

**When praying doesn't seem to work ...
Keep on praying**

Psalm 77

Laments in the Bible

- “Life is unspeakably sad until you recover the lost language of lament. Then it becomes ‘speakably’ sad, and an authentic journey into [God’s] presence begins.” - Larry Crabb

Many are hurting / suffering ...

- usually going through it “silently”
- church culture often encourages us to suffer silently
- Why so embarrassed by tears?
- Why trying so hard to pursue happiness?
- Why avoid suffering at all cost?
- ... uneasy in the presence of sorrow?
- ... unfamiliar with the language of lament?

Antidote to “suffering in silence”

- Learning to express sadness, anger, frustration, fear, anxiety, grief, & regret to God
- Recovering the lost language of biblical lament
- Biblical lament

Lament asks 2 questions:

- “Where are You, God?”
- “If You love me, why is this happening?”
- Biblical lament is more than just crying or complaining
- “Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain.” – Mark Vroegop

The book of Psalms (150 psalms)

- Songbook/prayer book of God's people
- Covers the entire range of emotions

Different types of psalms

- Psalms of praise, thanksgiving, and trust
- Psalms of lament
 - Corporate or individual lament (e.g., Psalm 22)
 - repentance-oriented (e.g., Psalm 51) or imprecatory
- Imprecatory psalms – angrily asking God to send “curses” upon one’s “enemy” or persecutors
- “... the psalms are the mirror of the soul”
– John Calvin

Psalms of Lament

- more than 1/3 of the book of Psalms are laments (58/150)
 - 42 individual laments
 - 16 corporate laments
- God's people are to keep on singing and praying while in pain
- How often do God's people hurt?
- How often do we sing "laments"?
- How often do we pray "laments"?

Psalm 77: example of a lament

1 I cry out to God; yes, I shout.

Oh, that God would listen to me!

2 When I was in deep trouble,

I searched for the Lord.

All night long I prayed,

with hands lifted toward heaven, ...

(Ps. 77: 1-2; NLT)

Psalm 77

¹ I cry out to God; yes, I shout.

Oh, that God would listen to me!

² When I was in deep trouble,
I searched for the Lord.

All night long I prayed,
with hands lifted toward heaven, ...

(Ps. 77: 1-2; NLT)

- Crying out to God when in pain much better than being silent
- It takes bold faith in God to pray a lament
- But ... most are afraid to lament. WHY?

Pain and tension may continue on ...

All night long I prayed,
with hands lifted toward heaven,
but my soul was not comforted.

³ I think of God, and I moan,
overwhelmed with longing for his help.

⁴ You don't let me sleep.
I am too distressed even to pray!

(Psalm 77: 2-4; NLT)

We keep on praying because ...

- we believe that one day God will answer and restore what we've lost

Lament leads to thinking/reflecting on the “good old days”

- 5 I think of the good old days,
long since ended,
- 6 when my nights were filled with joyful songs.
I search my soul and ponder the difference now.
(Psalms 77: 5-6; NLT)

Painful searching makes us blurt out 6 blunt questions

- Has the Lord rejected me forever?
- Will he never again be kind to me?
- Is his unfailing love gone forever?
- Have his promises permanently failed?
- Has God forgotten to be gracious?
- Has he slammed the door on his compassion?

(Psalm 77: 7-9; NLT)

Intense pain stirs up powerful emotions ...

- *not based on truth*
- but nonetheless *feel true* (very real)

- It takes bold faith to honestly ask God about what we are feeling (in our soul) despite what we already know (in our head)

Conclusion of what he was feeling – v.

10

7 Has the Lord rejected me forever?

Will he never again be kind to me?

8 Is his unfailing love gone forever?

Have his promises permanently failed?

9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has he slammed the door on his compassion?

**10 And I said, “This is my fate;
the Most High has turned his hand against me.”**

“Just my luck,” I said. “The High God goes out of business just the moment I need him.” (v. 10; MSG)

Lament turns us around

■ “Lament is a prayer that leads us through personal sorrow and difficult questions into truth that anchors our soul.” – Mark Vroegop

11 But then I recall all you have done, O Lord;
I remember your wonderful deeds of long ago.
12 They are constantly in my thoughts.
I cannot stop thinking about your mighty works.

