



## The Lament of a Shepherd

Winter is an interesting time of year in the part of the hemisphere where I'm located. Dreary, dark, foggy days can go on seemingly forever, with the sun peeking through the clouds on only a rare occasion. Often, our lives feel similar. When we are mourning the loss of a loved one or lamenting a situation in our lives, all around us can seem dreary.

David lamented on several occasions, as is evident throughout the psalms. One such time was after he was anointed king and was being unjustly accused by Saul. Saul's obsessive paranoia caused him to rally his troops and relentlessly pursue David. Saul had become so compulsive that he put a hit on David's life. He wanted the young man who had helped soothe his tortured soul through music, his own son-in-law, killed. We can only imagine how torturous this must have been for David.

### **Psalm 59:3-4, 7**

They have set an ambush for me. Fierce enemies are out there waiting, Lord, though I have not sinned or offended them. I have done nothing wrong, yet they prepare to attack me. Wake up! See what is happening and help me! Listen to the filth that comes from their mouths; their words cut like swords.

This psalm, in its entirety, is a song of lament. David trusts God and acknowledges Him as his strength and his fortress and the One who will rescue... but David still laments. He still cries. He still mourns. He still grieves. And God knows. And lamenting is good.

In *Prayer in the Night*, Tish Warren writes, "Lament is not only an act of self-expression or exorcising pain: it forms and heals us. The Psalms express every human emotion, but, taken up again and again, they never simply leave us as we are. They are strong medicine. They change us. The transformation they effect isn't to turn our sadness into happiness; they don't take grieving people and make them annoyingly peppy and optimistic. They never say, 'Chin up' or 'It's not so bad'. Nor do they tell us why we suffer. Instead, they fix our vision on God's love for us, and teach us to locate our own pain and longing in God's eternal drama. They form us into a people who can hold the depths of our sorrow with utter honesty even as we hold to the promises of God."

David emphasized his innocence. In fact, in the strongest way possible, David was emphatic with God that the crusade Saul was on against him was not due to anything David had done. That he in fact, was innocent.

Maybe the same is true for you, fellow shepherd. Maybe you have been wrongly accused. Maybe the mistreatment you are experiencing by your team, your friends, your family, your parish, or your Board is completely unjustified. You cry. You mourn. You grieve.

And God is listening. And we, like David, should lament. AND we should express our trust in God's promises...

### **Psalm 59:9-10, 16-17**

You are my strength; I wait for you to rescue me; for you, O God, are my fortress. In his unflinching love,

my God will stand with me. He will let me look down in triumph on all my enemies. But as for me, I will sing about your power. Each morning I will sing with joy about your unfailing love. For you have been my refuge, a place of safety when I am in distress. O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love.

Dear shepherd leader, you may be right where David was when he wrote this song. You may be falsely accused or hunted down, through no fault of your own. Or you may be experiencing the consequence of your own sin. You may be in what seems like a desperate situation. No matter the circumstances, the words David used to express his faith in the Father holds true for us, just as they did for him: God is our strength. God is our refuge. God loves us with an unfailing love – before, during, and through our lament – even or especially when all in our lives seems dreary.

May these words of David's, this lament, remind you of the faithfulness of our Good Shepherd, in every single situation we face. And may He transform you in the process.

## Digging Deeper Questions

1. As a shepherd leader, are you aware of any sheep that you're leading who may be in the midst of some dreary days? How can you be present for them?
2. Holly writes that lamenting is good. Would you agree? What personal experience or moments come to mind that support your answer?
3. How have you been transformed as a shepherd leader by your moments (or seasons) of lament?