

## INTRODUCTION

Today, we continue our sermon series called “Psalms: the Soundtrack of a Godly Life”. This morning’s sermon is the second in a two-part mini-series on the **Lament Psalms**. I had the privilege of preaching the first sermon back in May, when we focused on the “WHAT” and “WHY” of Lament. Today, we will focus on the “HOW.”

I will be using power points slides regularly today, and I will also make available a full copy of my manuscript. So, if you would prefer to sit back and listen—rather than multi-task or take your own notes—know those resources will be available on the church’s website this afternoon.

As it was two months ago, Lament remains an incredibly heavy topic. Even as we all continue to confront the twin cruelties of racism and the coronavirus, we have seen death affect our community in other ways. I am thinking of Lazada, Herb and Vershawn’s daughter. This Wednesday, we celebrated her arrival into God’s presence even as we grieved her senseless death at the end of a gun. As a young dad, tears came often. No parent should have to bury their own child. I am grateful that our Pastor provided a consoling presence and a word of hope.

I am also thinking of a young man named Isaac, or “Cornbread”, a regular at The Commons before the building became known by that name. Cornbread was a regular on Beals, cruising on his bike, flashing a bright smile, often a bit intoxicated. I remember gently guiding him to a seat after he crashed a MACC Lit community dinner years ago; despite being a bit loopy and loud, he enjoyed our potluck dinner. Two weeks ago, Cornbread died unexpectedly. His life mattered. And for all the trouble he caused, and all the trouble he suffered, The Commons was built for him. Thanks to Edythe, we celebrated his life with a block party Friday. And while he may not have a photo hanging from our walls, that building will keep his memory as long as we do.

I’m also thinking of our sister, Carolyn Davis, who’s childhood home was deliberately firebombed two weeks ago. While no one was hurt, a family’s home was almost destroyed. When I first learned of this tragedy, I was able to pray with several of you on the 48214 CARE team. We were able to just sit and lament the loss of that home. We spoke of the love that was sown there like a seed. We spoke of the childhood memories made there. The dreams that were born there. The celebrations that happened there. We spoke of the creaky doors, the nooks, the crannies. And we grieved how that was all nearly vaporized in an act of selfish violence.

And as we did that, we welcomed God into our prayers and griefs. We did that because our God laments alongside us. Grief is a dark place--it is a place of pain, doubt, and anger. But it does not have to be a lonely place. Our God joins us in it. He *tabernacles* in it. And my prayer is that when confronted with sin--whether in ourselves, in our community, or in our broken world--we will reject our instinct to withdraw from the brokenness, to withhold our honest feelings from him so we can present a polished and pristine image, and instead embrace God,

confront him, and weep before him, so that *he*--through our lament--can transform *us* into a humble and empathetic people who are eager to trade our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh.

I have organized this sermon into three parts: **RE-WIND**, **RE-LEARN**, and **RE-TELL**. As we progress through the sermon and discover helpful guideposts to practicing lament in the Psalms, we will set time aside in the sermon to give our own laments, together, and begin to practice what we're preaching. Our primary passage will be Psalm 88, and I invite you to turn there now and listen as I read verses 1-2 and 18.

*O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you. Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cries! You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.*

Please join me before the Father:

*O God, Creator, Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. You who weep with us and groan within us, we come to you now. And we come confidently, knowing that we can draw near to you, our great High Priest, empathetic with our own weaknesses. Open our eyes to the forgotten practice of lament. Help us to learn how to navigate the depths of these dark waters, the Valley of the Shadow of Death, the wildernesses we will inevitably face. Teach us that honest grief before you is the better way. Give us the courage to sit with our questions. Grace us with the humility to see lament--and the confession and repentance that often follow--as medicine for our souls. Weep with us Lord. Walk alongside us. Be our counselor and keeper, refuge and redeemer. Amen.*

## I. **RE-WIND: The “WHAT” and “WHY” of Lament**

Now, before we dive into today's passage, I want to revisit the first sermon on Lament. In that sermon, we focused on the scriptural basis for lament by asking two questions: “WHAT is Lament?” and “WHY do we Lament?”

### A. WHAT is Lament?

Despite what many of us have been taught, Christian lament is woven all throughout the tapestry of Scripture, from Genesis<sup>1</sup> to Revelation.<sup>2</sup> Approximately one-third of the Psalms are considered laments.<sup>3</sup> David, the author of many Psalms and a king described as “a man after God's own heart”<sup>4</sup> laments the loss of his friend, Jonathan, his persecutor, Saul,<sup>5</sup> and the death of his sons.<sup>6</sup> The Old Testament prophets routinely cry out to God over the collective failures of

---

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 6:6-8.

