



Giving Voice to Our Lament

A Lenten Practice of Embracing a Vocabulary of Intimacy, Protest, & Hope

2/24 Psalm writing #1

"Expression of pain is essential to prayer. It is that simple and that difficult. By telling the truth of its world to God, Lamentations becomes a school for prayer. Speaking truth to God can seem unthinkable, because God already knows, or because God may not care, or because God appears to be the cause of the trouble in the first place. But as in any relationship, not speaking truth to God causes a dwindling of mutuality and expansion of anger, resentment, and alienation. Pray anyway." – Kathleen O'Connor

Take some time in God's presence to write out everything you are currently lamenting. What has been disappointing, upsetting, or devastating for you? A bulleted list is fine.



3/3 Psalm writing #2

“Confession propels the community to imagine a world beyond the current state of sinful existence. Lament that recognizes the reality of brokenness allows the community to express confession in its proper context. Confession acknowledges the need for God and opens the door for God’s intervention. Confession in lament relies on God’s work for redemption.” -Soong-Chan Rah

Use your list from 2/24 to create a complaint as in the Psalms of Lament (see Appendix 2). Describe the pain these things are causing you and ask God for help. (Ps. 4:2).



3/10 Psalm writing #3

"Biblical hope does not emerge from proper reasoning or new information. It is not optimism or wishful thinking. It is not a simple act of the will, a decision under human control, or a willful determination. It emerges without clear cause like grace without explanation, in the midst of despair and at the point of least hope. It comes from elsewhere, unbidden, illusive, uncontrollable, and surprising, given in the pit, the place of no hope." –Kathleen O'Connor

After the complaint section you wrote on 3/3, add a section that verbalizes your trust in God. Name times God has been faithful in the past. (Ps. 4:3)



3/17 Psalm writing #4

"Whether we are dealing with sharp pain as in a bone marrow biopsy or the more dispersed pain of sadness about a diagnosis or another loss, we belong to a Savior, Jesus Christ, who knows human suffering and grief. Both the psalmist and Jesus show us that is not irreligious to cry out in pain before God, to lament, to grieve. It is an act of faith and trust. For Jesus displayed perfect trust in the covenantal faithfulness of the Father in his life and in his prayers, which continue on our behalf. This faithfulness took the form off petitioning to the Father in the garden to "let this cup pass from me," but also yielding in prayer, saying, "yet not what I want but what you want (Matt 26:39)." –J. Todd Billings

Add some lines to your Psalm asking for God to intervene. (Ps. 4:4-7)



3/24 Psalm writing #5

"The Lament psalms regularly trace a movement from complaint to confidence in God. Yet they make that move without ever telling us that the external situation has changed for the better. What has changed is the psalmist's inner experience of suffering, and perhaps that has changed only because she has dared to break the isolation of silence and knows that God has heard." -Ellen Davis

Close your Psalm with praise and thanksgiving. (Ps. 4:8) Then go back to the beginning and add the address- a line that identifies God as the one you are speaking to (Ps. 4:1).



Some helpful tips for writing your own Psalm of Lament:

1. Taking the basic shape of a lament psalm as your pattern, write your own lament psalm.
2. Choose whether you wish to write an individual lament or a communal lament.
3. Keep your phrases/lines succinct; no long sentences, no wordy phrasings.
4. Be specific and concrete in your statements, rather than abstract and idiosyncratic.
5. Choose evocative imagery or metaphors that will help you see what you're praying.
6. Take advantage of the unique devices of Hebrew poetry.
7. Title your psalm.
8. Share it with a friend (if you feel comfortable).

-W.David O. Taylor

Bibliography:

Bread & Wine: Readings for Lent & Easter (various)

The Art of Biblical Poetry by Robert Alter

Praying the Psalms by Walter Brueggemann

Getting Involved With God by Ellen F. Davis

The Word in the Wilderness by Malcolm Guite

Lamentations by Kathleen O'Connor

Prophetic Lament by Soong-Chan Rah

Open & Unafraid: the Psalms as a Guide to Life by W. David O. Taylor

Prayer in the Night: for Those Who Work or Watch or Weep by Tish Harrison Warren

Psalms of Lament by Ann Weems



Psalm 4 as an example:

Address and introductory cry

¹ Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.

Complaint or Lament

² How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?

Confession of Trust

³ Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.

Prayer for Deliverance

⁴ Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.

⁵ Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.

⁶ Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.

⁷ Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.

Praise

⁸ In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.

More Psalms of Lament:

Individual psalms of Lament: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142.

Corporate psalms of Lament: 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129.

