

That's Sad

Psalms #4 | Nov 5, 2023 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Preached by Steve Howell



Recap/Review

Good morning! It's great to be **back** with you this morning.

I was thankful for the opportunity to take some **vacation time last week**. I'm especially appreciative of **Phil Smith** from **Pioneer Bible Translators** speaking last Sunday to share about the important work of Bible translation. Hopefully it provided some food for thought and gave you an opportunity for prayer!

This week, we are **returning to our series** on the **Book of Psalms**, so if you have your Bible, please turn ahead to **Psalm 51**. We'll get there in a few minutes.

In this series we are trying to help you **recognize the range** of songs in this book, help you **learn to read** them well, and help you to **cultivate a heart** that expresses emotion in the godly patterns we find here.

So far, we have looked specifically at:

- Songs of **Praise**
- Songs of **Confidence**

These **categories aren't rigid**...just like when you are listening to music on Spotify. A few are obviously **one category** (*just like George Strait is going to be pure country music*), but many of them could fit into **multiple categories** (*like Carrie Underwood straddling the line between country and pop, or Luke Combs singing a Tracy Chapman tune*). Many of the themes and lyrics covered in these songs will bleed into other areas. But there is still **value in looking** at the categories and types of songs, learning some **common elements and patterns** that resonate with us and that provide a godly example to follow.

Today, our category is going to take us in a **different direction** than we've been going for the last few weeks. We are going to look at one **category** of song that **dominates** the book of Psalms. While the *praise of God* remains a good and positive overall focus of the book, we are going to explore an entire class of songs within the book that **aren't so positive**. These are songs that **cry and weep**, that **groan and complain**.

Today we are going to look at: **Laments**, the **Sad Songs** of Psalms! (Keep the Kleenex handy!)



Would it surprise you to know that **around 60%** of the psalms fall into this category of **lament**?!

You **might expect** the joyful **hymns of praise** to dominate this book. After all, **“happiness”** seems to be the **expected emotion** we have for people who follow God. In church, we have a **Sunday morning “game face”** when we get here:

“How are you this morning?” “Great!!”

We have this notion that Christians are **supposed to be positive** all the time...that **sadness should be fleeting**, that sadness is an **anomaly**. Yet the Psalms **paint a different picture** of God’s people.

Instead of occasional moments of sadness, the songs **repeatedly** and **frequently** make their way back to **difficult and challenging places** where happiness is far from their minds.

“LORD, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me! Many are saying of me, “God will not deliver him.”” (Psalm 3:1–2, NIV)

“Listen to my words, LORD, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.” (Psalm 5:1–2, NIV)

“Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1, NIV)

“Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.” (Psalm 61:1–2, NIV)

“I cried out to God for help; I cried out to God to hear me. When I was in distress, I sought the Lord; at night I stretched out untiring hands, and I would not be comforted. I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.” (Psalm 77:1–3, NIV)



Struggling with Sadness

A Shared Struggle

Do these lyrics resonate with you? Have you put them on your lips recently? Are they familiar to you? Do you know what it’s like to be struggling with sadness?

We are **all too familiar** with the emotions. Sadness like that can be a **fleeting** feeling, or it can dig in and **remain for long periods** of time.

In my own life, I have faced seasons of sadness where (to quote those Psalms) “my heart grew faint” and where God seemed “far off.”

As a **freshman in high school**, I battled a fairly serious **depression**. In that period of life, I wallowed in sadness for months. I was convinced that no one really liked me or really cared about me. I falsely attributed those opinions to my family and most of my friends...and even those whose care I couldn't explain away, I reasoned they were probably exhausted from dealing with me. Day in and day out, I would feel a cloud of gloom over every experience. It was a lingering, baseless feeling. God pulled me out of it, eventually...but **even now, I still face times when the sadness draws me in and requires effort to escape.**

Later, in my twenties, I faced a season of sadness that wasn't an overall mood. Instead, it was brought about by **crisis**. My father passed away after an ATV accident on the family farm. It was sudden and unexpected, and I had a focused reason to grieve, cry, and feel despair. In the face a crushing loss, the sadness was acute.

Can you relate? (Why am I even asking?!) Of course, you can!



You've faced **your own seasons** of sadness. Looking around the room, I see people who have been sad for good reasons: ongoing **sickness, cancer, divorce, job loss, rebellious children**. I've prayed for many of you, I've been a shoulder to cry on for some of you, I've walked through it with some of you.

...So I know you know.

Big Picture



Statistics show that sadness, depression, and anxiety are quite **common**. One study shows that **about 30% of Americans** have been **diagnosed with depression** at least once during their lifetime...and that's just diagnosed.¹ How many more feel it, yet never go to a doctor or seek help? They just tough it out and hope that it goes away at some point. The number would climb significantly based on that fact alone.

