

Psalm 13  
The Gift of Lament  
April 7, 2024

**Main Point:** Lament is a lost gift to much of the American Church. Lamenting is not grumbling. It is complaining to God while trusting Him. Lamenting is trusting in a sovereign God while being honest about the brokenness. Lament is a gift because it opens us to honesty about life while drawing us closer to our kind and loving Father. And because God took on flesh, He meets us in our complaints. Jesus knows. He invites us to partake of the gift of lament.

**Opening Illus:** My daughters are really into Taylor Swift. So as a Dad I decided to listen in. And the first song that popped up was “All Too Well” – the 10-minute version of the song. And I realized, she’s singing a song of lament – sorrow and anguish and seeking hope -  
(Side note – you couldn’t do much better for a powerfully memorable illustration of the sanctity, protection, and provision of marriage than the 15-minute short film “All Too Well.” Both the main characters – man and a woman - are big time wounded because they gave themselves away outside of the sanctity, protection, and provision of marriage. Excellent for parents to screen first and their young adolescent kids to watch together.)

And then hearing of all these situations and circumstances in so many of your lives lately,

Story of Molly’s favorite coffee shop closing in Auburn -  
Alice Lewallen, a friend’s mom with cancer, a friend broke her foot, another friend fighting long term anxiety, a protracted conflict, longer than expected season of suffering, a difficult marriage, chronic pain or illness, Israel, Ukraine, Russia, Haiti, Sudan, American politics, Bham Southern, my sister’s dog died...

We have sorrow and we have anguish over these things. Anguish which is a mix of sorrow and anger. Anguish is a proper and holy response to the brokenness we face, and lament is the gift of God taken up again and again in the psalms especially. Biblical scholars have found that about half of the psalms have elements of lament.

Let’s take it up, this gift of lament. Invitation, Permission, and Prescription.

David’s main point is life can get really hard, but God is able.  
Not sure what David’s circumstances are, but we can enter in to David’s mindset:  
I’ve been here a long time. I’m tired. I’m exhausted. I’ve been enduring, but now I’m spent. How much longer?

So lament is an aspect of God's word that is easy to miss. No one wants to dwell on the suffering, spend time in it, sitting in it, talking about the waiting. But lament is a gift because it enables us not just to endure, but to endure with assurance that rescue is coming.

### **1 Invitation to Lament: Complaining to God (vs. 1-2)**

Behind the invitation is God's character. He is tender and compassionate (Ps 103:13-14) He has higher ways: "Only a sovereign Father would allow His suffering children to complain in order to draw them to greater faith." George Robertson (ESV GTSB notes)

David not shying away from how he feels. He's on the edge of the end, feeling like he's going to die. 4 times asks "How Long?"

Sometimes the fight lasts a lot longer than you had anticipated.

A few years into pastoring in Monroeville, Alabama, an out of town visitor attended our church a few times with a long time member who was in real estate. In the next county over, they had taken out an option on 5,000 acres of timberland that happened to have a rail line right on the edge of the property. Their plan was to build a landfill there. We had a couple of families in our church who lived nearby where the landfill was planned. There was a fight brewing.

Over the next several years, a small, vocal and research savvy group raised awareness. The landfill backers had contracts with every state east of the Mississippi to bring in via railroad millions of tons of waste per year. From the apathetic response, many were saying, "what's the big deal?" It's a rural area, very low population, and it's private land.

I wrote a letter to the Montgomery Advertiser because this had gotten the attention of the state legislature. What does love your neighbor mean in the Christ-haunted rural South? Why aren't more people against this? Do we really want a precedent of out of state trash being brought in to our state at this scale?

In our small church, some families were asking How long, oh Lord? Will our enemy be exalted over us?

And I learned something that is key to lamenting as God calls us – empathy.

Frankly, I would not have been near as interested in the prospects of a landfill being built 30 miles away from Monroeville if it did not affect families in my own church. The reason why more people didn't seem to care that much was because it did not appear to affect them.

Now this is easy to miss because the Psalms of Lament are about pain, sorrow, distress, and well, we don't really like to dwell on those areas. And yet, God invites His people to complain!

God empathizes with His children's pain. Not just sympathy, but empathy. You know the difference, right? Sympathy is wow that looks hard. Empathy is I know that is hard. I identify with it, I have experienced it. I know what it is like to suffer, to have sorrow, to experience pain. This is the God of the Bible. In Christ, God has experienced our pain. He knows. He invites us to complain to Him.

