

Introduction: Pg. _____

“Learning to Lament” Psalm 13

Amazing, Captivating, Compelling... Notice the detail... People of all different ethnicities coming together. The crowd gathered. One man turning on his megaphone in order to raise his voice.

But in the foreground.. You have a little boy... with tears filling his eyes and beginning to run down his cheeks.

"When I originally sat down to work on this piece, I wanted to capture the emotion being displayed all over the country for the injustices being experienced by the black community. I wanted to stir up empathy for what people have been experiencing for many generations. The harsh, bright colors represent the raw emotion of the protests in our cities, both present and past, the people with signs call back to the days of the Civil Rights Movement where all races made their voices heard for justice, and the small child in the front with his mother being on the front line, pleading to be seen [[not as a threat, but as a human being]].... As a good father listens to the cries of his children, let's bring our voice to the Greatest Father and reflect on his wisdom... so that we can seek the justice created by Him."

The black community has been lamenting for years, 401 years in this country, which marks the arrival of African slaves in 1619. It's time for us to lean into the opportunity and instruction of God when he says: "weep with those who weep" (Romans 12:15) and to do so through the Biblical form of prayer known as lament.

That's the simple call of today's message.

The Point: Learn to lament over the sin of racism.

In order to learn what lament looks like, we are going to turn to the Book of Psalms. Some scholars simply divide the Psalms into two broad categories (praise & lament). 40% of the Psalms are psalms of lament, or contain lament in them.

Psalm 13 (text displayed)

Learning to Lament will be, for many of us - perhaps most of us, like learning a new language. Lament is not something we are good at or super comfortable with as American Christians, because most of the time, most of us live such comfortable lives.

That's why I want to give you a simple framework in 3 elements for learning to Lament from Psalm 13. First, lament involves...

1. Bring God your pain in prayer (13:1-2).

We're immediately struck by the raw showcase of honesty and emotion, articulated in six question that penetrate the halls of heaven.

- “How long?” “HOW long?!” “HOW Long??!?” “HOWWW LONNGGG, GOD!?!?!?!” (4x!)

- How long? I'm weary, God. I'm tired. Feelings of - I can't go on. My strength is spent. I've been praying this same prayer like a broken record! Enough is enough. Day after day, I'm seeing the same things. This month is no better than last month
- Will you forget me forever?
 - He feels forgotten. He feels like God is indifferent, like God doesn't really care.
 - But that's how it can feel
- How long will you hide your face from me?
 - It's about relationship, and it feels like God has intentionally turned away from him. He feels abandoned. In our pain, we can have the best theology (and know that God has promised to never move, to never leave us or forsake us), but not feel it or not take hold of it by faith in those moments or even seasons of life.
- How long must I take counsel in my soul?
 - David is saying: "I can't get it out of my mind. I keep thinking about it, and processing, and wrestling, quite possibly to the point of discouragement and even the depression we see in Psalm 42-43)
 - {P} The mind is a battlefield, and oh by the way, don't think that Satan does not see when we're down. He attacks when we're vulnerable!
 - Be on your guard. Yes, think and process, but don't dwell in an unhealthy way. Don't let it spiral down.
- How long must I have sorrow in my heart all the day?
 - He's grieved. He's no doubt shedding tears as he cries out to God. The word can be translated as suffering or torment.
- How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
 - I am in the vulnerable position of weakness.
 - My enemy has the upper hand...

We can feel the intensifying emotions as we read this. The Hebrew (the original language in which these words were penned) signals that very reality: the first phrase is 5 words, the second 6, the third 8 (all these "suggesting the psalmist's suffering grows worse the longer it continues"), and then the fourth phrase elevates the crisis with the presence of his enemy coming against him.

What words would you use to describe the emotional posture of David? Desperation? Confusion? Exhaustion? Anguish?

Circumstantially, his suffering feels so intense, its like he's just been removed from Eden.

WHAT IS LAMENT?

Defined: "Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust." - Mark Vroegop

Every lament carries our complaints to God. It's a conversation with God about our pain, and if we're never bringing our pain to God, we're simply not being honest. Listen, God is probably saying to most everyone of us in the room: "I want you to be more vulnerable with me."

That's why Soong-Chan Rah says...

