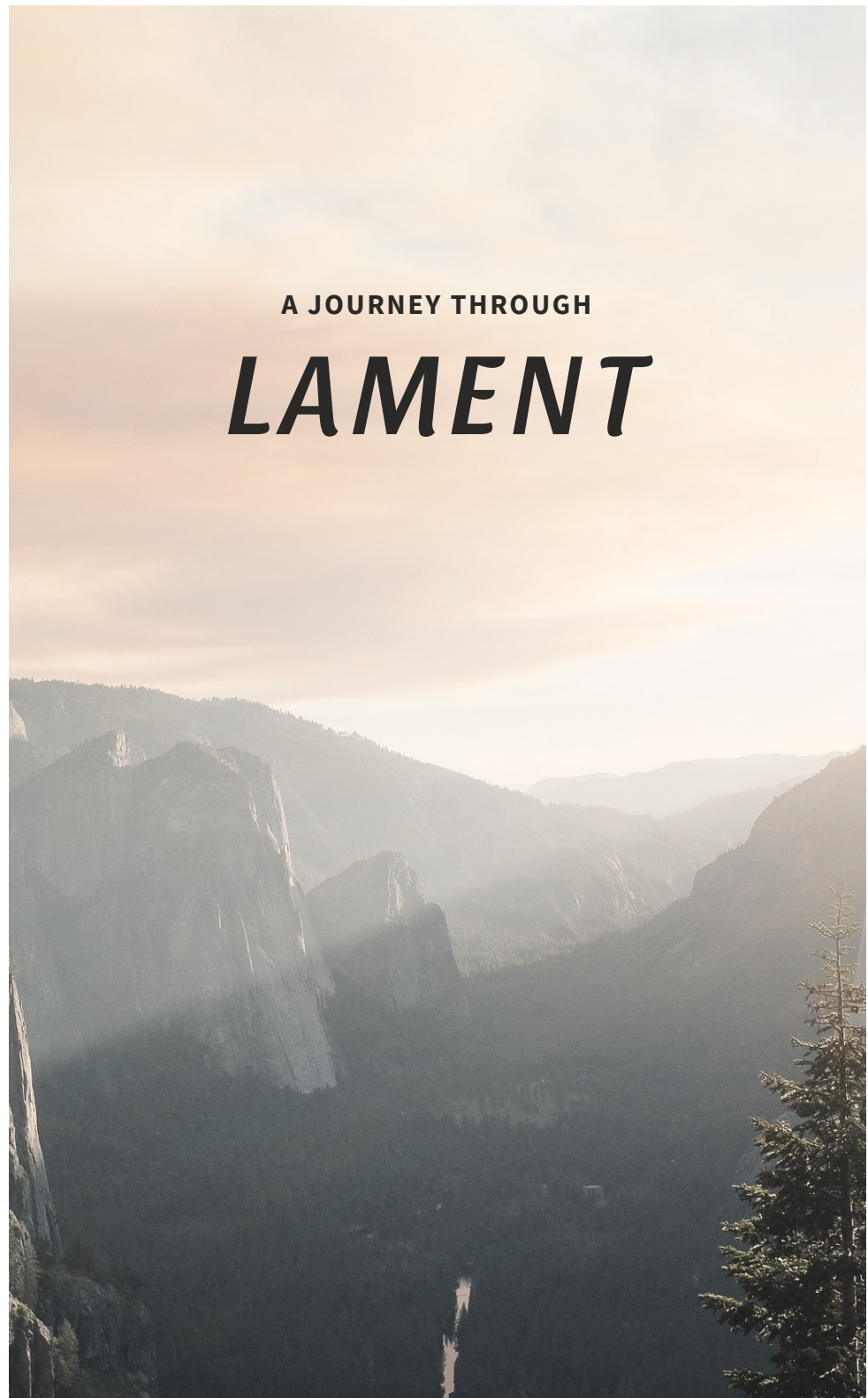


A JOURNEY THROUGH
LAMENT

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LAMENT

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la·ment
/lə'ment/

a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.

synonyms:

wail, wailing, lamentation, moan, moaning,
weeping, crying, sob, sobbing, keening

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STRUCTURE OF LAMENT

Lament is just as natural of an expression as praise. When we feel thankful and blessed, we give thanks to God. When we feel the emotions of grief and distress, we should turn to God in lamentation.

The most important thing to remember in lament is that we come before God as we are. We do not need to clean up ourselves or our lives first.

A biblical lament contains several basic components. Some or all may be used.

- **AN ADDRESS TO GOD**

Laments found in scripture are directly addressed to God in a personal way that shapes our view of Him.

