to him. Let me give you a little taste of what I'm talking about.

Ps. 6:2-7, “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. 3 My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord—how long? 4 Turn, O Lord, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love.... 6 I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. 7 My eye wastes away because of grief; it grows weak because of all my foes. **Ps. 44:22-26** Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. 23 Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! 24 Why

do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? 25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. 26 Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!” **Ps. 39:12-13** “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and give ear to my cry; hold not your peace at my tears! For I am a sojourner with you, a guest, like all my fathers. 13 Look away from me, that I may smile again, before I depart and am no more!” These were actually songs!! Think about that—can you imagine if we sang, “Turn Your Face Away?”

Now, I’d be willing to bet that many of us, when it comes to suffering and expressing the pain of suffering and confusion and frustration, are a little uncomfortable with this approach; that this isn’t really an appropriate response to suffering. It runs contrary to what we’ve been taught, “Doesn’t the Bible say to rejoice in suffering?” It doesn’t say whine. “Rejoice that you’ve been counted worthy to suffer for Christ!” “God is working everything out for my good and his glory.”

Yes—and don’t you think Jesus knew that? Knowing God is faithful gives us somewhere to go with our pain hope in our pain. Not like a spiritual oxycontin—that numbs us to the pain. And when we suffer, we should lament. And so we really need to think about how to biblically express passionate grief or sorrow for something.

Side note: Guys in particular tend to struggle with this. Sounds girly to talk about and express your feelings. You’re not gonna do that. You’re gonna be a “strong man” than keeps that pain bottled up. Your daddy told you to keep a stiff lip and that expressing your emotions a sign of weakness, he didn’t read the Bible very carefully. That is toxic masculinity.

King David was one of the manliest men to ever walk the earth. He killed lions and bears with his bare hands. He killed Goliath with a stone. He killed tens of thousands of warriors in battle. He was one of the best generals in history. And the Psalms are covered in his tears—he kept a journal about it. Jeremiah—crying all the time. Look at the life and ministry of Jesus, the manliest man ever, who expressed more emotion than any man I’ve ever met. **Do not be deceived, emotional expression is not an assault on your masculinity. It is an invitation to be fully human in a sinful world.**

...where marriages struggling, health problems, financial problems, addictions, job problems... And God’s design for you in your pain, is not to keep it to yourself, or ignore it, but to let it out, to pour out your heart to him.

All this leading up to Psalm 22, our text for today, I want to talk us through a portion of this Psalm and lead us to a better understanding of how to cry out to God. And we’re going to see 3 stages of lament.

Pray.

Read Psalm 22:1-2, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning. 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.” So stop right there. Let’s take a look at what just happened.

Express—He’s in a dark place and he’s expressing it. Look at him express so many of the things that so many of us often feel, when we’re in a season of struggle. He feels forsaken. Feels like God is far away. This isn’t a rehearsed meal time prayer. This guy is banging on God’s door asking “What are you doing!” Voicing your complaint before God.

Rough time in seminary and asking why God wouldn't allow me to be happy. And I remember throwing my Bible in frustration. You may be asking, I appreciate you talking about how we can speak to God in a honest way, but, take Ps. 39, even if it's well intended, isn't it a sin to tell God to turn His face away from you so that you can smile?

Yes. It is. And that's why it's amazing that he keeps these prayers in the Bible! Prayers that are shot through with doubt and worry and questioning. He could have just edited those out: "I'm going to take that one out. I don't want anyone thinking they can talk to me like that!"

But he keeps them in there, not as an example of sinless perfection. God knows sinners will never express themselves perfectly and yet he keeps these prayers in here as an invitation for us to bring our imperfect sin-stained expressions of grief and pain to him. And not only that He actually listens to them—God hasn't set prayers of lament to go to voicemail. "Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice." (Ps. 55:17) The Psalter is so real!

So David expresses his feelings to God. That's the first step of lament.

Now we're not done yet, we've got some more work to do. We don't just express our feelings and drop the mic and leave. Lament starts with expressing our feelings but it cannot stop there. We live in a culture, where people look to their feelings to tell them what's true. But that's a problem because sin in Genesis 3 affected everything about us, including our feelings. Which means that often times our feelings about ourselves, our circumstances, and God do not correspond with reality. Our feelings lie to us. They deceive us. We don't "listen to our hearts". What? Jer. 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick." That's terrible advice. Feelings aren't bad—they're just broken. So, in when it comes to lament we're want to express our feelings, but we can't afford to listen to them—to be ruled by them—to let them have the last word.