“Lament recognizes the struggles of life and cries out for justice against existing injustices.” Soong-Chan Rah, *Prophetic Lament: A Call for Justice in Troubled Times*

I like how Eric Mason, author of *Woke Church*, says “if I had been one of the writers under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, I would have named Lamentations Redemptive Blues. . . . It's heavy like that.”

Pastoral Encouragement

- You can keep it real with God. He already knows. Bring your unfiltered questions and emotions to God.
- We all ask questions in the storms of life. God IS BIG ENOUGH for your questions.
- He wants us to bring our pain!

PIC: Appendectomy...

- Nurses: Assessment Tool called a Pain Scale: On a scale of 1-10 how acute is your pain (1 being I'm good, 10 meaning I'm about to pass out from the pain)
- 3 if I'm still. 9 if I move.

Our level of lament depends on how acutely we feel the pain of brokenness. But the question we need to ask right now is, how acutely do we feel the pain of our black and brown brothers and sisters, and neighbors?

If we're at a 3 while they're at 10. There's something wrong. Lament provides a beautiful path for empathy. Your pain is my pain, and I will bring our pain with you to our God!

T: We will not seek justice to reflect the anti-racist heart of God if we don't see the brokenness and feel the pain of those suffering injustice. We must bring our pain to God together, and then #2....

2. Make bold requests for restoration (13:3-4).

The vulnerable emotion of vv. 1-2 gives way to the bold requests of vv. 3-4. The “How longs? And Whys?” of vv. 1-2 move to... “And so God, I am asking you, we are asking you . . .”

This is how we enter in further to true lament. We're not just crying out - there's an issue, and I'm not okay with it!, but we're crying out for real change.

We see three bold requests addressed as imperatives to God:

1. Consider or LOOK! Let me know you are here. Let me feel your presence. Let me know that you hear my cries. Let me see that you are still moving!
2. Answer! And God, that you not only hear, but that you will respond! That you will bring justice! For all of my questions, please give a favorable answer! And, O Lord my God...
3. Light up my eyes! The request for illumination (light up my eyes!) is not about about seeing the path ahead as it is saying: bring me life! Restore my physical health, but not just physical, my mental, emotional and spiritual health. Strengthen me. GIVE ME LIFE! This is made plain by the next line: “lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

As we look closely, we can see how these bold requests seek a resolution to our pain. We are ultimately looking for restoration. Don't miss the connection between David's pain and his requests in 3-4.

- Asking God to Look/Consider & Answer resolves the feeling that he's been forgotten, or that God is hiding his face.
- Then he asks God to "Light up [his] eyes . . . lest his enemy think they've won, resolves how they are exalted over him in verse 2.

I love how this one request is so powerful that it works like a domino... God if you light up my eyes, I won't taste death, my enemies won't win, my foes won't rejoice!

What one prayer would work like a domino? God, light us up! Bring us life! Flood this city w justice. Eradicate our selfishness. Let love reign over this city! Put leaders in schools, businesses, corporations, churches, and government that will seek justice by reflecting the anti-racist heart of God.

In order to lament, we have to see the brokenness around us. We have to listen! If we don't listen, we won't lament.

- We LAMENT how we have distance ourselves from one another rather than getting proximate.
- We LAMENT that the US Census Bureau shows the annual income for Black Americans is the same as it was 50 years ago when Dr. King and thousands of others Marched on Washington.
- We LAMENT that the now illegal practice of redlining kept thousands of black families from buying a home, thus amplifying the generational wealth gap in our nation.
- We LAMENT that Black people and other People of Color have to even be tempted to "whiten" their resumes because it raises the likelihood of interviews by 15%.
- We LAMENT that Black inmates make up 33% of the prison population but 12% of Americans.
- We LAMENT that while Black and White American use marijuana at similar rates, one group is almost 4 times more likely to get arrested (you know when group).
- We LAMENT that the Black Church in America had to be created because they were treated as second-class, but not in the eyes of God.
- We LAMENT our racial insensitivity.
- We LAMENT that seeking racial justice is considered a "political issue" and not a "biblical issue" by so many Christians. We LAMENT that we, even far too often, as Redemption Hill Church, have not treated it as a primary doctrine though we know Jesus taught the story of the Good Samaritan, not primarily to teach us the value of a good deed, but taught it to life up the ethnic minority often discriminated against, as the hero of the story, to teach us that all people no matter their age, ethnicity, gender, or background would be loved with the love of God!)

