



This article by counselor Karen Merry is helpful in times of trouble and stress. It provides a guide for us to write our psalm of lament, following the example we read in the Psalms.

- LuAnn Roberson

Trauma and Grief

The Practice of Lament: How Long, Oh Lord?

Karen Merry

Trauma brings suffering and loss. Loss brings grief.

After trauma, our soul twists and heaves with heart-rending cries that, unless expressed, turn us to bitterness and judgment—against both man and God. We can become cynical, numb, or falsely pious. Unexpressed grief in the midst of suffering is a form of violence against our souls. A denial against who God has designed us to be—fully human. He doesn't call us to "shush-up" our tears or our questions like an irritated parent after a long day. He invites us into expression. To naming our losses through the *language of lament*.

When we stuff our feelings, our hearts become hard and numb. When we allow ourselves to feel them and express them, our hearts become soft and we can engage with God more authentically. Lament, then, becomes the bridge that leads us from numb disconnection to intimate connection with God and others.

In our grief and sorrow, we cry out our anguish, our despair, our disbelief, our confusion, our anger. The full range and expression of emotions. It is the cry of "where are you, God?" "Why didn't you prevent this?" "Why are you silent?" "Why did you abandon me?" "You aren't doing what I thought you would." "This is unfair, unjust." Rooted in our cry is the assumption that surely, if God truly loved us, he would take away our pain.

"To lament—that is to cry out to God with our doubts, our incriminations of him and others, to bring a complaint against him—is the context for surrender. Surrender—the turning of our heart over to him, asking for mercy, and receiving his terms for restoration— is impossible without battle. To put it simply, it is inconceivable to surrender to God unless there is a prior, declared war against him.

Christians often assume our conflict with God was finished when we converted. At that point, we were enemies of God—indeed, we were and it was a great battle. But the battle is not over with conversion. Though it is the decisive victory that assures the outcome of the war, it is hardly the last and final fight.

Sanctification is a lifetime process of surrendering as more and more intense conflicts with God and others expose and dissolve our urgent preoccupation with the self. A lament is the battle cry against God that paradoxically voices a heart of desire and ironic faith in his goodness." Dan Allender, Mars Hill Review, 1994



In Psalm 13: 1, David asks, *“How much longer will you forget me, Lord? Forever?”*

Lament can allow a person to fully express their grief, and even accuse God. Grief isn't stuffed or hidden. In expressing the full range of their grief in a lament, the person doesn't stay just in their grief, but moves forward in calling out to God for His help. It can lead to a deeper expression and experience of faith.

But then, note the shift in Psalm 13, verses 5 & 6: *“I rely on your constant love; I will be glad, because you will rescue me. I will sing to you, O Lord, because you have been good to me.”*

Elements of a Psalm of Lament

- ✎ Cry out to God (your address to God)
- ✎ Affirmation of Trust (your remembrance of God's presence in your past)
- ✎ **Complaint (your anger, pain, heartache, or sadness)**
- ✎ Confession of your sin or claim of innocence
- ✎ Petition/Request (your deepest desire)
- ✎ Additional Argument (anything more, why God should intervene)
- ✎ Rage against Your Enemies (bringing your enemies before God)
- ✎ Assurance of Being Heard (what you need to feel heard)! Promise to Offer Praise to God (the promise you can offer to God)
- ✎ Assurance (the attribute of God you are thankful for in the moment).

Every lament must have a **complaint**. All psalms of lament have some of the above elements, but do not require all of them. Some leave us in the process of our wrestling. Psalm 88 ends on a bleak note! *“You have taken me from my neighbor and friend; darkness is my closest friend”* (Psalm 88:18).

There are 67 Psalms of Laments (some individual, some community). Individual laments: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 36, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143.

Psalms of lament were a NORMAL part of Israel's praise and worship, both as individuals and community.

We do NOT attempt to solve our own problem in a lament. But purposely turn our eyes towards God. To listen. To wrestle.

In our lamenting, we can experience the paradox of sorrow and joy.



Write your personal Psalm of Lament

- ✎ Take a recent event (e.g. loss of a friend or family member to COVID), or perhaps even something from your trauma timeline. Sit with the event and take note all that you feel as you recall that event.
- ✎ Identify your emotions *without judgment*
- ✎ Name your **complaint** *without judgment*
- ✎ Using the other elements listed, write your personal Psalm of Lament.
- ✎ Be truthful.
- ✎ You might consider reading your psalm to a safe person, or to your spiritual community.

*2014, Updated 2020

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