Sounds like: "Father God, my rock and salvation, please hear what I have to say"

- **A CRY OUT TO GOD**

A lament does not hold back in complaint. God knows what is in our minds and our hearts, so we do not need to hide or pretend. We bring the depth of the grief we feel in complete honesty. Laments often contain vivid descriptions as a result.

Sounds like: "I am hurting more than I my words can express. The pain of loss that I feel is too much to bear and I cannot live this way"

- **A PETITION FOR HELP**

Lament brings all our questions and doubts directly to the throne, again with painful honesty. We tell God exactly what we want Him to do. Heal us, free us, save us, comfort us, protect us. We call on the same character of God in times of need that we praise Him for in times of thanks.

Sounds like: "Help me to feel happy again. I don't want to be sad"

- **LAMENT DETAILED**

We tell God our problems in detail. Why are we suffering? Why are we angry? What are our fears? Lament lets out all our problems without holding back anything. It also presents heartfelt questions, not as requests, but as cries of protest and pain. This honest form of worship shows both our assurance and our doubt. The lament detailed can include prayers of anger and questioning.

Sounds like: "Why did my special person have to die? What am I going to do now that they are not here?"

- **STATEMENT OF TRUST**

Following the presentation of distress, we remember God's past faithfulness, power, wisdom, and love. This portion of lament lists how we have seen God act and confesses trust in Him to do it again.

Sounds like: "I will trust you God, because you have given me all I need and cared for my family"

- **PROMISE OF HOPE AND WORSHIP**

A lament ends with an expression of hope despite our current position or circumstances. In scripture, we often see the words "even though", "but" or "yet" as the author reflects on the faithfulness of God. We anticipate the praise we will give Him as we long for the help we have cried out for.

Sounds like: "Even though things are bad right now, I know you will answer my prayer, and I will shout for joy when you do"

BREAKING DOWN A BIBLICAL LAMENT

PSALM 71

1 In you, Lord, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

ADDRESS TO GOD

2 In your righteousness, rescue me
and deliver me; turn your ear to me
and save me.

PETITION FOR HELP

3 Be my rock of refuge, to which I can
always go; give the command to save
me, for you are my rock and my
fortress.

4 Deliver me, my God, from the hand
of the wicked, from the grasp of those
who are evil and cruel.

5 For you have been my hope,
Sovereign Lord, my confidence since
my youth.

STATEMENT OF TRUST

6 From birth I have relied on you; you
brought me forth from my mother's
womb. I will ever praise you.

7 I have become a sign to many; you
are my strong refuge.

8 My mouth is filled with your
praise, declaring your splendor all day
long.

9 Do not cast me away when I am
old; do not forsake me when my
strength is gone.

CRY OR COMPLAINT

10 For my enemies speak against
me; those who wait to kill me conspire
together.

11 They say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him, for no one
will rescue him."

12 Do not be far from me, my God;
come quickly, God, to help me.
13 May my accusers perish in
shame; may those who want to
harm me be covered with scorn
and disgrace.

PETITION FOR HELP

14 As for me, I will always have hope; I
will praise you more and more.

STATEMENT OF TRUST

15 My mouth will tell of your righteous
deeds, of your saving acts all day long
— though I know not how to relate
them all.

16 I will come and proclaim your
mighty acts, Sovereign Lord; I will
proclaim your righteous deeds, yours
alone.

17 Since my youth, God, you have
taught me, and to this day I declare
your marvelous deeds.

18 Even when I am old and gray,
do not forsake me, my God, till I
declare your power to the next
generation, your mighty acts to all
who are to come.

19 Your righteousness, God, reaches to
the heavens, you who have done great
things. Who is like you, God?

PROMISE OF HOPE AND WORSHIP

20 Though you have made me see
troubles, many and bitter, you will
restore my life again; from the depths
of the earth you will again bring me up.

21 You will increase my honor and
comfort me once more.

22 I will praise you with the harp
for your faithfulness, my God;
I will sing praise to you with the
lyre, Holy One of Israel.

23 My lips will shout for joy when I sing
praise to you— I whom you have
delivered.

24 My tongue will tell of your righteous
acts all day long,
for those who wanted to harm me have
been put to shame and confusion.

ADDRESS TO GOD



- Laments found in scripture are directly addressed to God in a personal way that shapes our view of Him.

Psalm 130:1-2

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy."

Psalm 22:2

"O my God, I cry out by day, and you answer not; by night, and there is no relief for me"

Psalm 86:6

Hear my prayer, Lord; listen to my cry for mercy.