David knows this! And he takes the steps that you and I need to take in order to properly balance our feelings. So we have David expressing his sorrow in verses 1 and 2 now look what he does immediately after in verses 3-5.

3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 4 In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. 5 To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

Remind

So see the order here. He expresses his feelings to God, and then he reminds himself about what is true. He's giving us a pattern for biblical lament. Look at this "Oh my God I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest...YET, you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in you and you delivered them. They called and you rescued them and they weren't put to shame... Do you see this? He's reminding himself of what's true. **PICK UP BIBLE.**

And he's doing this intentionally. Let me show you, keep reading vs. 6-8 9-10...So don't miss this pattern. Expression of feelings. Reminder of truth! And then, he does it again! 14-15, 23-24. This is the pattern.

Let me show another place Lam. 3, "16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel, and made me cower in ashes; 17 my soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is...vs 21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: 22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my

soul, “therefore I will hope in him.” He’s having two conversations! He expresses his sorrow and then he talks to himself. He’s preaching to himself! We can’t miss this.

In your moment of despair or confusion or frustration or anger or sadness you have to preach to yourself. If you do not preach to yourself, you will listen to yourself and you will believe your feelings. You will allow your emotions to shape your entire perception of reality.

This is a non-negotiable in the Christian life. When you wake up tomorrow, you’re going to feel all kinds of emotions, and many of them aren’t helpful emotions. And you can’t afford to listen to those feelings, you have to correct them with the truth. **You feel shame and guilt?** Remind yourself of what’s true: “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” **You too weak to go on:** Remind yourself of what is true. “Yet I am always with you...” (Ps. 73:23-26) You feel like you have to have the **praise and approval of other people** to make you feel valuable: Remind yourself, “The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” “You feel like **God has left you:** Remind yourself of what’s true: For I am convinced...” This is why we memorize Scripture.

This isn’t just some self-help method to find a silver lining behind every cloud. This is using God’s Word to capture and restore the desires of our heart. We’re not fighting broken emotions with the power of positive thinking. You have to fight broken emotions with truth. You have to fight deceptive feelings with theology. What would it look like if people started preaching to themselves and said that your hope and joy wouldn’t float in the current of emotion but that it would be planted firmly in the soil of gospel truth.

So we express our feelings and then we remind ourselves of what is true. Then the last step, we hope in God.

Hope

This Psalm starts with despair in the present but end with hope for the future. Look at this. **Starting at vs 26-31.** He’s preached himself into hope. Looks where started. This is how this works. He’s preached himself into biblical hope! And it’s important to point out that when I say “hope” I don’t mean some general happiness that he’s worked up. When I say hope, I mean he’s hoping in something. And notice what the object of his hope is not—ideal life circumstances. What is it? **Read.** His hope is largely centered on God’s glory! The hope he has isn’t some general hope—it’s a confidence that in this situation, God will glorify himself and satisfy those to look for him.

Coronavirus quarantine—preach to yourself. I know I feel isolated, maybe alone, cut off.” But I know that Jesus was truly cut off. **(Mt. 27:46)** We can know he hears us because there was a day when he didn’t hear Jesus. “My God, My God” only time he talks to God and not refer to him as father. Jesus was forsaken so that you won’t ever be! **This is where you have to preach the Gospel to yourself. I can’t measure God’s love by how I feel. I have to measure God’s love by what I know to be true—that Christ is alive.**

Horatio Spafford story.

*** Martyn Lloyd-Jones a Welsh pastor who ministered in Westminster Chapel for over 30 years, wrote a book called *Spiritual Depression* and he comments on this Psalm. Listen to this:

“The main trouble in this whole matter of spiritual depression...is this: that we allow our self to talk to us instead of talking to our self. Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts [for example] that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning...they start talking to you, they bring back the problem of yesterday, etc... (But) Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to you. Now this man’s treatment [in Psalm 42] was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself, ‘Why art thou cast down, O my soul?’ he asks. His soul had been repressing him, crushing him. So he stands up and says: ‘Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you’...The main art in the matter of spiritual living is to know how to handle yourself. You have to take yourself in hand, you have to address yourself, preach to yourself, question yourself. You must say to your soul: ‘Why art thou cast down’—what business have you to be disquieted? You must turn on yourself...exhort yourself, and say to yourself: ‘Hope thou in God’