

## WEEK TWO | PRAYERS OF LAMENT AND INJUSTICE

### INTRODUCTION

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Over two-thirds of the psalms are prayers of lament and/or justice. THINK on this. Two-thirds of the Psalms are prayers, venting anger and rage and disillusionment and confusion and questions and frustrated longing to God, in a posture not of whining, but of worship.

Prayers of lament and justice tap into something that can often be strangely unfamiliar to us. Instead of bottling up anger, and letting it fester into bitterness - the Psalmists, including David seem to be very adept at expressing their feelings and desires to God. Instead of avoiding and numbing pain, the ancients had wardrobes to express sadness, lament, and anger.

The prayers of the Psalms reveal something else - that righteousness is not just a matter of concern for God - it is an important matter for His people. The exercise of calling for and desiring to see justice administered and oppressors punished is a regular occurrence in the Scripture.

As modern people, we need to tap into the wisdom of the ancients. Not everything about our culture and lifestyle leads to our flourishing. We would be wise to practice lament and crying out for justice.

### START WITH SCRIPTURE

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#### READ Psalm 10 OBSERVATIONS

- 1) Have you ever dared ask the question presented in verse 1?
- 2) When you take into account the whole Psalm, what kind of posture do you see? Humility or pride? Reverence or apathy? How does this shape our interpretation of verse 1 and instruct us in our own lament?
- 3) The word "justice" triggers some people today. In our polarized political environment, the phrase "social justice" has a number of connotations. Many people who identify as Christian, suggest that the Bible doesn't address social justice, but spiritual justice. But how does Psalm 10 demonstrate that God cares about material justice as well?
- 4) What sources of hope are found in the Psalm?

## PRACTICING THE PRACTICES

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### DISCUSSION

#### REVIEW

- How is the practice of daily prayer going for you?
- Which exercise (Prayer Cards or The Lord's Prayer Guide) did you find most helpful, and why?
- Any stories from the last week's Practice that you would like to encourage the whole group with? Answered prayer? Breakthrough?
- Any questions you're wrestling with?

#### REFLECTING ON SUNDAY

- How familiar were you with prayers of lament and justice?
- What did you learn?
- Do you deal with your sadness in a healthy, spiritually mature fashion? If no, what are some ways lament is a struggle for you?

#### PRACTICE

- Put away your phones or any other distractions, and get into a comfortable, but alert position.
- **LEADER:** Invite the Holy Spirit to come.
- Draw to mind an unanswered prayer or area of sadness and disappointment in your life.
- With that in your mind, have somebody read Psalm 79 (or another lament psalm of your choosing) out loud. Do your best to pray it, not just listen to it.
- Then sit in silence for a few minutes, just thinking about and feeling the weight of lament in your own life, community, or world. It can be lament over unanswered prayer or just emotional pain.
- Go around the room and pray your own "lament psalm" to God. Don't censor yourself. Flip the edit button to the "off" position and be honest with God and your Community. It doesn't have to be long. A sample prayer of lament is on the next page.
- End by listening to or singing a worship song or doing your best to express faith in God in the face of unanswered prayer.
- Thank Jesus that he went through unanswered prayer and emotional pain in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, and that he will lead and guide us through those kinds of moments.

### **A Sample Prayer of Lament and Justice from the Gospel Coalition:**

Father, we come to you deeply distressed and troubled. Like Jesus, our souls are overwhelmed with sorrow by the difficult circumstances that have come upon us. Circumstances that seem to have no end in sight. Lord, we think of those in our faith family who are dealing with the loss of loved ones—spouses, children, unborn babies, friends, relatives. Losses that will remain with them until they too go home to be with you. Oh God, we grieve these losses. We confess that we don't understand. Questions fill our minds: Why did this have to happen? How could you allow it? Where are you in the midst of it?

We're also filled with sorrow over the relational difficulties that have come into our lives. We think of the challenges of marriage or parenting. The difficulties that have overtaken marriages because of porn addiction, broken trust, rampant insecurities, outbursts of anger. The pain of a wayward children who reject you, despite everything they were raised to believe. The strains of taking care of aging parents as we watch life drain from their bodies. Oh God, these daily difficulties wear on us until we feel too exhausted to go on.

God, we're also exhausted by the physical, mental and emotional trials you have brought upon many of us. We think of those who are battling physical and mental illness, disease, and disability. Lord, it's such a demoralizing and dehumanizing path. The constant nausea, dizziness, fatigue, fog, tremors, the pain that shoots through our bodies, the inability to do simple things like walk or run or play with our kids...or even have kids. We grieve the anxiety that ravages our lives, the darkness of depression that bleeds into every part of our soul, the highs and lows that destroy our relationships, all of it, makes us feel less than human. We HATE it. We hate it God. And we confess that we often struggle to see you in the midst of these trials.

But, of course, Lord, when it's all said and done, we acknowledge that many of our trials have been brought on us through our own sin. We've gone after the false gods of sex or money or comfort or control or escapism and now we're tasting the bitter consequences of those choices. Like Israel, we spurned you to go after other lovers and now those very lovers have spurned us in our greatest moment of need. Oh God, our sin makes us miserable. We hate it and yet often we keep going back to it. We feel trapped.

All of these things fill our hearts with sorrow and grief. And yet we do not grieve as those who have no hope. On this side of the cross, we know that all of our grief, sorrow, and sin has been borne by another for us. For there, on the cross, Jesus the ultimate grief-bearer, took our sins and sufferings upon himself so that we might not be consumed by your wrath or by the suffering that comes in this broken world. Because of his atoning work on our behalf, we not only experience salvation amidst sorrow, but we also have great confidence that one day all of our sorrow will be wiped away when Jesus returns to right all wrongs and cause us to walk with you in unbroken fellowship on a renewed earth. Oh Lord, we have great hope because of Jesus. And so we continue to submit ourselves to you just like Jesus did, trusting in your goodness and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us when we feel too exhausted to go on. Strengthen us now in Christ's name we pray. Amen.