



A Word on Lament

Lament is the prayer of paradox, a cry to a silent or seemingly absent God, an attempt to connect with the disenfranchising community, an effort to define one's experience in a world where all structures have collapsed. It is the death rattle and the newborn cry. It is the haunting howl of alienation and despair spoken from the place where hope paradoxically emerges. (Byrne 255)

Theodicy: Asks the question, where is God in suffering?

1. Belief in God's Goodness
2. Belief in God's Power
3. Belief in the Real Occurrence of Suffering

Lament in the Bible is the unedited cry of a person who's:

...unexpected circumstances challenge the old world view and previous faith presuppositions. They are speeches of surprised dismay and disappointment from the speaker who never expected this to happen to him or her. From this place of dislocation and disorientation anything may and will be said, the juices flow, and the animal is loose. (Byrne 260)

However, lament not only is the voice of pain, but it is also the voice of prayer stemming from our innermost being which assumes that God is there, can be present, and can help.

It contains both:

Questioning AND Trust

Protest AND Acceptance

Fear AND Confidence

All the while seeking to persuade God to act on behalf on the innocent, the victim, & the sufferer.

Hebrew mindset is able to hold that two opposite things can be true at the same time. Our culture tends to live more in dichotomies (either/or), so this can be harder for us to wrap our mind around.

Lament Vs. Complaint

Lament is not complaining for the sake of catharsis (releasing/venting – seeking relief on our own); instead, its hopeful outcome is *relief from God* to whom it is being addressed.

Lament: bemoans the troubles and moves to some expression of confidence and assurance of being heard

Complaint: offers only a sense of arguing with God about the present situation and does not explicitly lead to trust in God

Image of clenched fists vs open hands



Begin embracing lament by:

1. Reading & Praying through Biblical laments
 - a. Job 16:11-12 “El delivers me over to evil and hurls me into the hands of the wicked, and I was at ease, but he smashed and smashed me, seized my neck and bashed and bashed me. He has set me up as his target.” Image of a wild beast mauling a wrestler or warrior. Being seized by the neck signals defeat.
 - b. Job 16:17-21 the “YET” turn. Hope in a witness (kinsman redeemer Job 19:25) pleading to God on his behalf. “Rising up” (as in: rises up in court) as a celestial witness.

Not a clear description of how or why, but evidence that *he hoped!* And hope is possible for us too.

2. Enter into lament as a practice (see exercise below)
3. Share it -- Importance of language
 - Gives permission to suffer, to be angry or disappointed, to BE HONEST! (Job is honored for speaking honestly to/about God, Job 42:7-8)
 - Hearing lament in community will have a shaping & formational impact on the faith community
 - Important for children and young people as they learn who God is. Without the space to work through suffering in light of God’s presence in it, the conception of God becomes too small to handle suffering.

When lament is not given voice in liturgical life, believers will experience liturgy as increasingly irrelevant. In order to survive the dissonance between what they experience in times of personal sorrow and what the church presents as reality, they will participate superficially. The script will be read, prayers will be said, but their souls will be somewhere else. Eventually, a worship service is reduced to a buck in the basket and checking the watch during the sermon. (Byrne 264)

Language is important!

3 Parts to a lament: Invocation, Lament, Petition

1. Invocation:
 - o Addresses God – in and of itself is an act of trust that he is present, that he cares, that he is listening.
 - o Affirms our belief that he is big enough – he can take it!
2. Lament:
 - o Honors our covenantal relationship with him – He’s not going anywhere, we aren’t either.
 - o A covenantal relationship can endure hard questions!
3. Petition:
 - o Puts God in his rightful place of authority and (cosmic) responsibility

Suffering is not the last word. The last word and the final reality is God who is at the beginning and ending of all that is. God is given God’s rightful place. The person is engaged in partnership with God. Covenant minus lament is a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense. (Byrne 263)

Coming Home: Additional Resources



Lament: Learning a practice from Job

Read Psalm 13 (light a candle if possible)

1. Vent or pour out your raw emotions to God (may be on behalf of others)
 - Cry out to God (your address to God);
 - Give voice to your complaint (your anger, pain, heartache, or sadness);
 - Rage against Your Enemies (bringing your enemies before God);
 - Additional Argument (anything more, why God should intervene);
2. Remember a time of God's goodness & faithfulness in your life or a time when it was evident God heard you, then express whatever level of trust you can in his faithfulness now
 - Affirmation of Trust (your remembrance of God's presence in your past);
 - Petition/Request (your deepest desire);
 - Assurance of Being Heard (your need to feel heard);
3. Write out praises and thanksgiving to God, remembering who He is that you put your trust in
 - Promise to Offer Praise to God (the promise (even if it is hope of a promise) you can offer to God); and
 - Assurance (the attribute of God you are thankful for in the moment)
4. Concluding prayer – blow out candle
5. Share, if able, with a group
 - You never know what gift your lament may be for another who doesn't feel brave enough or strong enough to voice their own
 - Fight the sense of isolation by allowing others to walk with you, however imperfectly they may do so

Byrne, Patricia Huff. "'Give Sorrow Words': Lament--Contemporary Need for Job's Old Time Religion." *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 56, no. 3 (2002): 255-64.