<sup>2</sup> Revelation 6:9.

<sup>3</sup> Soong-Chan Rah. *Prophetic Lament*, p. 21-23.

<sup>4</sup> ! Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 1:17.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Samuel 12, 18.

Israel,<sup>7</sup> and the book of Lamentations is really just one long lament of Israel's injustice and sin.<sup>8</sup> But it is not only God's people who lament; God *himself* laments with us. The Father not only laments his creation's disloyalty<sup>9</sup> but also its bondage to sin and death.<sup>10</sup> The Holy Spirit groans in anguish within us and on our behalf, interceding for our weaknesses.<sup>11</sup> And Jesus, when confronted by the tears of his friends Mary and Martha, wept over the death of his Lazarus.<sup>12</sup> The scriptures portray Jesus as the "man of sorrows" and "acquainted with grief"<sup>13</sup>; he laments the prodigal city Jerusalem and longs to gather his people to him like a mother hen.<sup>14</sup> Christians like to think of God as above all of that, but that simply is not the portrait the Bible paints. And because our God weeps with us, for us, and alongside us, we can collapse into his waiting arms, knowing we can draw near, receive mercy, and find grace in our times of need.<sup>15</sup>

As we can see, this picture of Biblical lament is deeply rooted in the character of God. It is certainly more robust than what our common dictionaries offer up.<sup>16</sup> So, last time, I defined Christian lament this way:

*Lament is a prayerful expression of anguish and hope that softens our callous hearts and steadies our shaken souls. It is a stubborn insistence that things cannot remain this way, a holy anger that is put to speech, and a grief that produces within us a hunger and thirst for righteousness. It is to our pain what thanksgiving is to our joy.*

Defined this way, we can begin to see lament for what it truly is. It is not a sign of weakness; lament is a righteous and treasured practice of God's people that reflects his own character. It is not always orderly and pristine; lament often looks more like a child, wailing and flailing, demanding his parent's relief. And it is not eager for tidy solutions; lament guides us away from insensitive and shallow responses to sin's cruel grip on the world all around us. And rather than leading us to recoil from pain, lament teaches us to welcome grief like a teacher and friend. This doesn't mean we should elevate pain for its own sake; it means we should see our grief, in response to pain, as a pathway to intimacy with God, not something to fear.

## B. WHY do we Lament?

That leads to the second part of the recap: *why* do we lament? What is it specifically that God's people are drawing their attention to and confronting? **For the Christian, lament leads us to better recognize and participate in the supernatural conflict at the heart of our faith.**

---

<sup>7</sup> Jerheima 12:1-4 and 14:17; Ezra 9:6; Ezekiel 19; Daniel 9; Amos 5;

<sup>8</sup> Lamentations 1-5.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 6:6; 1 Samuel 8:7

<sup>10</sup> Jeremiah 12:20-21; Genesis 6:6.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:26-27.

<sup>12</sup> John 11:33-35.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 53:3.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 27:46; Luke 13:34.

<sup>15</sup> Hebrews 4:16.

<sup>16</sup> "Lament" *Merriam-Webster.com*. 2020. [ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lament> ]

Recall that in our last sermon, we studied Psalm 130. There, the Psalmist cried out to God from “the depths”—a Hebrew phrase used throughout the Old Testament to refer to and describe the corruption of creation, the deep-seeded brokenness that plagues our existence, and the devastating chaos fostered by what scripture describes as the “powers” and “principalities” which wage war against God and his Kingdom. If we are honest, we are not accustomed to talking about evil and sin in these kinds of radical and supernatural terms. And yet that is precisely how scripture goes about doing so.

Recall that while the world, or “*cosmos*”, is described in the Bible as the handiwork of God and the object of his creation, it is also used to describe the evil regime that has invaded and taken up residence in our once-beautiful creation.<sup>17</sup> When God appears within this world, he is described in the Bible as a “stranger” who “was in the world, and the world was made by him, yet the world knew him not.”<sup>18</sup> “Be of good cheer” Jesus tells his disciples, “I have overcome the world.”<sup>19</sup> This “world” does not welcome the Creator, or his people, because it has been saturated with hostile supernatural “powers” coordinated by the Devil himself.<sup>20</sup> Notice how John’s gospel refers to the Devil as the “prince of this world”<sup>21</sup> and Paul describes him even more shockingly as the “god of this world.”<sup>22</sup> This Enemy, and these powers, form an empire of cruelty, aggression, envy, misery, violence, falsehood, greed, ignorance, and spiritual desolation. This empire uses deception, temptation, and everyday experiences to shape our imaginations and affections away from God. They bring chaos down like rain, sow injustice like seeds, and infect us all with greed, fear, and selfishness. And while these powers cannot separate us from God’s love,<sup>23</sup> they contend against God’s followers all the same. They will remain a terrible enemy until the end—when death is the “last enemy that shall be destroyed.”<sup>24</sup> It is the “present evil world”<sup>25</sup> to which Paul says we must never be conformed,<sup>26</sup> and against which we stand as more than conquerors.<sup>27</sup>