God, we not only LAMENT, we REPENT. God, change our land. God, start with us. Forgive us for the times we have not spoken up. Forgive us for when we've let microaggressions go unchecked. Forgive us for not feeling the pain of those hurting around us. Forgive us for perpetuating racial disparities in our workplaces and schools. Forgive us for not showing love to the new neighbors who everyone else conveniently ignores.

God, forgive us.

I want to encourage you to write out a prayer of lament this week. Go find the psalms of lament (Google works) and read through them, pray through them.

3. Express patient trust in God's faithfulness (13:5-6).

Here is an unexpected turn... In the midst of all the pain, David still wants God, needs God, loves God. The laments paint a vivid picture of the mixed emotions we carry, not only toward circumstances, but toward God himself in the midst of our suffering.

I know you've prayed like this...

- How long? Why?! How long, Lord? Where are you? I'm down. I'm almost defeated.
- BUT GOD! I know you are there. I know you care.

Look at what he says:

"BUT..." All this may be true, BUT there someone TRUER still. The first word, provides a shift, and there must be a shift.

- Why? As Philip Mitchell was preaching last week at Victory Church in Atlanta: "We must have a theology of suffering that is greater than our emotions..."
- [[This psalm reveals the three realities we all experience simultaneously: *here's my world...* (It's not good or great. It's coming at me. The brokenness is real. The pain is hard). And *here I am...*(getting bombarded on allllll sides), BUT God, *here YOU ARE.*]]
- Why? Lament is a path to healing.... If you don't take your pain to God, your pain will take you to a place of bitterness, perpetual disappointment and possibly despair. This is what separates ordinary grief and sorrow from lament. Only lament is distinctly Christian...

BUT I have trusted in your steadfast love

- There has to be a fight for faith. We have to keep looking up to God, even as we look out at the brokenness and injustice all around us.
- Did you know there is a book of the Bible that is full of lament? It's called (that's right) Lamentations. The writer is lamenting the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of God's people to Babylon. The only words of hope are found in chapter 3: "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:21-23)
- **"Trust is not a passive state of mind. It is a vigorous act of the soul by which we choose to lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seeks to overwhelm us." - Jerry Bridges**

My heart shall rejoice in your salvation

- God meets David and he meets us in our pain, he reminds us... there is something beyond this, something better. Your circumstances and suffering will not have the last word. I am your salvation
- If you don't see justice now, you will see justice then. All injustice will meet justice/be replaced w Gods justice. No racist comment, no racist action goes unnoticed and unaccounted for by the ultimate Judge who will bring complete justice in the very end.
- That's why we can say with the psalmist as he finishes the psalm...

I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Trust, rejoice, sing... There's always reason to hope, because is in control. Our God has been good to us! He does love us. He is working all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose. He is allowing our suffering to produce character and character hope, a kind of hope that will not disappoint us.

[[The structure of this psalm in particular seems to communicate a subtle message. 5 lines in stanza one (Tumultous pain), giving way to 4 lines of prayer]]

HOW LONG? IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW LONG... BECAUSE YOU ARE WITH ME. YOUR LOVE LEADS ME EVERY DAY. YOUR SALVATION WILL COME (NOW OR THEN). I WILL REJOICE AND SING.

[[“Waiting on God ascribes to God the glory of being all to us.” - Louie Giglio]]

Conclusion:

Today is an invitation to...

“Learning to Lament”

**Bring your pain
with bold requests
expressing patient trust.**

“How long, O Lord? . . . God, we are asking you . . . But we will trust you . . .”

The final week of the life of Christ was marked by lament. Luke 19:41 tells us...

“And WHEN HE drew near and SAW the city, HE WEPT over it, saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace!” - Jesus, in Luke 19:41-42

Jesus not only sees our brokenness. He became broken that we might be restored, that we might be healed, that we might be made whole.

The lament of Luke 19 gave way to the lament of the cross: “My God my God WHY??? Have you forsaken me?”

That’s the heart of seeking justice in the heart of Christ, a willingness to disadvantage ourselves for the advantage of the community.

At this time, I want to invite Pastor Steve Agboola to lead us in a time of prayer, a prayer of lament...