

**“Psalms of Lament”**  
**Psalms Series | Part Three**  
**Pit Prayers**

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We continue this morning with our Psalms Series. We looked at Psalms of Praise and Psalms of Thanksgiving so far and this morning we look at another whole category of Psalms that is radically different and make up most of the book of Psalms.

They are called Psalms of Lament. I call them the Pit Songs. They were written while the Psalmist was feeling discouraged and overwhelmed with life. While he was in the pit of discouragement and feeling like God had deserted him.

A number of times the Psalmist describes himself as being in the pit of despair.

**Psalms 88:4,6 I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am like one without strength.... You have put me in the lowest pit, in the  
darkest depths.**

**Ps 40:2 He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire;  
he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.**

The Psalms are so encouraging because as we read them we realize we are not alone in what we are experiencing and they help put into words what we are feeling and sometimes what we are afraid to say to God.

They show us how to live in a fallen world full of pain and disappointment. They show us how to hang onto God when we are in the pit.

David doesn't hold back and God is ok with that. He dumps his doubts, fears, anger, feelings of God deserting him, wanting to get even with people.

God gives us permission to lament. To express our sorrow, regret, or unhappiness. That's why we have all these Psalms to help us get in touch with our emotions and express them. God doesn't want us to pretend.

One pastor writes how he was so impressed when he visited a church and saw a box of Kleenex. He said - here was a church where it was ok to cry and be honest in your worship.

A religion or church that causes people to bottle up their pain and tears does not produce healthy Christians.

- We do want to have positive confessions and declaration songs of victory.
- But to have meaningful positive confession there must be honest praying.

These songs of Lament are not to make us depressed this morning but to give us a path to victory in our lives so we don't get stuck in our pit.

At Petra, we want to be real. We want honest worship. We want to come before the Lord with all the good, bad and ugly parts of our heart and allow him to transform us in his presence. We want to leave differently than how we were when we came.

- Where the negative is turned to positive, sorrow to joy, and fear to trust.
- We want to turn our distress into hope and praise him even in our pit.

The Bible is so honest. There is no attempt to whitewash the suffering and feelings of God's people. It encourages brutally honest praying!

The Psalms of Lament are great because they teach us how to pray and relate to God during tough times.

Here are some truths to help us get out of whatever pits we find ourselves in today.

### **1. We are encouraged to come to God with our complaint and petition.**

To get out of our pit we need to move out of denial and the fake smile and become honest with God.

And, too often we run to everyone else with our complaints instead of going to God and working it out with him.

We see David running to God each time he found himself in a pit situation. He would wrestle with God with his issues.

### **Read Psalms 142**

Our human tendency is to blame people or God for our pit. But our help is in the Lord as our high tower and mighty deliverer. We need to go to him and make our appeal and requests to him.

## **2. We are encouraged to get in touch with our feelings and share them with God.**

David was a guy, and sometimes it's hard for guys to do this. We are good at stuffing our feeling and toughing it out. But in reality, the feelings are still there for all of us and if we don't express them in a healthy way they eat away on the inside and slowly destroy our faith and trust in God. We become cynical in our faith.

Feelings are messy and not always based in reality. They can be hurtful when dumped on others but they are not hurtful to God so we are to go to him with those messy feelings. (*Psalms 88 – The darkest Psalm*)

Lament Psalms are cries of despair, anger, protest and doubt and were a normal part of Israel's worship. They sang about their individual and national despair.

Let me describe what a pit looks like and feels like. Some are shallow and some deep but they have some common characteristics. See if you can relate....

- The pit consists of doubts, and a mixture of anger, fear and hopelessness
- The slimy walls are covered with feelings of rejection, feeling neglected, maybe feeling the church and others don't care or understand
- There are feelings of being deserted by God. The core of your anger is often directed at God for letting you fall in the pit and for not getting you out quickly enough
- Sometimes you don't feel angry with God but depression becomes your pit
- In the pit is confusion and where you struggle with your thoughts about the trustworthiness of God and his promises and his protection.
- You wonder does prayer make a difference? Is this worth it?
- Sometimes the thoughts turn inward and you feel you are unworthy and deserve the pit. Feelings of condemnation weigh you down

We all spend time in a pit from time to time. It is a reality of life.

