

LAMENT

A lament is a prayerful response to the full range of problems in the human condition. The psalms specifically name isolation, shame, despair, danger, physical impairment, and death as cause for lament. Laments are one of the ways that we intentionally bring into God's presence parts of our lives that are traumatic or disturbing.

Consider writing your own lament. In writing your own psalm of lament it may also be helpful to keep in mind these ideas that Walter Brueggemann (a noted theologian) outlines as salient elements in the prayers of lament.

1. A protest, crying out about the incongruity of the promises of God and something in your lived experience
2. Voicing a complaint as a way of taking initiative in the covenantal relationship you have with God
3. Knowing that often, but not always, the complaints of the people of God will move God to answer and to save

Take time to sit quietly and reflect on a time in your life when you were experiencing some type of deep pain or protest. Let yourself try to remember the feelings that were associated with that time in your life. What were the cries of your heart? What were your questions about where God was at that time? As an expression of prayer, write your own lament about that time or that experience of pain or loss.

To help stir your imagination three examples of laments have been included: A biblical structure of lament and two modern examples of personal laments. These are not meant to be models of what you are to write, but merely examples to help you pay attention to what might need to be expressed from your own heart.

The only essential element of this exercise is that you *authentically express something that has been painful to you, to God.*

Example 1: Traditional Structure of Biblical Psalm of Lament

Traditionally the psalm of lament has a definite structure with several elements:

The opening address,
the complaint,
the confession of trust,
the petition for help,
the vow of praise.

While not all of these elements are found in every lament psalm, they are all present in Psalm 22, which has been described by some as the premiere lament psalm.

Address: “My God my God... (22:1a)

Complaint: “Why have you forsaken me? Why are you in so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?” (22:1b)

Confession of Trust: “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.” (22:3-4)

Petition: “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.” (22:11)

Vow of Praise: “From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” (22:21a-22)

Example 2: Personal Psalm of Lament

By Ann Weems from her book, Psalms of Lament

I am depressed, O God.
I see no end to this cycle of sadness.
People tell me: “Everything will be all right,”
But it isn’t, and it won’t be.
They quote Paul to me:
“All things work together for good for those who love God.” Don’t I love you? Wasn’t I brought up in your holy house, O God? Didn’t I memorize your words and sing hymns to you?
Don’t I bow down to you?
Isn’t that what I’m doing now?
No one can tell me any good can come from this moment!
Let them have their say if it makes them feel better!
But I don’t want to hear it! I know what I’ve been through.
I know what it is to have death walk the halls of my home.
What has happened can’t be undone.
What is done cannot be prettied up.
But you, O God, can stop the aftershocks.

O God, tear through the night
To rescue the one you have left too long.
Help me, O God, Out of this tomb of pain.

Example 3: Personal Psalm of Lament

By Karen Goltz

Blog: Karen's Take on Life, the Universe, and Everything

Accept me, O Lord, because your people have not. A congregation of your followers sought to destroy my marriage and my faith. Every day I live with the pain, feeling their rejection, and my failure to guide them back to your ways. Have mercy on me, Abba. Ignite my faith where it has dimmed, and show me your justice. Keep my family together. Let those who have strayed from you but call themselves by your name make right their wrongs, and know that what they say and what they do matters. Open my heart, O Lord, and heal the pain that lives there. Quiet my demons, and restore my faith. Show me your faithful, your forgiven people who remain true to your path, unable to be perfect, but very loving, very giving. Where are you, Lord? Explain how this can happen in your Church. Zeal is yours, Lord. I'm waiting for you to show it.