By discerning this cosmic reality, we can begin to do things: recalibrate *our laments* and *recalibrate our hearts*. By recalibrating our laments, we focus them on the real battle—which is not against flesh and blood, but against these “powers”<sup>28</sup>-- so that we can recognize how sin has corrupted all of creation, and not simply our “personal relationship” with God. Grasping this reality frees us to examine ourselves and our motivations with greater tenacity, recognizing just how deeply-seeded and insidious these dark influences are in our lives, and how they have led

---

<sup>17</sup> 1 John 2:15

<sup>18</sup> John 1:10.

<sup>19</sup> John 16:33.

<sup>20</sup> Colossians 1:16; 1 Corinthians 2:8; Ephesians 1:21, 3:10.

<sup>21</sup> John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4.

<sup>23</sup> Romans 8:38.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26.

<sup>25</sup> Galatians 1:4.

<sup>26</sup> Romans 12:2.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 8:31-39.

<sup>28</sup> Ephesians 6:12.

us astray.<sup>29</sup> We can then also begin to recalibrate *our hearts* and remind ourselves that God is not the architect of that corruption; he is in fact working to defeat the regime that perpetuates the pain by redeeming the world and unleashing his people to live a different way.

These twin recalibrations--to our laments, and to our hearts--teach us, as citizens of God's Kingdom, to participate in this supernatural conflict by rejecting the deceptions of the enemy and embracing acts of *shalom*: confession, repentance, generosity, hospitality, reconciliation, and other creative and costly means of disadvantaging ourselves to advantage our neighbors.<sup>30</sup> We can begin to abide, like a tree planted by streams of living water,<sup>31</sup> in a radically different Kingdom than the one that plagues this world, one where the first are last,<sup>32</sup> the poor are blessed,<sup>33</sup> and the meek inherit the earth.<sup>34</sup> We advance this Kingdom, and defy the powers, when we walk the extra mile,<sup>35</sup> turn the other cheek,<sup>36</sup> and bless those who persecute us.<sup>37</sup> We associate with the lowly,<sup>38</sup> abstain from vengeance,<sup>39</sup> and overcome evil with good.<sup>40</sup> We stand in solidarity with the marginalized.<sup>41</sup> We choose peace when threatened by the sword,<sup>42</sup> blessings when cursed,<sup>43</sup> and love towards anyone we might consider our enemy.<sup>44</sup> We don't demand our "rights" at the expense of our neighbors' welfare—we willingly relinquish them, emptying ourselves in the likeness of our savior, descending rather than elevating ourselves,<sup>45</sup> finding our lives by losing them.<sup>46</sup> Jesus, the King of this Kingdom, is the one we imitate: he who emptied himself and took on the form of a servant,<sup>47</sup> who washed his betrayer's feet,<sup>48</sup> who pled for the forgiveness of his own murderers,<sup>49</sup> and who willingly gave up his life and healed us by his wounds.<sup>50</sup> Jesus' death made a mockery of Satan and the powers,<sup>51</sup> and one day, he will return to make all things new.<sup>52</sup> ***This is why we lament--to confront the powers with the peace of Christ.***

---

<sup>29</sup> Jeremiah 17:9.

<sup>30</sup> Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*.

<sup>31</sup> Psalm 1.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 20:16.

<sup>33</sup> LUke 6:20-23, Matthew 5:1-12.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew 5:5.

<sup>35</sup> Matthew 5:41.

<sup>36</sup> Matthew 5:39.

<sup>37</sup> Matthew 5:44.

<sup>38</sup> Romans 12:16.

<sup>39</sup> Romans 12:17-20.

<sup>40</sup> Romans 12:21.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 25:35, Isaiah 58:10.

<sup>42</sup> Matthew 5:9; Matthew 26:50-53.

<sup>43</sup> Mathew 5:44.

<sup>44</sup> John 15:13, Luke 6:27, Matthew 5:43-48, Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:27-37; Romans 12:20.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew 20:25-28.