... Now wait a minute. I thought God said to do everything without complaining... yes.

For years I missed this! Phil 2:14-16 – “Do everything without grumbling or disputing (complaining or arguing), that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation...” Paul is referencing the Israelites' 40 year journey through the desert wilderness on the way to the Promised Land. They did a lot of grumbling.

What I missed was the difference between grumbling and lamenting.

Story of how I had to apologize to my kids for shutting them down...

Quote from Gordon Bals > “Lamenting is not grumbling. A grumbler is indifferent or hard towards God and has built a defensive fortress around his heart. A lamenter remains receptive to God but confused about life, which causes him to search out God and wrestle with Him.”

Lamenting and grumbling are similar b/c the feelings are the same. This is hard, I don't like this, I don't want to go through this, I wish this were over. Grumbling is whining without God in the picture. It is self-focused and anger based. Grumbling says, “I don't deserve this.”

The lamenter keeps bringing his honest feelings to God and is reaching, stumbling towards God.

The Israelites who complained – grumbled—against God in the desert were punished for it. Because their grumbling was not of faith, but of fear, discontent, unbelief.

**Numbers 14:2-4** > 2 And all the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The whole congregation said to them, “Would that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would that we had died in this wilderness! 3 Why is the LORD bringing us into this land, to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little ones will become a prey. Would it not be better for us to go back to Egypt?” 4 And they said to one another, “Let us choose a leader and go back to Egypt.”

They did not choose to trust... Don't let that be you. Don't look at your circumstances, your unmet dreams and desires, and then interpret them as God is against you.

God tests His children - **Deut 8:15–16**: 15 who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water, who brought you water out of the flinty rock, 16 who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end.

## **2 Permission to Lament: Appealing to God (vs 3-4)**

God doesn't expect us to have it all together.

God does expect us to be broken and in our hearts we **MUST** be broken – this is why every week in our worship services we are invited to confess our sins. So that at least once a week we are confronted with the ugly. Only by staring at it are we jolted out of our complacency and our apathy about how bad the world is and how much we personally need a Savior.

Vs 3-4 – appealing to Yahweh, you who are My God – I have nowhere else to go, nowhere else to turn. And so we see the great wisdom of God to bring you to and through bitter trials – that this would be your psalm, your song, your prayer – and what kind of prayer is it? Words? Recitation? A reading? No.

Raw, childlike, lest, lest, lest – 3 times – if you don't answer, I'm done for.

Lest means 'for fear that' – he's in an escape room and he can't escape. Apprehension. Lest – 3 times – if this doesn't happen, then I will be silenced.

Many of you have experienced this, what David is experiencing. When you have faced something that is bad that you cannot fix. That you cannot control. That you can't get away from. Consider these things, Lord! See them! Answer me, Lord, for You are my God – this is when crying out "Oh My God" is proper and right and using His name in a holy way – You are doing what David did - turning to the only One who can save.

ILLUS - chaplain for MFD – these guys were tough, trained, equipped, in shape – but when facing death that they couldn't prevent or didn't rescue the person it messed with them – of course! – All the injustices in the world cry out to be avenged, cry out to be made right.

And so this must be like all the psalms, a song of Jesus – Jesus cried this out and He did face the worst – death – death did prevail over Him so that death will never prevail over us – the great shocking reversal of the Resurrection – this is our Victory in Christ – are you in Christ?

What is the appeal?

“Light up my eyes” – I’m in darkness, I don’t understand, I’m prone to think and do lots of harmful things. I feel like I am near death. I can taste death. I’m confused.

Christians are those who are honest enough about pain to stare it down bc we do not have the fear of death – this is what it means practically to be Easter people. We react to pain with the most practical, helpful possible way in the world – with TRUTH, true truth. The very practical attractiveness of Christianity is clarified and revealed through suffering – this is another gift of lament – why is this a gift of lament? B/c Christianity is not just for the next life and we have salvation so we are happy all the time...

Christianity calls for – demands – the most honest assessment of the realities of life. We didn’t break the world but we live in a broken, fallen, messed up world. And God loves this world so much that He tells it the truth! Dealing with the brokenness can make us mean, closed off, self-protective, shallow, and drunk on distractions of never-ending entertainment – there’s always a new false comforter - something new to look at and be distracted by.

