

Session 2: Praying in lament – “How long, O Lord” (Psalm 13:1)

1. The Christian’s experience: our God is good... and strong... and yet we hurt

The costly loss of lament

What is a prayer of lament? = ** prayer in pain that leads to trust **

Not just the Psalms: e.g.

Revelation 6:10, “They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

Hebrews 5:7, “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears”

Mark 14:33-34, “ And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. ³⁴ And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death...”

Mark 15:34, “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

... but specially in the Psalms (about 1/3 include lamentation)

2. The Psalms: spotting lamentation... and learning to copy it

Something is NOT RIGHT – it’s intolerable – it CAN be changed – the LORD must change it

Cause of lament? It varies...

- the unjust suffering of an individual (sometimes God’s king, sometimes an “ordinary” worshipper)
- the unjust suffering of a community (“communal” laments are more unusual: e.g. Pss 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85)
- sin that needs to be repented of (seven “sorrowful”/“penitential psalms”: Pss 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143).

The Psalms’ pattern of lament...

- Deciding to pray... and calling on the Lord (Lord, help me)...
- Bring your lament/complaint/question – e.g. Psalm 77:9
- Sometimes a confession of sin or assertion of innocence...
- A bold plea for help... again and again
- Choose to praise and to trust – e.g. Psalm 13:1 → Psalm 13:5

3. An example: Psalm 6 – the mirror of the weary soul

In response:

Do you find it hard to pray a prayer of lament? Why?

What have you just heard that you want to tell yourself the next time you find it hard to pray?

How can we help one another to pray honestly?

Psalm 143 (from Sing Psalms)

1. O hear my prayer, LORD;
My cry for mercy heed.
In truth and righteousness
Draw near to meet my need.
And do not judge me in your sight
For in your presence none is right.

2. The foe has hounded me
And crushed me to the ground,
In darkness made me dwell,
Like those in death long bound.
And so my spirit is afraid;
My heart within me is dismayed.

3. Therefore I call to mind
The days and years long gone;
I ponder all your works
And what your hands have done.
To you in prayer I spread my hands;
For you I thirst, like arid lands.

4. My spirit fails, O LORD;
Come quickly to my side.
Hide not your face from me,
Lest to the pit I slide.
Let morning bring your love anew,
For I have put my trust in you.

5. To you I lift my soul;
Show me the way to go.
I hide myself in you;
LORD, save me from my foe.
My God, teach me to do your will;
May your good Spirit lead me still.

6. For your great mercy's sake,
O LORD, preserve my life;
And in your righteousness
Deliver me from strife.
In love, put all my foes to shame;
Destroy them, for I bear your name.