

# Lament

## *How To Get from Here to There*

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Psalm 13

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Today, I want to address a topic that is not talked about in church very often, and it's this idea of lament. Some of you may have looked at the bulletin cover and then pulled out your phone to Google, "What does lament mean?" Because we don't talk about it that often. I want to start by sharing with you some verses that many of us probably have heard in Scripture before, and they all encapsulate this idea that we understand that we are supposed to rejoice in the Lord always.

But yet, if you are like me, there are seasons that that may be a struggle. It may be difficult, and that's when we can use lament. So let's look at these Scripture. First one comes Philippians chapter 4, verses 4 to 7. The apostle Paul says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again. Rejoice. Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Jesus says in Matthew 6:34, "Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself.

Each day has enough trouble of its own." Paul again in Romans 12: 12, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer." The psalmist, David, Psalm 37, verse 4 says, "Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart." Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." James says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters.

Whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." Psalm chapter 30, verse 5, "For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime. Weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." In Psalm 144:15, "Blessed is the people of whom this is true.

Blessed is the people whose God is the Lord." Again, if you were raised in church, you're probably familiar with some of these passages of scripture. Even if maybe you were just brought to youth group by a friend, you probably recognize some of these and even understand the idea that Christians are not supposed to allow the pains of this life to steal their joy in God.

We all have learned and recognized that as Christians, we are supposed to embrace the brokenness of our world with the hopeful confidence that one day God will make everything right again, and yet we struggle. There was a pastor who wrote a book called *Dark Clouds Deep Mercy*.

And in it, he says this, "I find that most Christians strongly believe that a joyful response should characterize their suffering, but they don't know how to reconcile their deep questions, honest struggles, and nagging doubts with the command to give thanks in all circumstances." Now, I am sure that you all can relate to this. Over the last year, I've officiated many funerals.

I have prayed with countless people before surgeries. I have met with dozens of people who are going through financial loss or relational loss, something in their life that was causing extreme pain and extreme turmoil. Many of these people were strong believers. They were you, the people who come to church on Sunday morning. They were people of faith. They knew the scriptures that I read earlier.

And many of them, because of those scriptures, had the added feeling of guilt for actually feeling sorrow as a follower of Jesus during a difficult time. And I have found as I meet with individuals and certainly as I experience this in my own life, there are usually two results that happen when a believer goes through a trauma and yet doesn't know how to appropriately respond to that trauma. The first thing that I see happen is denial.

They go into denial and they tell everyone, "It's fine. It's okay. I know it's going to be okay," even though it is obvious that nothing could be further from the truth. Things are not fine. They're hurting and understandably so because they've gone through an extremely difficult situation. If they don't enter into denial, the next thing or the other option that they choose is usually doubt. They struggle with doubt in their soul as to the validity of their faith.

These individuals get hung up on the question, "Why would God dot dot dot fill in the blank?" We've all asked the question, "Why would God allow this suffering? Why would God allow this hurt?" And I have even witnessed some people walk away from the church or from God or their faith for a season because they can't make sense of what has happened and no one has the answer. They have been hurt. And we don't have the answer.

Why? For those of you that watched *The Chosen*, this Christian series based on the Bible, this idea of lament is perfectly played out. This idea of being hurt is perfectly played out in season three when the apostle Peter and his wife, Eden, lose their baby before it's born. They get angry with God because here is Jesus who is healing other people and taking care of other people's problems, but yet they have sacrificed to follow Him, and He allows their baby to die.

You see, it is important for us as followers of Jesus to know how to get from pain to trust, how to get from hurt to healing, or confession to clarity, or calamity to comfort. This is what I want to focus on today. I want to focus on this idea of lament because the lamenting is the gift that God has given us to move from hurt to praise.

It's a model that Scripture gives to us that we can walk through together. Many believers have used lament to go from pain to trust. This is actually how Mark Vrogap, who wrote the book *Deep Clouds, Deep Mercy*, how he defines lament, is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. Lamenting is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.

Much of what I share will come from his book as he highlights scripture. I remember going through the Psalms as a college student, and our professor wanted us to go through all 150 and point out the ones that were lament Psalms. We see these in Psalms, but it's not only in that book. We see them in Jeremiah. Again, he is known as the weeping prophet. As he cries over Israel who is being disobedient to God, all of the people and the leaders are leading this people astray, and so he laments.

And of course, we have the book of Lamentations. Of course, that is also a lament. You see, the Hebrew people, when we look at the Old Testament, were familiar with lament. They used these as an opportunity to cry out to God. The Israelite people would be enslaved and mistreated by others. Life was not easy for them. One of the words that we often use to describe them is hardship.

One of these lament Psalms is used again in *The Chosen* at the beginning of season three, episode eight, the last episode of season three, it's Psalm 77. It is a beautiful lament, but it's too long for us to have time to go through that whole psalm today. But I encourage you, maybe you'll write that down. Psalm 77, it's a beautiful lament, but we're going to do one that's a little shorter so we can spend time in it and see kind of the pattern of how this works. And that's going to be in Psalm 13.