I have experienced a number of pits over the years:

- Before I accepted Christ, I was in a deep pit of being alienated from God
- When I broke up with my girlfriend – That was my teenage pit
- When I wrecked my car
- My dad's journey with cancer and his death a few years later – long pit
- Failure of my first church plant

- My young daughter's hospital experience
- A pit season where we struggled in our marriage
- A moral failure of my spiritual mentor and the resulting fall out
- A difficult ministry season in the 90's
- My experience with cancer and then later a heart attack

During these times of testing and struggle the Psalms of lament helped me connect and be honest with God.

### **3. Praying the Psalms helps us reorient our heart while still in the pit.**

The Psalms are more than poetry and ancient songs. They are living and life giving to us today. Praying them is a powerful way to stay connected to God. Especially when you don't know how to pray about your situation.

Sometimes in the midst of hard times you find your prayer life in the pits too. Praying the Psalms is very helpful during these dry hard times.

Jesus used some of the Psalms when he was struggling in the Garden of Gethsemane and while on the cross. He prayed part of Psalm 6 and Psalm 22.

*Psalm 22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*

The Apostle Paul quoted the Psalms to help the people. He quoted from Ps 44.

*Psalms 44:2 Yet for your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

Both Christians and non-Christians experience suffering. The difference is we have one who walks with us, absorbs our pain, gives us strength, and delivers us in due time.

- Not always according to our time frame though.
- Plus, we have an eternity awaiting us where there will be no more troubles, sorrow or tears.

### **4. Our emotions and feelings need to be confronted with truth.**

God invites us to openly and freely share our raw feelings with him and then through the Holy Spirit he brings them into alignment with the truth of who he is and the situations we find ourselves in.

Our feelings are not always rational, accurate or trustworthy. For instance, David out of his emotions said things that were not true. He blamed God wrongly. He felt God deserted him but he hadn't. He felt nobody cared for him and they did.

***Psalms 142:4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life.***

Everyone has a right to their feelings. It doesn't help to tell someone they shouldn't feel a certain way. But that doesn't mean my feelings are reality. God wants to teach us truth in our pits.

The hard truth is sometimes our pit is the very place God wants to do a transformation process in our life. If we will stop fighting and demanding God to get us out of the pit and begin asking him to reveal what he wants to teach us in the pit we will be much better off and possibly get out of our pit a lot sooner.

#### **5. We can choose to trust in the character of God when life is hard and we don't have answers.**

We can choose to trust God or stay mad at God.

The Holy Spirit gives us the ability to trust God. Sometimes he reminds us of God's faithfulness. To encourage himself David would often reminisce of the many ways God had rescue him and the nation in the past.

David would lay out all his honest feelings to God but he would most often end with a faith declaration of his trust in the goodness and sovereignty of God.

Lament and expressing our feelings is always done in the context of trust. We are saying to God, *"I am able to be this honest with you because I know you won't walk away from me when I am honest. I know I can trust your unfailing love."*

After we lament, we hold on to our faith in God. We may complain and raise objections to God but we don't walk away from our relationship with him.

**Let's read Psalm 13** and see how David laments and ends by declaring his trust in God. This is his pit prayer.

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

**How long will you hide your face from me?**

**<sup>2</sup>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?**

**<sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, LORD my God.  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,  
<sup>4</sup> and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.**

Read the next two verses out loud together with the congregation as our declaration of trust, along with David.

**<sup>5</sup> But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
<sup>6</sup> I will sing the LORD’s praise,  
for he has been good to me.**

### **Conclusion.**

Sometimes in reading these Psalms of Lament we think the Psalmist moved from despair to praise at the end of a chapter in a short period of time. Not so, The Psalms represent a journey of our souls. A journey of wrestling with our thoughts, emotions and crying out to God over and over again.

Our faith and relationship with God causes us to keep wrestling instead of giving up and turning our back on God. We know he is good and just in all he does or allows to touch our lives. So, we continue the journey to understand his ways and to trust his hand in our lives.

This is the testimony of God’s people through the generations. Like the great faith chapter of Hebrews 11 where some experienced their deliverance from the pit and some died in persecution but kept their faith in God through it all.

No matter where you are this morning. In the pit or out of the pit, Know this - He is with you and will never leave you nor forsake you. Trust in his unfailing love!

**Blessing:**

May the Lord bless you with a peace and confidence in your God. May the Lord lift you out of your pit and turn your sorrow to joy, your fear to trust, your distress to renewed hope and may his love overwhelm and keep you.