<sup>46</sup> Mark 8:34-35.

<sup>47</sup> Philippians 2:1-11.

<sup>48</sup> John 13:1-17.

<sup>49</sup> Luke 23:34.

<sup>50</sup> Philiippians 2:1-9, Isaiah 53:5.

<sup>51</sup> Colossians 2:15.

<sup>52</sup> Revelations 21:5.

## II. RE-LEARN: The “HOW” of Lament in the Psalms and Psalm 88

So, if lament can help us unlock our ability to better live out the Kingdom of God, we need to learn how to lament! And that leads us to the heart of today’s message, which focuses on the “HOW” of lament. The Lament Psalms range widely, so we’ll take a very broad approach, looking to identify the “guide posts” that can direct and construct our laments, while focusing primarily on Psalm 88. I welcome you to turn there now; the passage will also be on the screen.

To be perfectly candid with you, I am anxious about teaching this Psalm. It is the only passage in the entire Old Testament where the Hebrew phrase “*I am hopeless!*”<sup>53</sup> is uttered, and the only Lament Psalm that ends without a high note.<sup>54</sup> And yet, if you only remember one takeaway from this sermon, let it be this: ***it is far more dangerous for God’s people to ignore our grief, and the transforming work God can do through it, than it is to confront, engage, and draw out our griefs through deep and honest lament to God.***

Let’s read this passage together, allowing the Psalmist’s heavy language to sit on our shoulders, invade our imaginations, and pull at our hearts.

1        O Lord, God of my salvation,  
              I cry out day and night before you.

2        Let my prayer come before you;  
              incline your ear to my cry!

3        For my soul is full of troubles,  
              and my life draws near to Sheol.

4        I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
              I am a man who has no strength,

5        like one set loose among the dead,  
              like the slain that lie in the grave,  
              like those whom you remember no more,  
              for they are cut off from your hand.

6        You have put me in the depths of the pit,  
              in the regions dark and deep.

7        Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
              and you overwhelm me with all your waves. *Selah*

8        You have caused my companions to shun me;  
              you have made me a horror to them.  
              I am shut in so that I cannot escape;

9        my eyes grow dim through sorrow.  
              Every day I call upon you, O Lord;  
              I spread out my hands to you.

10       Do you work wonders for the dead?  
              Do the departed rise up to praise you? *Selah*

---

<sup>53</sup> Psalm 88:15. Sometimes translated “I am overcome” or “I am in despair.” The term *aphiyach* is only used here in the OT, and its meaning is to this day largely unknown.

<sup>54</sup> Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr. *Psalms*. P. 377-382.

11     *Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,  
          or your faithfulness in Abaddon?*

12     *Are your wonders known in the darkness,  
          or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*

13     *But I, O Lord, cry to you;  
          in the morning my prayer comes before you.*

14     *O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?  
          Why do you hide your face from me?*

15     *Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,  
          I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.*

16     *Your wrath has swept over me;  
          your dreadful assaults destroy me.*

17     *They surround me like a flood all day long;  
          they close in on me together.*

18     *You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;  
          my companions have become darkness*

Did I mention that this passage was heavy? And yet, family, I believe it is also far more than a heavy dose of sour medicine--I believe this Psalm is a gem, burning like a warm hearth full of holy fire prepared by God to refine our souls. It contains a four-step pattern we see throughout the Lament Psalms: (1) a prayer, (2) a complaint, (3) a request, and yes, even a (4) a statement of trust.<sup>55</sup> And I think that this pattern is a helpful, straightforward framework for us to consider as we cultivate the discipline of lament in our own lives. I want to briefly examine each of these steps--which serve like theological "guide posts" and "checkpoints" to our lament--and look at each of the four steps through both Psalm 88 and another complementary Lament Psalm. And as we progress, we will conclude each step by practicing each of the four parts together.

#### 1.     Persistent Prayer | Psalm 88 + Psalm 77

"When I *cry out* in your presence," the Psalmist says in Psalm 88, "let my *prayer* come before you; incline your ear to my *cry*."<sup>56</sup> "Every day I *call* on you," he says.<sup>57</sup> This emphasis on prayer, and calling out to God, is common throughout the Lament Psalms. The author in **Psalm 88** is sharing an urgent demand, using words like "cry" and "call" repeatedly. He *expects* God to answer this urgent outpouring, trusting that *if* YHWH would just answer, all would be put to rest. We also see this same dynamic in **Psalm 77**. There, the Psalmist drives himself deeper into the presence of God, demanding his Father's attention like a toddler who has been injured. "I cry aloud to God, and he *will* hear me"<sup>58</sup> the Psalmist declares. All throughout Psalm 77, we see a writer *resolved* to speak to his God, and to bring his pain before him. And in both Psalms, the *very first* act in each Psalmist's lament is this outcry for God's attention.