(Psalm 77: 11-12; NLT)

There comes a point where ...

- we need to **recall** what we know to be true
 - we need to **remember** what we know to be true
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- Historical facts
 - What God has done in the past

What has God done in the past?

13 O God, your ways are holy.

Is there any god as mighty as you?

14 You are the God of great wonders!

You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations.

15 By your strong arm, you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

(Psalms 77: 13-15;

NLT)

God's works flow from who He is

13 O God, your ways are holy.

Is there any god as mighty as you?

14 You are the God of great wonders!

You demonstrate your awesome power among the nations.

15 By your strong arm, you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.

(Psalms 77: 13-15;

NLT)

■ Focus shifts from works of God to character of God (v. 13; v. 14a)

One more rhetorical question!

- Is there any god as mighty as you? (v. 13b)
- Different from previous 6 questions
- From honest questions to confident trust
- This makes lament different from simply complaining or crying – full of God's mercy & grace

Biblical lament is possible ...

- only if we believe that God is sovereign, unchanging, loving and good
- This belief creates tremendous tension when we face painful and perplexing circumstances

Learning lament is ...

- learning to live in tension between realities of a hard life and God's unchanging goodness
- learning to redirect our focus from my "hopeless situation" to God's "hopeful future" for me
- anchoring ourselves to what's true even as we are still in pain (what we're feeling)
- learning to avoid "aimless" or "selfish" grief

Psalm 77 concludes with ...

- defining moment in redemptive history where God demonstrated His faithfulness, power and love to His people

When the Red Sea saw you, O God,
its waters looked and trembled!

The sea quaked to its very depths. ...

Your road led through the sea,
your pathway through the mighty waters—
a pathway no one knew was there!

You led your people along that road like a flock of sheep,
with Moses and Aaron as their shepherds.

(Psalm 77: 16, 19-20; NLT)

What happened in Psalm 77?

- Psalmist anchored his hurting heart to the “exodus” event
- Exodus: greatest redemptive event in God’s relationship with His people
- This historical moment defined psalmist’s understanding of God’s character

What is our exodus event?



What is our exodus event?

- The cross where Jesus Christ died for us
- The cross reminds us that God has already proven Himself to be “for us” and not “against us”

The Cross: historical fact that God is “for us”, not “against us”

If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² [God] who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all ... ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ... ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

(Rm. 8: 31-33, 35-19)

The Cross: historical fact that God is “for us”, not “against us”

... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rm. 8: 31-33, 35-19)

The Cross: God suffers for us and with us

- “The biblical revelation neither explains nor eliminates suffering. It shows, rather, God entering into the life of suffering humanity, accepting and sharing the suffering.”

– Eugene Peterson

Lament: not the opposite of praise

- Psalm 77 begins with:

I cried out to God for help ...

and I would not be comforted.

- It ends with:

Your ways, God, are holy.

What god is as great as our God?

- Lament: path to praise

- It lead us through our brokenness & disappointment to renewed trust in God, by His mercy and grace

What have we learned?

- We must recover/relearn the lost language of lament
- “Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.”
- The psalms of lament will teach/guide us in this journey (e.g., Psalm 77)

To lament ...

- Turn to God
- Pray our complaints/questions
- Remember/recall God's previous works
- [Make a request for God to do something – missing in Psalm 77]
- Express our renewed trust and praise

Elements of biblical lament

- Turn
- Complain
- Ask
- Trust

Final questions

- Why does it take a strong faith to lament?
- Think back on God's faithfulness ... where has He proven Himself to be trustworthy?
- What portions of Scripture do you use to anchor yourself to who God is?
- Will you make time to talk to God about what's in your soul?

Final question

- This week, make time to talk to God about what's in your soul ...
 - Tell Him your pain/problem
 - Share your questions with Him
 - Affirm your trust in Him
 - Ask Him to keep your faith in Him strong