

Expressing our pain and sorrow

In the psalms of lament God is giving up permission to be honest with him about how we feel about life. Practising laments today is a necessary thing for our own health and well-being. Holding our pain inside without expressing it is not a healthy way to live. Neither does talking to someone else about it again and again, with no end to our pain coming through this means. Laments are expressing our pain to God, bringing our stuff to God, confronting him with the stuff below the surface of our lives and asking him questions. We can learn to do this:

by journaling: laments include describing what has happened (specific sins, losses, grief, betrayals, some sort of injustice; body, soul and mind conditions); use phrases like, "I cry out to you, O God!" or, "Give ear to my predicament!" or, "Let 'em have it, God!" The example from Psalm 5 below shows how he brings his complaint to God, expresses the reason for his lament, and then finds strength from God himself to deal with the repercussions of his pain.

by going for a hike and, at the top of a mountain at the top of our voices cry out our questions to God.

Express our pain through song, like Brian Doerksen's, "Your Faithfulness" or Jars of Clay's "O my God," or Helen Otte's version of Psalm 77, "I cried out to God to help me," or Norman L. Warren's version of Psalm 30, "I worship you, O LORD."

This is a process, and process means, "journey." It means we're on our way somewhere. Practising lament is probably about step three or four in a long line of more steps. It's not the final product. It's not the end goal. If we think it is the end goal, then we are cutting the process short. The end goal is to become like God in Jesus Christ. So when Jeremiah wishes to God that certain people be slaughtered, this is not the end goal; it is part of process toward learning to love our neighbor as ourselves (see below).

One thing we can count on from God when we bring him our pain: he won't necessarily take it away; but he will show us, somehow, in some way, that he loves us. In other words, don't look so much for action from God; look for his presence through Jesus Christ. *Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? (Rom 8:35). Nothing shall separate us!*

I recommend reading books on Lament. A great majority of psalms fall under the category of lament (see example below). Jeremiah's prophecy, and the other book we have from him called Lamentations, give really good models for expressing our laments today (again, see example below). And, of course, Job expresses lament very well. Read the sections where he speaks in the book after his name, and find many examples of it (again, see example below).

Michael Card who is otherwise known as a song-writer, wrote several excellent books like, [A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching out to God in the Lost Language of Lament](#). Another great book on this issue (though it does not necessarily speak about lament) is by Pete Wilson. The title is, [Plan B: What do you do when God doesn't show up the way you thought he would](#). Larry Crabb in his recent books also is a good resource. [Shattered Dreams: God's Unexpected Pathway to Joy](#). A great example of dealing with grief and tragedy is Jerry Sittser's [A Grace Disguised](#).

Psalms:

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my sighing.

**Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God,
for to you I pray.**

**In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait in expectation...**

**Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with destruction.**

Their throat is an open grave; with their tongue they speak deceit.

Declare them guilty, O God!

Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.

But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,

that those who love your name may rejoice in you (Ps 5:1-3, 9-11).

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

**How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and every day have sorrow in my heart?**

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

Look on me and answer, O LORD my God.

**Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"**

and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing to the LORD, for he has been good to me (Ps 13).

Jeremiah:

You are always righteous, O LORD,
when I bring a case before you.
Yet I would speak with you about your justice:
Why does the way of the wicked prosper?
Why do all the faithless live at ease?
You have planted them, and they have taken root;
they grow and bear fruit.
You are always on their lips
but far from their hearts.
Yet you know me, O LORD;
you see me and test my thoughts about you.
Drag them off like sheep to be butchered!
Set them apart for the day of slaughter!
How long will the land lie parched
and the grass in every field be withered?
Because those who live in it are wicked,
the animals and birds have perished.
Moreover, the people are saying,
“He will not see what happens to us” (Jer 12:1-4).

From Job (here he expresses his pain to God, and also brings up what little help his
“friends” are in accusing him of doing something wrong):

“If only my anguish could be weighed
and all my misery be placed on the scales!
It would surely outweigh the sand of seas --
no wonder my words have been impetuous.
The arrows of the Almighty are in me,
my spirit drinks in their poison;
God's terrors are marshaled against me...

“What strength do I have, that I should still have hope?
What prospects, that I should be patient?
Do I have the strength of stone?

**Is my flesh made of bronze?
Do I have any power to help myself,
now that success has been driven from me?
A despairing man should have the devotion of his friends,
even though he forsakes the fear of the Almighty.
But my brothers are as undependable as intermittent streams,
as streams that overflow
when darkened by thawing ice
and swollen with melting snow,
but that cease to flow in the dry season,
and in the heat vanish from their channels..." (Job 6:1-4, 11-17).**

See the series I've done on the psalms of lament elsewhere on this web site.
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