---

<sup>55</sup> Stacie Gleddiesmith, "My God, My God, Why? Understanding the Lament Psalms," *Reformed Worship*, June 2010. See also: Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*. I am hugely indebted to both of these authors for providing a framework and language that shaped much of the heart of this sermon!

<sup>56</sup> Psalm 88:1.

<sup>57</sup> Psalm 88:9b, 13.

<sup>58</sup> Psalm 77:1.

Let me ask you: who taught us to cry out? Of course, the answer is “no one!” As the Ottenoffs and Hogles are especially aware of these days, and as the Muneawas soon will be, once a child takes its first breath, that child welcomes the world with a very *loud* wail. Every single one of us, from me to my son, share this same story. Our lives began with tears. It’s become part of what it means to be human in this broken world—to cry *is* to be a human.<sup>59</sup> But lament is not quite like that. We aren’t born *lamenting*. Christian lament—the kind that is honest, biblical, redemptive—is not natural to us. To cry out as the Psalmists do here, to pray in our pain, to get quite messy with our words and tears before a holy God, takes vulnerability, faith, and a whole lot of persistence.

If we are honest, though, many of us fear lament for this reason. We find it too honest, too open, and too risky. We fear we won’t be heard. And when we give into those lies, we risk succumbing to something far worse than our fears: *silent despair*. Despair is what lives under the hopeless resignation that God does not care, does not hear, and will never restore what is so desperately broken in and around us. People who believe this stop praying. They simply give up.

Russell Moore, a leader in the Southern Baptist Convention, shared a story that captures the danger of this “silent despair.” Moore describes visiting an orphanage in Russia while his family pursued adoption. The silence from the orphanage’s nursery was eerie, sickening even. The babies in their cribs never cried, not because they didn’t need anything, but because they had learned—through neglect—that no one would answer. And yet, shortly after Moore and his family completed their adoption and left with their two little boys in their arms, one of the boys began to scream. Moore explained:

*Little Maxim’s scream changed everything—more, I think, than did the judge’s verdict and the notarized paperwork. It was the moment, in his recognizing that he would be heard, that he went from being an orphan to being a son.*<sup>60</sup>

Moore’s experience provides us with a profound insight: just as children who are confident of their caregiver’s love cry out, so too will a Christian lament their woes to a God they love, a Heavenly Father they have embraced as one adopted into the family of God.<sup>61</sup>

And yet, I wonder how many of us are holding onto a “silent despair” instead of persisting in prayer. How many of us have found ourselves in a dry wilderness, spiritually dehydrated by our unanswered prayers, from the sort of divine silence we observe in Psalm 88? Maybe you have given God a defiant silent treatment. Or maybe you just don’t know what to say. Maybe there is a particular hardship or struggle that you just cannot talk to God about right now. I hope that you will be encouraged by these Lament Psalms to start praying again, to start crying out again. And for those of you who are around friends that pray in ways that make you wince as they do

---

<sup>59</sup> Micahel Card, *A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament*, p. 19.

<sup>60</sup> Romans 8:23.

<sup>61</sup> Ephesians 1:5.



this--slow your roll! Don't be so eager to jump in, correct, hush, and fix. Remember that your friend is *praying*. They are in that holy moment, exhibiting trust in their Heavenly Father.

Family, as we mine the riches of Christian lament, recognize that as you begin to unleash heartfelt cries to our Father, they will often be brief, messy, and unpolished. They may feel forced and uncomfortable. But keep talking to God! Don't allow your fears, despairs, shame, or or doubts to silence you. Your pain can be a path to deeper intimacy with God. And by being persistent, we can learn together how to vocalize those fears, despairs, shames, and doubts in our prayers. We can refuse to stuff these hardships further into the recesses of our souls. Lament opens that door and shows us a path toward restoration with our Heavenly Father.

No one taught us how to cry! Tears are part of what it means to be human, at least until Jesus returns to wipe them all away.<sup>62</sup> But to lament--*that* is a deeply Christian activity. It is a prayer of faith for the journey between a hard life and God's goodness. And we don't just awaken to it; we have to learn it, cultivate it, and harness it. We do that by turning to God in persistent prayer.

But before we do that, please take a moment to cry out to your Heavenly Father in lament. After just a few moments, I will offer a cry of my own, focused on the sin of racism, and you are welcome to join me:.