So Christianity says that God loves this broken world so much that He sends His Son, Himself to confront the brokenness, have compassion towards it and do the only thing that can be done to fix it – absorb it into Himself, atone for it Himself, pay for it Himself, and invite any and everyone who trusts in Him and what He has done to be covered, rescued, bought. What this does is take you where David goes – to full on hope.

ILLUS of MFD who loved to rescue - but then they faced some situations that they could not fix – death seemed like it won – and it had – but not the war. Jesus won the war.

This is what David is doing – willfully choosing to see that this circumstantial suffering is a battle that he is fighting, but he knows, deep down where it really matters, he knows, has experiential knowledge of knowing that God is the Warrior King who wins salvation for all who trust in Him.

You are not enough. You can fall apart. B/c in Christ, you’re not falling apart! The cracks are openings by which you are filled with surrendered love. The cracks are how we surrender to love. Ok, I’ve got cracks! This is the surrendered Christian! So many, many cracks, fractures, scars, blood seeping out, and the Great Physician says tell me about it, I WANT to hear it, I understand – don’t you remember what I went through for you? The cracks and breaks are just to show you again how much you need Me and that only I can give you life. Only Jesus.

This is Invitation to Lament, Permission to Lament, so that you will take the prescription and actually turn the corner to godly lament. B/c it's one thing to complain to God, it's another to receive and act upon His remedy, His prescription.

### **3 Prescription to Lament: Empowered to Fight (vs. 5-6)**

Prescriptions given from your doctor enable your body to fight the intruder, to give your body help, not to do it for your body. Lament is a tool, a tool to help us fight.

Lament is the way that God your Father brings you to deeper assurance, to thick skin, to wartime endurance and perseverance b/c this life is war.

David gets there – to surrender.

Vs 5-6 Surrender. Surrender to love. Surrender to perfect love. “only love can leave such a mark, only love can heal such a scar.” – Magnificent, – Paul Hewson –

This kind of suffering is military special forces level training for the fight that Christianity really is. Why is this so hard? Because Jesus promised us that narrow is the gate and hard is the way that leads to life, and we struggle with believing that it could be this hard! Take up Lament as the gift that it is!

So that you will take the prescription and actually turn the corner to godly lament. B/c it's one thing to complain to God, it's another to receive and act upon His remedy, His prescription.

Surrender is head, heart, and actions

Head – trust – what am I choosing to think about? What walls can I put up in my thought life to get me to the truth and stay on the road named Truth?

Heart – emotions, affections - rejoicing in salvation – in what matters most of all

Actions – will – volitional decision to sing bc of head and heart – the head and heart are choosing to dwell on Yahweh – the personal name and nature of God – the Great I Am.

**Actions:** Singing. All that goes into singing – choosing, breathing, vocal chord fluctuation. Don't take this for granted. What you are doing when you are singing - Singing is a response to something worth singing about. Back to choosing to see God's steadfast love and mercy – He has dealt bountifully with me. Hasn't He brought you out of the miry pit, set your feet upon a rock, given you a new song? Choose to see.

### **Conc:**

Won't you take this prescription? Won't you tell others about the Miracle Drug? You will b/c you can't help it. This is the not too good to be true truth that comes from the gift of lament. These are fortifying, foundation solidifying, root developing, making you immovable as we walk together up the narrow road that leads to Life.

## Psalm 13 The Gift of Lament

### Questions for Small Groups

1. What do you think leads many Christians to neglect the gift of lament?
2. How can we encourage each other and our unbelieving friends to see lament as a gift? What are the benefits of the gift of lament?
3. Can you think of a time when you have seen grumbling turn into lament? Maybe where it started out as angry grumbling, but God turned it into lament.
4. Review and discuss the difference between grumbling and lament as defined by Gordon Bals (professional biblical counselor): “Lamenting is not grumbling. A grumbler is indifferent or hard towards God and has built a defensive fortress around his heart. A lamenter remains receptive to God but confused about life, which causes him to search out God and wrestle with Him.”
5. How can we help our children deal with the hard circumstances in life by using the gift of lament? (I had to apologize to my children for shutting them down any time they complained about something and not giving them the opportunity to lament.)
6. Share how you have been helped (and how you can help others) by putting walls up in your thought life to protect you from whining, and instead going to God with your complaints.