

Prayer Everywhere

Prayer Tool: How To Lament

What?

Lamenting is prominent in the Bible. This prayer tool will show the significance of using lament scriptures in our own lives.

Why?

"I am beginning to see that much of praying is grieving" Henri Nouwen

Bible references:

"Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people" Jeremiah 9:1

"Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan" Psalm 55:17

A quick introduction to Lamenting

The most helpful aid to our prayer life during seasons of unanswered prayer, particularly those that bring with them a surge of acute pain, is the genre of Bible passages known as "Lament".

In another Prayer Tool, "Praying the Psalms", the Psalms of Lament are highlighted briefly -and this prayer tool will unpack them further:

Unanswered prayer implies the enduring of some of type of loss which ultimately leads to the processing of grief and disappointment. Hopes and expectations have been unfulfilled, loved ones have been lost, dreams have been smashed. God hasn't come through as you thought He might.

It is here we must remember that pain is not the enemy. Pain is pain. Pain needs to be expressed, for pain that is not expressed can never be transformed, and pain that is not transformed will be transmitted.

The Lament Passages

One of the most under-valued and misunderstood parts of scripture are the lament passages most notable in the Psalms, Job, Jeremiah and Lamentations.

Jeremiah expresses gut-wrenching anguish in his own book and through Lamentations. Job faces and experiences many unanswered questions and tormented wrestling. And over one third of the Psalms are full-throated, no-holds-barred songs of disappointment and searing pain.¹

“This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears. No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit. My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.” Lamentations 1:16

“Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.” Psalm 69: 1-3

“What did I do to deserve this? ... I expected good but evil showed up. I looked for light but darkness fell. My stomach’s in a constant churning, never settles down. Each day confronts me with more suffering. I walk under a black cloud. The sun is gone. I stand in the congregation and protest. I howl with the jackals” Job 30:24-29 (The Message)

Do it: How to Lament

It’s a travesty that many of us have sidelined these passages in our personal devotion and our corporate worship, particularly when they were gifted to us to help us through the many days of disappointment, grief and loss we all inevitably face.

The lament passages of holy scripture are there to sit with us in our pain. Though it appears all trace of God’s presence has left, these passages mysteriously convey to us the truth that God is not simply trying to rush us out of our pain but rather first and foremost be with us in it.

He is present with us – experiencing our pain, carrying our sorrows, listening to our rage, understanding our doubts.

¹ Find a specific list of Lament Psalms in the Prayer Tool “Praying the Psalms”

The Old Testament writers were made of stern stuff. Rather than try to control or ignore the pain, they encourage us to lean towards it, even when it seems like insurmountable grief. They call us to face our grief, express it wholeheartedly in the presence of a Holy God because they know that even though it feels like we have lost our lives, we don't have to lose our souls too.

In his book, *Luminous Dark*, Alain Emerson describes how he processed the death of his beloved wife Lindsay when she was only 23, and unpacks his discovery of the lament passages:

“As I look back on those survival days, I remember the newfound appreciation I developed for the integrity and honesty of the scriptures. It was strange to me but I began to experience a kind of holy connection, a recognition that the Bible made space for such outbursts of utter hopelessness and pain. Without rushing me from this place, the words of sacred scripture rested on me and gave voice to my despair.”

Don't rush through the Psalms of Lament, even if you are having a good day. Instead allow your soul to be shaped by these holy words so that when the difficult days come, you have a well-developed go-to prayer language to help you through.

If you are in a dark season of unanswered prayer, unsure how to pray or express your anger or disappointment to God, know there is an invitation to bring all that is inside you to the Father.

Receive the lament passages of the Bible as a rare treasure helping you speak out holy words when you don't have your own. As you do you will slowly become aware – contrary to how impossible it currently seems – that God can do something with the brokenness of your life beyond what you can imagine. He will turn what seems irreversible into a message of resilient hope. But that resilience will only be formed in us after we have prayed ourselves through the process of pain. That's why the holy laments of the Bible are God's gift to us.

Books on Lament

- *A Grief Observed* - C.S. Lewis
- *Luminous Dark* - Alain Emerson
- *God on Mute* - Pete Greig