The rates are higher for **younger** adults, and the rates are higher for **women** than for men. And of course, there have been higher rates across the board in the aftermath of **COVID**.

Sadness is a part of **all our stories**...whether we are **war vets, victims** of abuse, **addicts**, or **fans** of the Denver Broncos.

Biblical Stories

Think that these emotions are a **modern problem**? Think again. They have been **part of the story** since God created the earth and humanity.

Elements of **grieving emotions** can be found **in the stories** of:



¹ [Depression Statistics \(2023\) – Forbes Health](#)

- **Joseph.** Languishing as he is sold into slavery, then imprisoned in Egypt (Genesis 37ff)
- **Moses.** Overwhelmed by the challenges of leading a new nation. (Numbers 11)
- **Hannah.** Heartbroken at her inability to have a baby. (1 Samuel 1)
- **David.** Fleeing for his life and leaving his closest friend. (1 Samuel 20)
- **Jeremiah.** Rejected for sharing God’s messages. (Jeremiah 15)
- **Jesus.** Weeping at the death of Lazarus. (John 11)

Proper Response?

All these **examples** come together to **remind us** that you and I **will face sadness**...and if we face it, we **need to face it in a godly manner!** We need to know the **proper response.**



Not everyone responds well to sadness.

*As I was working on this sermon this past week, I stumbled upon a country song from the early '90s on the radio. Do you remember “**Bubba Shot the Jukebox**” by Mark Chesnutt? The title gives you the main plot of the song, but why did he shoot? The jukebox started playing a sad song, and Bubba was so emotionally distraught by the sadness that he got his gun and shot it.*

*The song is clever and catchy and amusing...but no one handles their sadness so poorly, do they? No one would do that, right? Well, I was also reading in **1 Samuel 18**. There, **King Saul** was so upset with his jukebox (David playing the harp), that he tried to do the same with a spear instead of a gun!*

People DO respond to sadness and depression with **violence**. They respond with **self-destructive behavior**. They respond with **alcohol**; they respond with **marijuana**. They respond with **apathy** and **isolation** and **sin**.

When you and I face sadness, we are going to need a **better solution**; a **better outlet**; a **godly response!!!!** We need to **honor God** even in our sadness.

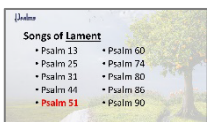
And this is where the **songs of lament** come in. Here we find **examples to follow** for any situation.

The Laments in Psalms

The songs of lament in Psalms are **abundant** and **diverse**. If you’re looking for some **examples**, check out the following:

Psalms 13, 25, 31, 44, 60, 74, 80, 86, 90

These have been **written to address different situations** and **sources** of grief and trouble both on a **corporate/communal** level and an **individual** level.



Sources of Trouble

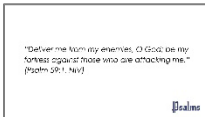
As we keep reading the laments, we see certain **sources of trouble** appearing regularly.



Trouble Source #1: The "Enemy"

Many of the psalms show the author in conflict with his **"enemies."** These enemies are usually presented as men who are seeking to **harm** or even **kill** the author, whether in **reputation** or in **real life**. Typically they **aren't named** – they are just a **generic** category of opposition. They are "gangsters doing dirty deeds"² against an innocent victim.

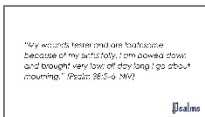
"Deliver me from my enemies, O God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me." (Psalm 59:1, NIV)



Trouble Source #2: Self

Sometimes the opposition and trouble come from **the author himself**. He has done something wrong, whether a spiritual **sin** or a practical **mistake**. Feeling **guilty** for his choice and decision, the songwriter describes his situation.

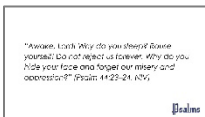
"My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning." (Psalm 38:5–6, NIV)



Trouble Source #3: God

Other times the author finds himself struggling with **God** himself as a source of trouble. Instead of feeling like a refuge in time of trouble, God seems **absent**. God seemingly **abandons** him and **refuses** to help. (*Not actually, but in feeling!*)

"Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever. Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?" (Psalm 44:23–24, NIV)



A Pattern for Facing Sadness

Whatever category of sadness and trouble you encounter, there is probably a **psalm that resonates** with your situation.

But these songs **don't just identify a source** of trouble. They also **model a healthy, godly response** to that trouble and the sadness that accompanies it. While **not formulaic**, the songs of lament share a **typical pattern** for facing sadness that we see when we investigate them in their entirety.

Let's **explore an example**.

