

## LAMENTING

### PSALM 22

Open to Psalm 22. Had a great week of prayer this week—so I want to talk about prayer and then we'll finish up our series next week. Like music, there are different genres of prayer. Praise, Repentance, Supplication. And so today I wanted to spend our time talking about a genre of prayer that is rarely spoken of in church life and that is the genre of lament.

To lament something is to express passionate grief or sorrow for something. It means to express intense mourning or sadness. So today, we're going to talk about how to be sad! Most people at some point have had an experience like this, where you cried out to God in your confusion, and frustration and pain. And you may or may not have known that this is very biblical. We see it consistently all the way through the Scriptures.

Particularly, we see this all over 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.

In fact, in the Scriptures it many times looks like a form of complaining to God. 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; Ps. 44:22-26; Ps. 39:12-13) 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. Because it seems on the surface, based on other teachings of the Bible, 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.” “Doesn't he say that he's designed suffering to make me more like Christ?”

And 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 feelings or sorrow and confusion and grief, it's because you're faith isn't strong enough. That if you really believed that God was working everything for your good, and you believed that you were supposed to rejoice in suffering, you wouldn't have these feelings of intense longing and sadness. That these feelings are really just a result of your spiritual immaturity.

And I want to say very clearly this morning that that is not true. 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! We know this, because the Bible is filled with godly, mature believers who are really sad!

And we need to understand this. At funerals I hear this sometimes. They'll say something like, “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. (Jn. 11:32-33, 35)

And while we certainly don't grieve as those who have no hope, we still experience a real sense of loss and pain, even if we know someone is with the Lord. Even if we know that what we're going through is only for a season.

**It's important for us to acknowledge that pain and it's important to God.** God cares about our pain. Specifically, he cares about our emotions. He cares about how we feel to the point where he even experiences these feelings himself! This is amazing. This is unique among world religions.

He cares about our feelings! If we're not careful we'll be tempted to think of God more as an exalted coach who just cares about making sure we do the things we're supposed to do. "I didn't sacrifice my son so you could have an easy life. Put some spit on it. I have a lot of work to do on you and all this crying is getting in the way."

Who could love a person like that? "I don't care how you feel, I just care that you do what I ask you to do." Friends, if you don't believe in a God who cares about your tears and pain, your emotions and feelings, then you don't believe in the God of the Bible.

So God cares about your feelings, he experiences our feelings, and then it gets even better: He wants to know about our feelings. He wants us to tell him how we feel. We know that because he's give us tons of examples for us in the Bible. He even says specifically in **(1 Pet. 5:7)**. Merimna means cares, worries, anxieties. See it again in **(Lam 2:19a)**. And when we're expressing those cares, those troubles, that sadness that grief, we're doing what the Bible calls lament. We're lamenting to God.

And I want to point out that pour out your heart to God is a command for all believers to obey, not just an option for the emotionally weak.

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. King David was one of the manliest men to ever walk the earth. He killed lions and bears with his bear 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 Psalm are covered in his tears. 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.**

So to review, feelings of deep sorrow and grief and pain will often characterize the lives of the most mature believers—men and women. Confusion, inner turmoil, and agony, are not necessarily the result of spiritual immaturity. They're the result of living in a fallen. World.

God cares about those feelings. He experiences those feelings with us. He keeps every tear in his bottle.

God wants us to express those feelings. He wants us to tell him about them. Specifically, when we're sad, he wants us to lament. The reality is that there is a variety of suffering and pain and angst and sadness represented in this room today. Marriages, 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.

Read Psalm 22:1-2. So stop right there. Let's take a look at what just happened.

Complain—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.

Like God isn't answering. He's has no peace. This is the first step of biblical lament. Saying how you feel. Voicing your complaint before God.

And as we noted before with lament, this doesn't come across as the most respectful, tidy prayer because it's not. Don't forget Psalm 44 earlier where the Psalmist asks God why he's sleeping. These aren't rehearsed meal time prayer. These guys are getting after it. They are banging on God's door asking "What are you doing!"

I remember being depressed in seminary and asking why God wouldn't allow me to be happy. And I remember throwing my Bible in frustration.

But Maybe you're 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, He realizes that 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. The Psalter is so real! Look at 21:6, 22:1, 23:1.

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. And that's because in Genesis 3 affected everything about us, including our feelings. Which means that often times our feelings about ourselves, our circumstances, and God and our relationship to him aren't what they should be.

Every culture has something that they look at to tell them what's true. Eastern cultures look at religion. Many North Atlantic cultures tend to look to science or philosophy. But today in America today more than ever, people look to their feelings to tell them what's true.

The problem is that in a fallen world, our feelings often lie to us. They deceive us. They don't tell us the truth about reality. Now this goes completely against our culture. Our culture elevates personal emotions to God like status. To the point where if you go against your feelings, you've violated yourself. We say things like "listen to your heart". What? Jer. 17:9 "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick" That's terrible advice.

Now let me be clear, feelings are good, not bad. The reason we have feelings is because we're made in God's image, and God has feelings. Having emotions and feelings and expressing those is biblical. It's

great! Feelings allow us to sense compassion, and joy, and sorrow, and affections for God. But sin distorts our emotions.

So In this sinful world it's not that feelings are bad, they're just broken.....and as a result they aren't a reliable source for discerning truth. So, while we want to be served by our feelings, we cannot afford to be ruled by them.

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.

Ps. 22:3-5

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.

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.

Let me show you another place we see this (Ps. 42:1-3, 5) See the same pattern here. He's expresses his sorrow and then he talks to himself. He's preaching to himself! We can't miss this.

This is crucial to fighting for joy in suffering. 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. And you can't! You have to remind yourself of what you know is true! 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'

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. In AWANA we are preparing people to suffer well.

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 have to trust God.

### Trust That He Hears You and Cares For You

This Psalm starts with despair in the present but end with hope for the future. Starting at from vs 26-31 he we see 7 instances of hope in God’s faithfulness in the future. Read them! He starts with lament but he ends with hope in God! He’s preached himself into biblical hope.

You say well I hear what you’re saying, but I just don’t understand how god would allow this to happen if he really loved me! The cross is the proof that our suffering is not an indictment on God’s love for us. In fact look at what Jesus says on the cross (**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 talk 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.**

Trust that he listens! It’s amazing that God tells lowly sinners that we can bring our complaints to him. But it is even more staggering that he promises to actually listen! (**Psalm 55:17**)

Are surprised when God listens? You shouldn’t be surprised God listens to your prayers. It should surprise us if he didn’t.