

Psalms of Lament

Directions:

1. Break up into groups of three.
2. Among yourselves assign a leader, a scribe, and a recorder.
3. Read silently Psalm 13.

Psalm 13 (NRSV)

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

1 How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

2 How long must I bear pain in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

3 Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

4 and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed";

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

5 But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

6 I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

4. Answer together the following questions:

Basic Context Questions

1. To whom is David speaking? (See vv. 1, 3.)
2. Observe the double-spaced section breaks. How many sections are there to this psalm?

3. Circle the question marks in section 1 (vv. 1-2).
4. What is David's *complaint* in section 1 (vv. 1-2)?

5. Underline the imperative verbs in v. 3.
6. What is David's *petition* in section 2 (vv. 3-4)?

7. Underline the actions or attributes of the LORD in section 3 (vv. 5-6).
8. What does David *vow* to do in section 3 (vv. 5-6)?

9. Does this Psalm give any indication of David's guilt or innocence before God?

Reflection questions:

1. Based on what you observed above, provide labels for the three sections of this psalm.

2. Based on what you observed in this psalm, what are key features of psalms of lament?

3. Based on what you observed in this psalm how might you define biblical lament?

4. Together, compose a three-sentence lament about a natural disaster (e.g., a tornado).

5. Based on what you know about God's covenant relationship with his people, how would you explain the theological basis for biblical lament? In other words, why would David be so bold as to *complain* about God to God?

6. In the present day, what are five or six circumstances that we or others might lament? Consider both personal and shared (regional, national, global) circumstances.

7. How have you experienced lament in corporate worship?

8. What circumstances might a child lament? Compose a three-sentence lament for corporate worship that a child might find relevant. Be concrete.

9. Can you identify any modern-day expressions of lament in music, film, art, poetry, etc.?
(Give a couple of examples.)

Application:

1. Identify where and how in this psalm you see the features of lament.

❖ **Psalm 3**

O LORD, how many are my foes!

Many are rising against me;

many are saying to me,

“There is not help for you in God.”

Selah

But you, O LORD, are a shield around me,

my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.

I cry aloud to the LORD,

and he answers me from his holy hill.

Selah

I lie down and sleep;

I wake again, for the LORD sustains me.

I am not afraid of ten thousands of people

who have set themselves against me all around.

Rise up, O LORD!

Deliver me, O my God!

For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;

You break the teeth of the wicked.

Deliverance belongs to the LORD;

may your blessing be on your people!

Selah

2. What postures, gestures, or actions express biblical lament?

3. Based on what you've learned about the features of biblical lament, evaluate the lyrics and structures of the following songs. What might be added before or after these songs to strengthen the expression of lament in worship? (Assign individual songs if short on time.)
 - ❖ "Good to Me" (*Lift Up Your Hearts*, page 620)
 - ❖ "O When Will We See Justice Done" (*Lift Up Your Hearts*, page 650)
 - ❖ "For the Troubles" (*Lift Up Your Hearts*, page 663)