So if you have your Bibles, I encourage you to open up to Psalm chapter 13. That is the lament Psalm that we are going to go through so that we can pick out this model of what it means to pray a prayer of pain that leads to trust. Let me pray and then we'll jump in. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us where we are.

And I know there are many people in this room that are in a difficult season right now. Various reasons, various things that have happened. I know that we all go through difficult seasons at one point or another. And so I ask that we would use the gifts and the models that You have given to us through Your Word that teach us how to approach you in our pain, teach us how to approach you in our suffering and in our questions, not in a way that leads to sin, but in a way that leads to praise.

And so may you walk with us in that process. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. Again, lament this idea of crying out to God is a way to move from hurt to praise. It's a tool that we can use in our seasons of despair, our seasons of hurt, our seasons of doubt, our seasons of question. And in these trying times, we know that our response is supposed to be praise.

It's supposed to be trust, but sometimes it is difficult to get there. And so this idea of using lament helps us to deepen our trust in God. It's a process. And as you look at these lament Psalms and as you read lamentations in Jeremiah, you see that there is a pattern. There's four kind of parts to this lament. And they don't always flow in linear linear order or pattern. It doesn't always go one, two, three, four.

Sometimes you jump around a little bit, but they all touch on one of these four topics. So here are the four parts of a lament. The first one is turning to God in prayer, making sure, obviously, you're going to him with your complaints and with your struggles, which is number two, bringing your complaints to God. Number three is this idea of asking boldly, going before God, and asking why things are happening. That's okay. And then the final part of lament, which is the goal, is to choose to trust or praise.

The beauty of a lament, a prayer lament, is that it allows us to openly and honestly express our frustrations and our pains and our confusion to God while at the same time encourages us to reaffirm our trust in God. What I have seen happen in lives and I've even experienced in my own life is if we don't learn to lament, if we don't learn to cry out to God in this way, we limit our relationship with Him because we somehow believe that God can't handle our frustrations and our hurts.

We shouldn't take those to Him. And so we begin to believe that we should hide these frustrations. We should hide certain things from God because in our mind, we know it is right, but our hearts are lagging behind. And so we talk about this idea. The first stage of a lament often is turning to God. You see, when we are hurt, many of us are tempted to use the silent treatment. Don't nudge your spouse, okay?

For whatever reason, we believe that if we use the silent treatment, we're going to show them. We either use this because we don't want to say something we are going to regret or that we say something in our anger or we feel, which is more often the case, that our silence is going to get the point across that we're not happy. I'm not happy with you, so I'm not going to talk with you. And we can be guilty of doing this with God as well. We say, "You know what? I'm so frustrated.

I'm so angry. I can't even talk to him right now. I can't even pray." Can I tell you if you've ever had that thought or feeling you're not alone? I have had many people come into my office and say, "Pastor, I am so hurting right now. I cannot even pray." I will tell you what my response to them is, which this is just an added bonus. This is for free, all right? I tell them just to say the name of Jesus. If that's all you can do, just say the name of Jesus.

You see, silence is the easy answer. It's the easy way out. Lament takes faith. It takes courage. Lament allows us to stay connected to God, not just in the good times, but all through life's ups and downs, the twists and turns. And let me just be honest with you, this can be messy. It's messy in your own personal life, and it's messy to walk through it with somebody else.

You may feel distant from God, but the first thing you need to do in your seasons of pain and hurt is turn to God. Don't run away. The second part that often comes next is just candidly talking to God about your problems, talking about your struggles. It's okay in your prayer life to point out things that don't seem to line up with his character.

It's okay to point out things that say, "You know what, God, it just seems like right now you're not in control because I don't know how you would allow this to happen." There are times when it feels like he's not loving because you don't feel that love from him. There's times that it feels like he is being cruel. And it's okay to say, "You know what? God, right now, I just feel this way. I have this feeling that I know maybe even isn't right, but I'm just being honest.

I feel this way." You might say, "Pastor, I can't do that." It's wrong to go before God and to claim those things. Well, I say, "Look at David in Psalm 13, verses 1 and 2. Here you will read about a man who is crying out to God, asking the questions, "Why? How long?" David says, "How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?" This idea of complaint is not venting in your sinful anger upon God as much as it is just being honest and sharing your struggles with him. It is being like David and saying, "God, right now, this is how I feel. I feel like you are far away.

And I am just wondering when are things going to change? When is it going to get better? If you can't get to the step of being honest before God, the danger comes in stuffing all of your feelings down and never working through them, never dealing with them. These are real feelings. And if they're not worked through, they can easily turn into a foothold for the enemy. The enemy can say, "Oh, yeah. Remember when God let you down? Remember that? Remember, you can't really trust him.

You can't really put your faith in him. All of these lives begin to happen because you've never worked through it, even though mentally you may know, "I know God is good. I know God is good, but sometimes I feel like He's not good." You have to work through that with God. And so then we move to point three, which is asking boldly, the whole point of lamenting as followers of Jesus has to do with the idea that what is happening in your life doesn't seem to align with God or His promises.