Father, my soul cries out to you. I am overcome with grief. When I consider the racial oppression that your people have waged against their own brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends, my soul aches for your presence. When I reflect on the ways your people, *your* people, have become captive to the comfort of our cultural situation and the power of our politics, I weep. What can be done, O God? The anguish, the pain, the sorrow, is beyond my words. Intercede for me, Holy Spirit. Don't allow me to recoil from the pain; guide me into embracing it. Walk with me, King Jesus, and teach me how to empty myself.

## 2. Courageous Complaints | Psalm 88 + Psalm 10

Christmas 2014 was a difficult time in the Demers home Two months earlier, my youth pastor and mentor, Dane Burk--the one I mentioned in my last sermon--succumbed to a years-long battle with cancer, leaving his wife to parent a family of grieving children. And just weeks earlier, I had attended the funeral service for a young man named Chris, one of my students at Central High School. Chris was a leader, bright, athletic, and genuinely funny. He was on an academic scholarship at Michigan State, and he even managed to walk onto the football team as a freshman. That all changed in late November, when he was killed in a tragic car accident. And then, on Christmas day, Laura and I grieved the loss of one of Laura's bridesmaids, Rebekah. Rebekah was a kind and humble spirit, one of Laura's nursing classmates and closest friends, and a truly loving person. In the span of about two weeks, she went from being perfectly healthy to incurably sick. Rebekah died a painful death that seemed over before we could even begin to process the fact that she was sick.

---

<sup>62</sup> Revelation 21:4.

The day after Rebekah's death, and while reflection on the deaths of Dane and Chris, I wrote this:

If grieving is a process, I have arrived at the "angry" stage. No doubt, I'm grateful. Grateful for each of these friends, their legacies, and their character. Grateful for our shared memories, our inside jokes, and our adventures. Grateful that we are promised--one day--that all of our mourning will be transformed into gladness by our King, and that our tears will be wiped away. But I'm also angry. So very angry. Angry over the loss of their lives. Angry at incurable diseases and split-second accidents. Angry over careers, marriages, families, and grandchildren that never got their chance. Angry over friendships that had just begun to blossom. Angry at stories that curtailed moments after the first act. Angry at a broken world consumed by tragedies like these. Angry at the evil forces sowing death and chaos all around us. Angry at how little any of us can do to change any of it. Angry at how quickly we forget and just move on. Angry over what feels like the absence of hope. Angry for highlighting my anger when others bear the real loss. Just plain angry.

And back then, I concluded with a quote from Psalm 88: "*Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you?*"<sup>63</sup> It hurts even remembering what that day felt like.

What do we say in these kinds of moments, family? How do we come up for air when we have been consumed and disoriented by a tidal wave of grief? Maybe my words weren't the most holy. They certainly weren't most hopeful. What they were, put simply, was a complaint. And if we're going to take an honest look at *how* to lament, we need to learn how to complain.

"Wait a minute," you say, "*complain?*" I'm sure you are already feeling uneasy. We don't like complainers! And isn't complaining always the wrong response? No, not if we read the Lament Psalms over and over. If we do, we will see plenty of creative and compelling complaints. We will find expressions of sorrow, fear, frustration and even confusion directed at God.

- There are "why" complaints: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" the speaker demands in Psalm 22.<sup>64</sup> "Awaken! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?"<sup>65</sup> "O Lord", the speaker weeps in Psalm 80, "why do you cast my soul away?"<sup>66</sup>
- There are also "how" questions: "How Long, O Lord?" demands the speaker in Psalm 13. "Will you forget me forever?"<sup>67</sup> "O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult?"<sup>68</sup>

And apparently, these complaints aren't sinful. They were set to music so an entire congregation could sing those complaints together in a coordinated chorus.

---

<sup>63</sup> Psalm 88:10.

<sup>64</sup> Psalm 22:1.

<sup>65</sup> Psalms 44:23-24.

<sup>66</sup> Psalm 80:12.

<sup>67</sup> Psalm 13:1-2.

<sup>68</sup> Psalm 94:3.