Psalm 5:1-2

Listen to my words, Lord, consider my lament. Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

Psalm 28:1

To you, Lord, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me. For if you remain silent, I will be like those who go down to the pit.

Psalm 54:1-2

Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth.

Psalm 55:1-2


Listen to my prayer, O God, do not ignore my plea; hear me and answer me.

Psalm 57:1-2

Have mercy on me, my God, have mercy on me, for in you I take refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed. I cry out to God Most High, to God, who vindicates me.

Write your own personal address to God:

CRY TO GOD



- Lament is an important part of the grieving process.
- It is not the absence of faith, but the very act of it.

In faith we trust everything to God, including our pain, doubt, and struggles. Scripture reminds us that this world is not without pain (John 16:33):

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Peace can only be found in Christ, so we bring our troubles before Him as an acknowledgement of faith that He will overcome them. He can handle the emotions we bring, allowing us permission to cry more, be authentic, feel what we truly feel, and express our hearts.

Have you cried out and complained to God?

Are you "hiding" your lament from Him?

What cries do you need God to hear?

What level of honesty have you expressed to God about the death of your person?

Take these thoughts and spend time writing your own cry to God on the following two pages.

CRY TO GOD

Habakkuk 1:3b-4

*Destruction and violence are before me;
there is strife, and conflict abounds.
Therefore the law is paralyzed,
and justice never prevails.
The wicked hem in the righteous,
so that justice is perverted.*

Lamentations 3:49-51a

*My eyes will flow unceasingly, without relief,
until the Lord looks down from heaven and sees.
What I see brings grief to my soul...*

Job 3:24-26

*For sighing has become my daily food;
my groans pour out like water.
What I feared has come upon me;
what I dreaded has happened to me.
I have no peace, no quietness;
I have no rest, but only turmoil."*

Psalms 42:3

*My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
"Where is your God?"*

Psalms 14:3

*All have turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good, not even one.*



PRAYER OF PAIN AND PETITION

- A formal request to God brought out of deep pain and distress.
- A petition for exactly what we want God to do.
- Asking for relief and intervention in complete honesty.

Jesus himself give us an example of a prayer of pain and petition in Scripture (Mark 14:33-36):

He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," he said to them. "Stay here and keep watch."

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

What do you notice about Jesus' language and posture in presenting His petition?

What is causing you pain in your grief?

What do you want God to do?

Take these thoughts and spend time writing out a petition to God on the following two pages.

PRAYER OF PAIN AND PETITION

Psalm 25:16-18

*Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.
Relieve the troubles of my heart
and free me from my anguish.
Look on my affliction and my distress
and take away all my sins.*

Job 13:20-21

*“Only grant me these two things, God, and then I will not hide from
you: Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me
with your terrors.*


Psalm 22:14-15

*I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.*

Lamentations 3:64-66

*Pay them back what they deserve, Lord,
for what their hands have done. Put a veil over their hearts,
and may your curse be on them!
Pursue them in anger and destroy them
from under the heavens of the Lord.*

PRAYER OF ANGER



- Emotions, including anger, are natural
- Ignoring these feelings means hiding parts of ourselves that were not meant to be hidden.

Scripture also shows us that anger will be a part of the emotions we experience (Ephesians 4:26-27)

“In your anger do not sin”: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.

It's how we handle anger that is critical. Lament gives us a good and appropriate outlet to express our raw feelings before God. In doing so, we often are brought to the root of our anger. It allows us to acknowledge our fears and our pain.

Admit it: Verbalize to God: “I am angry...”

Analyze it: What parts of your grief make you angry?

What are you not getting that you believe you really need, want, or deserve?

What fears do you have?

Do you really believe that God is at work in and through your life?

Act it out: How honest are you being with God about your anger?

Take these thoughts and spend time writing out a prayer of anger on the following two pages, working toward intentionally abandoning anger.

PRAYER OF ANGER

Psalm 44:17-22

*All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.
Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.
But you crushed us and made us a haunt for jackals;
you covered us over with deep darkness.
If we had forgotten the name of our God
or spread out our hands to a foreign god,
would not God have discovered it,
since he knows the secrets of the heart?
Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.*

Job 7:11-16

*“Therefore I will not keep silent;
I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit,
I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.
Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep,
that you put me under guard?
When I think my bed will comfort me
and my couch will ease my complaint,
even then you frighten me with dreams
and terrify me with visions,
so that I prefer strangling and death,
rather than this body of mine.
I despise my life; I would not live forever.
Let me alone; my days have no meaning.*

PRAYER OF QUESTIONING

- Questioning in lament brings all our questions before God, not as requests, but as cries of protest and pain
- We long to understand “why” and expect someone to be able to explain what we cannot
- We want answers that will help us top make sense of the “big picture”

We know that having answers would likely not change our level of fear or pain. In bringing our questions before God, we acknowledge our doubt and find our trust in Him to hold the pieces of our lives and place them perfectly in His time. We recognize this Psalm of lament repeated by Jesus himself while on the cross (Psalm 22:1):

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?