² To quote "Beer for My Horses" by Toby Keith and Willie Nelson

An Example: Psalm 51

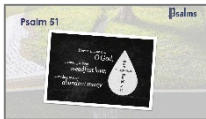


Psalm 51 is a well-known psalm. It is one of seven “*penitential psalms*” in the book – a sad song focused on *individual sin* and the *remorse* that follows. In other words, the source of trouble in the song was the author himself...and he’s **devastated** by it!

Who is the **author** of this particular song? It is our **most frequent author** in Psalms, **King David**. Psalm 51 was written in the **aftermath of David’s affair** with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of her husband (terrible choices! He should be sad!).

God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David for this sin, an event recorded in 2 Samuel 11:1-12:25. After Nathan’s rebuke, David is **brokenhearted** and ready to **repent**. While we can’t be sure exactly **how soon** after the rebuke this psalm was written, its origin was **in the context** of David’s regret and repentance.

Listen to the song and **feel** the anguish...



Psalm 51 (NIV)

For the director of music. A psalm of David. When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight;
so you are right in your verdict
and justified when you judge.
- ⁵ Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
- ⁶ Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb;
you taught me wisdom in that secret place.
- ⁷ Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
- ⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
- ⁹ Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.

- ¹⁰ Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
- ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.
- ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
- ¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
so that sinners will turn back to you.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,
you who are God my Savior,
and my tongue will sing of your righteousness.
- ¹⁵ Open my lips, Lord,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
- ¹⁶ You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
- ¹⁷ My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart
you, God, will not despise.
- ¹⁸ May it please you to prosper Zion,
to build up the walls of Jerusalem.
- ¹⁹ Then you will delight in the sacrifices of the righteous,
in burnt offerings offered whole;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

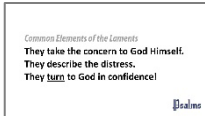
In a Nutshell...

Did you follow David's progression here?

1. David asks **God for forgiveness**...based on God's own qualities of **mercy and love** (v. 1-2)
2. David **confesses his transgressions** and sin (v. 3-5)
3. David **pleads for forgiveness and restoration** (v. 6-12)
"Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all of my iniquities." (KEY VERSE v.9)
4. David **vows to teach other sinners** to repent and praise God (v. 13-15)
5. David points out the **grounds for forgiveness** – not sacrifices (in a legalistic fashion), but a **broken spirit!** (v. 16-19)

Common Elements of the Laments

What David does here is **common** to the songs of lament. There are **certain elements** that are **shared** in all these sad songs. These elements may be in **any order**, and depending on the song the **emphasis** might be greater on one part than the others. But these elements are present throughout:



1. **They take the concern to God Himself.** The songs address God and cry for help.
2. **They describe the distress.** They identify the source of trouble.
3. **They turn to God in confidence!** They express trust in God's response and deliverance, regardless of their situation.

Read through any of the sad songs – the laments – and you will find that they **don't stay as laments** forever. That **"turn" toward God changes the entire situation** and moves the song to a **declaration of praise**...maybe a feeble praise, but praise nonetheless!

Godly Grief



So **what can we take** from these sad songs?

Our own encounters with grief and sadness usually find us searching for a **solution** to the feeling. We want **sadness** to **change** to **happiness**. We want the emotion to transform; we want the feelings to reverse.

The songwriters in Psalms were no different. But they did recognize and share an important caveat to the sadness:

Even when we are sad, our hearts should choose to praise God.

By **turning to God** in confidence – even **WITHIN** the sadness – we put our emotions in a better place. We find reasons to **hope**, to grow **content**, to **see God's plan** in motion.

You realize what this is, right? It's **not happiness**. It is **joy**.

While genuinely mournful, the psalms of sadness **provide a picture of JOY** that **trusts** God completely **through the sadness**. We are told in the book of Philippians to:

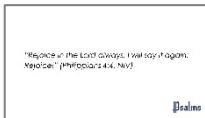
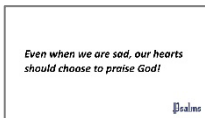
"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4, NIV)

Notice that it **doesn't say** to "Rejoice when everything is **going smoothly!**" It says to rejoice **"always!"** And that certainly includes **during times of trouble and sadness**. Practically, this means we must focus **less on the feeling** (happiness) and **more on the choice** (rejoice). We are to do so **"in the Lord,"** not based on the **circumstances**; we rejoice **based on God Himself**.

What does it mean to **trust Him completely in sadness**?

It means the focus moves **off self**. We must not **look to ourselves** for resolution to our troubles. We humbly **submit to God** and recognize that **He is the one** to fight our battles. **Vengeance** is His; **redemption** is His. As David demonstrates so completely in Psalm 51, **we are powerless** in and of ourselves to make a change (I cannot purge my own sin; I cannot purify myself). Only God can do that! So, we **trust Him**.