**Psalm 88** is disproportionately complaining-focused, often in an almost sarcastic form. “Do you work wonders for the dead?” the Psalmist asks.” Are your wonders known in the darkness?”<sup>69</sup> Similarly, **Psalm 10** opens with two especially astonishing complaints. “Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?”<sup>70</sup> In this Psalm, the speaker is wrestling with God’s apparent silence in the face of blatant injustice. Notice how the Psalm begins with an appeal to YHWH--translated “Lord” here in your Bible. This is the name God uses to introduce himself to Moses and save the Hebrews from slavery; the name God used to make a mockery of Egypt’s false gods and part the Red Sea. The Psalmist calls upon *that* name, that imagery, and then proceeds to accuse that *same* Deliverer God of disinterest! He lays out a detailed complaint against God--highlighting the unpunished arrogance of the wicked against the poor, the ill-gotten gain of the greedy, and the unpunished pride of God’s enemies.<sup>71</sup>

It is remarkable how common these complaints are in the Psalms, relative to how uncomfortable we are with them. Perhaps we don’t understand the value of bringing our complaints to God. But let’s be clear, family--the Psalms permit and even encourage us to share our frustrations, *including and especially if they are with God himself*. The Psalms teach that this kind of complaint is essential to Lament; it is where we identify the source of our pain, draw attention to the brokenness of the world, and focus on appeals to God’s character. After all, we complain because we expect God to be who he says and do what he has promised. That means naming, with specificity and honesty, situations or circumstances that are painful, wrong, unjust--or as one author beautifully put it: “...circumstances that do not align with God’s character and therefore do not make sense within God’s Kingdom.”<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, if we refuse to complain, I fear we will fall into two related errors: *anger* or *denial*. Some of us become so filled with built-up anger towards God that we live in self-made prisons of bitterness and rage. Pain gives rise to this fiery rage, and there are often spiritual burn scars to show for it. On the other hand, some of us revert to stoicism: we try and project a kind of steady confidence and contentment that, if we are honest, feels more like denial. “Everything is fine!” we say, even though we know it isn’t. Whether we’re in either of these two places--anger, denial--we often desperately need Christian community to coach us off the cliff of our anger or coax us out of our caves of hiding. We can’t stuff down our frustrations and be consumed by anger or denial. We must instead bring our complaints to the Father.

Don’t get me wrong--I’m not suggesting that scripture grants us some kind of blank check to vent self-centered rage at God every time life doesn’t turn out like we planned. I’m also not suggesting that we have a *right* to be angry with God. And I certainly want to caution you against getting *stuck* in this step. We are not meant to linger in complaint forever. But...I do think that the Psalms are teaching us about a place for a kind of complaining that *is* biblical and

---

<sup>69</sup> Psalm 88:10, 12.

<sup>70</sup> Psalm 10:1.

<sup>71</sup> Psalm 10:2-4.

<sup>72</sup> Gleddiesmith, “My God, My God, Why?”.

deeply courageous. Frankly, without a complaint, there isn't really a lament, and there is no basis for making a demand of God, which is the next step.

Again, before moving on to that third step, please take a moment to offer a courageous complaint to your Heavenly Father. In a moment, I will offer mine, and you are welcome to join:

Enough is enough! How long, O Lord? How long will you leave us, your Bride and first love, stumbling in the darkness, blinded by our sin and selfishness? Our minds are dark, cavernous, lacking your Light. They are not renewed as they should be. We are taken in by cultural patterns and myths that ignore or deny the painful stories of our brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends. We choose vengeance over peace, conflict over reconciliation, anger over empathy. We refuse to acknowledge the deeply-seeded idolatries that shape our hearts in insidious ways, fostering greed, selfishness, envy, racism, and oppression. If we have run out of energy to even believe these things can change, how can you expect us to keep working for it? How long will we be forced to only hear of your goodness while we see the world's evils--particularly the evils of racial pride, socioeconomic injustice, and ethnic divisions? How long will these reasons to despair surround us? Where are you, O God? You prayed for our unity. You ceded us the ministry of reconciliation. You promised us power and peace. Help us, Heavenly Father! Cure us of our blindness! Open our eyes to see the glories of redemption and confession, lead us in the pathway of righteousness. Give us reason to hope again.

### 3. Bold Demands - Psalm 88 + Psalm 22

That leads us to the third step in lament: we are taught by the Lament Psalms to call on God with a confidence deeply rooted in his character. Throughout the Psalms, the writers are equally as bold as they are angry or discouraged. They call upon God with such authority that it seems sometimes like they believe they can command God to act. Their confidence in God's character, and their knowledge of his past deliverance, compels them to make bold requests. The writers of lament stake their faith, their claims, on what God has promised to do.

"Let my prayer come before you," the Psalmist demands in **Psalm 88**.<sup>73</sup> The Psalmist is facing death all around him, and yet he hears nothing but silence from God. And so, he is compelled to make demands of the God of the universe: "Incline your ear and hear my cry!"<sup>74</sup> he says. Notice the same sort of intensity in **Psalm 22**. "Be not far from me," David writes, "for my trouble is near."<sup>75</sup> Both speakers implore God to be close, to come quickly to their aid, to deliver them, to save their souls, and to rescue them from danger.<sup>76</sup> Each request builds on the one before, calling upon God to act in a way that fulfills his promises and amplifies his holiness.

