

Getting Started

What different kinds of pain and trauma are people (are you) experiencing right now? Let's name them together. Then let's learn how to name them in God's presence and embrace people in their pain.

Trauma Today

Trauma is a very ordinary as a life experience. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) reports, "In the United States, 61 percent of men and 51 percent of women report exposure to at least one lifetime traumatic event..." Women are at high risk for sexual trauma. 20% of women experience sexual assault in their lifetimes. Such statistics show that trauma, while always extraordinary is also ordinary.

And yet, although we live in a world of loss and disaster, lament as a spiritual discipline is almost entirely neglected. American culture lives in denial about the fallenness of this world. Affluence, scientific achievement, and the rise of therapeutic culture all have conspired to lend the illusion of control to the American. Trauma and suffering have largely been marginalized in the American consciousness. The American church preaches happiness and fulfillment, marginalizing lament still further. The loss of lament is real and costly.

Reasons to Bring Back Lament

Lament is biblical and Christ-like. We've got a whole book in the Bible filled with five haunting laments called Lamentations. That's not all. 40% of the book of Psalms are laments. Scattered throughout many other books of the Bible, Bible readers find lament after lament. Jesus used these laments throughout his life. Most famously, he put on his lips Psalm 22, crying out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1a). Jesus' sufferings and death have not only given to us a Savior who can identify with our pain, but also has opened up to us the possibility of lament. By his blood, we can enter into the presence of God with all of our hurts and complaints.

Lament transforms the believer. Lament as rhetorical form typically has these five parts: 1) the address, 2) the complaint 3) the request 4) the promise and finally 5) the expression of praise. Can you see how the Spirit through lament moves a mourner to praise through these five elements of lament? Lament wades deeply into loss by naming it honestly in God's presence. Lament then transforms the mourner into worshipper through the gospel. As Eugen Peterson says, "...all true prayer pursued far enough will become praise...It does not always get there easily...But the end is always praise."

Psychology also recognizes the power of grieving. Judith Herman's now classic book, *Trauma and Recovery*, names mourning as absolutely essential to recovery from trauma. According to Herman, in this part of recovery, the survivor has to admit that they are grieving. They must name all that they have lost. The only difference between Herman's mourning and biblical lament is to whom the complaint and the mourning is addressed. Instead of speaking the mourning to a counselor who can only witness tears, lament is spoken to God who has promised to dry tears.

Going Deeper

Read Lamentations 2:13, 18-22.

1. What notes of despairs do you find in the verse? Hope?
2. Lamentations is not a typical biblical lament. Instead of the five parts of lament. It is three. Can you point them out from the sermon lesson?
3. What does God promise to do with tears in other Scriptures?

Learning to Lament

4. Look at Psalm 13. Can you identify the five parts of lament in the psalm? What happens in the heart of the psalmist as he laments? Why?

Psalm 13

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- 1 How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- 2 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?
- 3 Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
- 4 and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- 5 But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- 6 I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.

Taking It Home

5. Are you struggling with trauma? Take some time to write your own lament with all five parts included. Share your lament with God.
6. Do you know someone struggling with trauma? How might this study be helpful as you minister to them? How might this study of Lament help us walk with people who are struggling right now because of racism?

7. Jesus lamented on the cross. How did God answer his lament? Why is this the most hopeful truth in the world?

Further Resources:

Bourman, Timothy and Bourman, Jonathan. "The Great Lament." <https://thenotablepodcast.com/podcast>

Lewis Hall, M. Elizabeth. "Suffering in God's Presence: The Role of Lament in Transformation." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 9, no. 2 (November 2016): 219–232.

Vargas, Kristin A. *How Long, O Lord? Hope and Help When You Have Been Deeply Hurt*. St. Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 2018.