Next, the focus moves **off results**. We must not look for a solution to the situation based solely on **achieving our own desires**. We are **not wise enough** to know **what is best** for ourselves or others. If we base our trust on whether He heals an illness, or whether He



gets me out of the unemployment line, or whether a broken relationship is healed, we are bound to be disappointed! Our trust should be on the fact that God knows what is best for us and for His eternal plans.

Third, the focus moves **onto God's faithfulness**. Our trust is placed on God – not on a resolution of the situation or on our own strength, but **on His goodness**. *He* is the one source of stability and forgiveness and love that we can lean on when the rest of our lives crumble!



Choosing Joy

We need to **choose joy** for **every situation**. So, when we face sadness, depression, grief, loneliness, or despair, we should try to put ourselves in a **situation** where you are **more inclined to praise**.

- **Do you feel closest to God in nature?** Then go to the lake and go fishing, or take a hike in a nearby park.
- **Do you feel closest to God through music?** Then turn on Life 88.5 or pull up Spotify. Sing along with the songs you know and let them draw you closer to Him.
- **Do you feel closest to God in silence?** Then spend some time alone with Him. Be careful not to allow isolation and loneliness to fuel your sadness, but take the time you need to be aware of His presence to and rejoice in it.

Find the place or circumstance in which you are **most likely to look to God**, to **lean on God**, to **love God**. And allow your praise to flow even while your situation is sad!

Closing

"We live in a society that despises lack and distrusts the weak, that shames insufficiency and only glories in grief once it is gone." – Elliot Clark

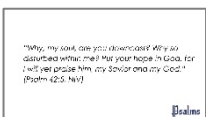
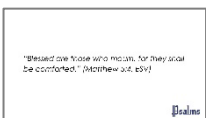
We wish **sadness would just go away**, but it is a **part of life**...and it can be a **valuable** part! It is a part of life **in which God can be at work**. He can **use our sadness and grief to focus our faith**. He can use it to **create a longing** for the thing we're designed for: Him!

Jesus said in the Beatitudes:

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." (Matthew 5:4, ESV)

The comfort will **come from God's presence** – even during the sadness. So, **adopt the mindset** of the songs of lament. **Choose to praise** God even when it is hard. **Allow yourself to love Him** and to **pursue Him**, whether your enemy is in here (your heart) or out there (in life). When facing sadness and depression, ask yourself:

"Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God." (Psalm 42:5, NIV)





Invitation

Don't face your sadness alone! Don't try to conquer it through your own power! Use it as a chance to draw closer to God. Allow His church to be part of the process as you confront those emotions and choose to praise.

- If you have a prayer request that you would like to share...
- Or if you would like to be part of this church body
 - o Either through a first-time decision to make Jesus your Lord and Savior
 - o Or by officially placing your membership in this church as an already-baptized believer...

...we invite you to come forward during our song.

PRAYER REQUESTS:

Notes

Struggling with Sadness

A Shared Struggle

Biblical Stories

Proper Response?

The Laments in Psalms

Psalms 13, 25, 31, 44, 60, 74, 80, 86, 90

Sources of Trouble

Trouble Source #1: The "Enemy" (Psalm 59:1)

Trouble Source #2: Self (Psalm 38:5-6)

Trouble Source #3: God (Psalm 44:23-24)

An Example: Psalm 51

Common Elements of the Laments

1. They take the concern to God Himself.
2. They describe the distress.
3. They turn to God in confidence!

Godly Grief (Philippians 4:4)

Even when we are sad, our hearts should choose to praise God.

Choosing Joy (Matthew 5:4; Psalm 42:5)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Describe a sad experience in your life. How did you react? Do you feel like your reaction honored God?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Do you find it surprising that 60% of the psalms include elements of lament (sadness)? Why or why not? What does that say about the human condition?
- How have you seen sadness and depression affect the people around you? Does there seem to be any difference in the lives of Christians vs non-Christians?
- Choose one of the following examples of sadness in Scripture: Hannah (1 Samuel 1), David (1 Samuel 20), or Jesus (John 11). What was their source of sadness? Were their emotions reasonable? How did sadness impact their relationship with God?
- A lament can focus on external enemies, internal turmoil, or spiritual doubts. Which is most difficult for you to face? Why?
- Read Psalm 51. List specific verses and/or phrases that show dependence on God instead of self. Which one would be most helpful to you in a time of trouble?
- What is the difference between joy and happiness? Read Philippians 4:4. If joy and happiness are different, how do we accomplish this command to “rejoice” while we experience sadness? (Hint: consider emotion vs choice)
- Does the church (in general, as well as at TCC) do an adequate job of addressing sadness and depression in the lives of its members? What are some specific areas we could improve?

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Pray for those around you who are dealing with feelings of sadness, grief, loneliness, or despair. Pray for God to make His presence known. Ask for His help in providing encouragement to those whose hearts are hurting.