What are the questions that are repeating in your mind?

What questions you are ashamed to ask?

Have you questioned God’s plan in your grief?

Take these thoughts and spend time writing out a prayer of questioning on the following two pages.

PRAYER OF QUESTIONING

Habakkuk 1:2-3b

*How long, Lord, must I call for help,
but you do not listen?
Or cry out to you, "Violence!"
but you do not save?
Why do you make me look at injustice?
Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?*

Psalms 43:2

*You are God my stronghold.
Why have you rejected me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?*

Psalms 13:1-2

*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

Psalms 42:9

*I say to God my Rock,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?"*

A dramatic seascape with a stormy sky and waves crashing against a rock. The sky is filled with dark, heavy clouds, with some light breaking through near the horizon. The ocean is turbulent, with white foam from the waves crashing against a dark, jagged rock in the foreground. The overall mood is one of power and awe.

STATEMENT OF TRUST

- A practice of reflection
- We remember all that God has done in the past
- We confess trust that God will continue to be faithful

The statement of trust is an expression of reflection on all that God has done in the past. We voice His faithfulness, power, wisdom, and love. As we remember, we move to a posture of trust, and confess confidence in God to be perfectly faithful, as He has always been.

Lamentations 3:21-24

Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him."

Slow down and reflect.

How has God been faithful in the past?

What has God done in the past to display His love and care?

Remember a time in your life that was a season of waiting. How did God meet you in this time?

Take these thoughts and spend time writing out a statement of trust on the following two pages.

STATEMENT OF TRUST

Psalm 71:19-21

*Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens,
you who have done great things.
Who is like you, God?
Though you have made me see troubles,
many and bitter, you will restore my life again;
from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up.
You will increase my honor and comfort me once more.*

Psalm 10:16-18

*The Lord is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.*

Psalm 22:3-5

*Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.
In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

Psalm 139:13-14

*For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

PRAYER OF HOPE

- **Offering the sacrifice of praise to God even in the midst of suffering.**
- **Every lament ends with a commitment of praise, such as “even though”, “but”, or “yet”. In spite of everything – our pain, our hurt, our anger, and our questions – we have hope.**
- **Giving praise for what God has done, having confidence in who He is, and confessing to trust however He chooses to act.**

The book of Lamentations teaches us that Lament is a process from beginning to end, or from ‘a’ to ‘z’. It is written as a poem and artistic display of the beauty that can be found in suffering. The structure of the book reminds us that every step of lament is important.

- Lamentations has 5 chapters. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 are what is called an alphabetical acrostic. This is a type of poetry that is built around letters of the alphabet.

- Each line begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet, starting with Aleph (א), and proceeding through in order. Since there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, these chapters have 22 verses.

- Chapter 3 is called a three-fold acrostic. There are three lines for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet, giving this chapter 66 verses.

- Chapter 5 is unique. It contains 22 lines, but without the alphabetic structure.

Following through this pattern will bring us to the prayer of hope. In spite of everything – our pain, our hurt, our anger, and our questions – we have hope. This hope is a choice to believe God and who He is. It is confidence in His faithfulness, and a confession to trust however He chooses to act.

You may not be at the end of your lament at this time. In fact, many of those who wrote biblical laments were not either. That’s perfectly fine. This is intended to help you uncover what hope may look like for you in the future, just as the prophet Micah expresses (Micah 7:7):

But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.

Where do you see hope today?

PRAYER OF HOPE

Spend time confessing your trust in His ability to work on your behalf in spite of current circumstances.

Even though...

Habakkuk 3:17-18

*Though the fig tree does not bud
and there are no grapes on the vines,
though the olive crop fails
and the fields produce no food,
though there are no sheep in the pen
and no cattle in the stalls,
yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will be joyful in God my Savior.*

But,

Psalms 59:16

*But I will sing of your strength,
in the morning I will sing of your love;
for you are my fortress,
my refuge in times of trouble.*

Yet,

Psalms 13:5-6

*But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord's praise,
for he has been good to me.*

Psalms 57:9-10

*I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
For great is your love, reaching to the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.*