You get to a point where something seems unjust, unfair, unholy even. Something just isn't right. And due to that tension, our lament is calling on God to act. We don't call on God only for our own personal relief, though that often is the motivating factor. We also cry out to God so that his character would shine. God, would you fix this so that you could receive praise?

Those who understand lament will continue to do so even if the answer is delayed for reasons we may never know. Here we see in Psalm 13:3, David says, "Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him, and my foes will rejoice when I fall." David cries out to God and says, "God, fix this injustice," or people are not going to praise you.

People are going to say things about you. You see, turning to God brings us to the only place where true change can come from. This lament serves to strengthen our resolve and not give up, saying, "God, I know you are holy. I know you are good. Will you please act upon your character?" Which leads us to the final step of a lament. And this is the goal and the turning point of every lament, and that is trust. It is a renewed confidence in God's trustworthiness.

That's where we want to end up. It's almost like when you come before God, you openly share your heart, your feelings, your emotions, the things you are going through because those are real and you're experiencing them. And so you lay those out before God. But in the midst of that process, your mind also continues to work and it

doesn't shut down. And you say, "God, even though I feel this way, I know it to be true that you are good." And so I'm going to stand on that promise, even in the midst of my pain, even in the midst of my hurt.

In his book, Mark uses this phrase as a conclusion to our pains and our hurts and our doubts. And I thought it was good. I had to read it a couple of times. Sorry, before we get to that, Psalm 13, 5, and 6. This is David, again, showing his trust in God. He says, "But I trust in your unfailing love." Remember, he has said, "How long? How long, Father, is this going to happen?" But now he's using his head to say, "But I trust in your unfailing love. My heart rejoices in your salvation.

I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me." This is the goal of every lament that you would get to the point, and you often see one of these transition words. So again, if you go home and Google lament Psalms or whatever as you're reading, you will see the complaints, you'll see the hurt, you'll see the pain, and you'll always get to a point where the person lamenting will say, "But I, but I will continue to trust in you," or, "I will do this." David says, "But I will trust in you." And it's not easy to get to that point.

It's not easy. You have to work through it. For some people, this whole process can take minutes. For others, it takes days, weeks, months, yes, for some even years. To work through this, it's a process. So Mark says in his book, "Hard is not hard, but hard is not bad," right? It's hard. We're not arguing that it's easy. Hard is oh, hard is hard. Sorry. I should read what I have on the screen. Hard is hard, but hard is not bad.

Hard is hard. It is. It's difficult. But that doesn't mean that it's bad. All laments will point to that transition of trust a form of praise. This idea of lamenting gives you a process for your pain. It creates space for a believer to wrestle with real emotions in a healthy way. Knowing you should rejoice without understanding the path can be disheartening. You have this hurt, but you don't know what to do with it, even leading to despair.

But laments provide the way for moving through the loss to hope. It provides a path for you to walk, to say, "I feel like I'm up against a wall. I don't even know what to do. I don't know how to get through this. This is what lament does. It offers you a path. It's a type of prayer. And I believe that if we will become better and learn how to pray in this way of lamenting, that we will move through difficult times with immeasurably more grace and mercy.

I also believe it will serve as a witness to who God is. As I began today, I know that many of us have been or are in a difficult season right now. And if you aren't in one currently, you probably just got through one, or unfortunately, you're just about ready to enter one because life is full of these seasons. And I want these seasons to be opportunities for us to grow in our faith.

I don't want the enemy to get a foothold. I also want you to know that it's okay to be hurt. It's okay to be confused or upset with what is happening. I encourage you, be honest with God. He can handle it. Use this pattern of lament as a guide to work through it. And again, it's not going to happen overnight for most people. It's going to take days, months, years, decades for some.

If you want to see good examples of laments, again, look in the Psalms, pick out their pattern of seeking God, having some complaint, or just misunderstanding, asking boldly for God to change, and then they end in trust and praise. It is a beautiful prayer language that often has been lost in our culture. Remember, a lament is a prayer in pain that leads to praise.

That's the goal. That's the process. As every service, we'll have people up here that are willing to pray with you. You may be going through a difficult season right now, and you just want somebody to listen. They would love to listen and pray with you. Maybe you want to do your own business with God, and you want to cry out to God because you're still even scared of the feelings that you have. You're scared of the thoughts you're having. You just want to do your business with God, that's fine. You can come up and use the altar and do your business with God.

This whole idea of a prayer of lament is a beautiful thing to move us from our pain to our praise because that's what God deserves. That's the goal of our lives. Let me close in prayer. And I know I believe that I only have a small piece of the pie of all of the pain and struggles that people are going through.

I maybe get just the tip of the iceberg shared with me as people ask for prayer because of what they're going through, the questions they're having, the struggles they have. But Father, you know it all. And You love us. You walk with us. You offer us Your grace and Your mercy and Your love. So I ask that we in return would come to You with those pains and with those hurts, that we would share with you really what we're thinking, knowing that you can handle it.

And in the process of that, that we would be reminded of Your faithfulness, that we would be reminded of Your goodness, that no matter what is happening, what is going on in our life, we will always have reason to praise You. There's always a reason to praise You for You are good. And so we ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.