So, what do we ask for? What kinds of things do we demand of God? Drawing from the Lament Psalms, Pastor Mark Vroegop outlines a helpful list of nine examples:

---

<sup>73</sup> Psalm 88:2.

<sup>74</sup> Psalm 88:2.

<sup>75</sup> Psalm 22:11.

<sup>76</sup> Psalm 88:3-12; Psalm 22:11, 19-21.

1. **Rise up!** -- In the Lament Psalms, we see the speaker demand that God “arise” or “rise up!”<sup>77</sup> These laments plead with God to do the work of fixing what is broken in the world. “Arise O Lord,” declares Psalm 10. “Lif up your hand, forget not the afflicted.”<sup>78</sup>
2. **Deliver us!** -- We also see the Lament Psalmists demand deliverance. “Grant us help against the foe...with God we shall do valiantly.”<sup>79</sup> By asking for God to save us, we are not only marshalling the resources of an omnipotent God; we are reminding ourselves that God can be trusted.
3. **Remember!** -- When the Bible calls God to remember, it isn’t as if he has forgotten anything. It is a way of asking God to be true to his promises. “Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been true from old.”<sup>80</sup>
4. **Have mercy on us!** -- When the situation behind our lament is directly connected to our own sin, we see the Lament Psalmists pleading with God to not remember their sins--to not be treated as they deserve. These pleas for mercy are also common in the book of Lamentations. “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.”<sup>81</sup>
5. **Listen to me!** -- In the face of deafening silence, like what we see in Psalm 88, we also see the Lament Psalmists reaching out to the Lord, blindly lunging for his presence. “To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, be not deaf to me! Hear the voice of my pleas for mercy.”<sup>82</sup>
6. **Teach me!** -- Pain can be a wake-up call, a unique opportunity for us to humble ourselves and learn. “Teach me to do your will, for you are my God,” the speaker says in Psalm 143.<sup>83</sup> “Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”<sup>84</sup>
7. **Vindicate me!** -- One of the most personal requests in the Lament Psalms relates to the desire for defense. These come in response to false accusations, misunderstanding, and unfair treatment. Rather than sliding into bitterness, or succumbing to the temptation to counterpunch, the Lament Psalms teach us to ask *God* for vindication. “Awake and arouse yourself for my vindication and my cause, my God and my Lord!”<sup>85</sup>
8. **Let justice be done!** -- By making God’s glory the partner to your pain, it is appropriate to demand justice. Lament gives us the language for talking to God about unfairness,

---

<sup>77</sup> Psalms 3, 7, 9, 10, 17, 74, 94.

<sup>78</sup> Psalm 10:12.

<sup>79</sup> Psalm 60:11-12.

<sup>80</sup> Psalm 25:6.

<sup>81</sup> Psalm 51:1.

<sup>82</sup> Psalm 28:1-2.

<sup>83</sup> Psalm 143:10.

<sup>84</sup> Psalm 90:12.

<sup>85</sup> Psalm 35:23-24.

abuse, and oppression, allowing us to boldly call on him to act for the sake of justice. “Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name,” the Psalmist says. “Let them perish in disgrace that all may know that you alone are the Most High.”<sup>86</sup>

9. **Restore us!** -- Many Lament Psalms feature a request for God to bring restoration to his people. This is consistent with the narrative of the Gospel, which culminates in Jesus returning to and restoring his Creation, bringing forth the New Heavens and New Earth.<sup>87</sup> “Restore us, O God;” says Psalm 80. “Let your face shine, that we may be saved.”<sup>88</sup>

May this list encourage you! Use it to guide your own demands. Lament gives us an expansive prayer language with which to speak to God. It is the language of our Savior, a “man of sorrows acquainted with grief.” Indeed, this Man of Sorrows meets us in our pain; he invites us to keep asking him with bold confidence, reminding us he is ready to give us good gifts.<sup>89</sup> These demands, and God’s response, can cultivate a deeper hope in God to care for and love us.

But before we move on to that final feature of lament--hope--please take a moment to offer a bold demand of your own. Once again, I will offer mine here, and you are welcome to join me:

Father, King, your people continue to build up the wall of racial hostility that you tore down when your Kingdom invaded this world of brokenness. Look upon your church, see how we are plagued by racial apathy and hostility. See how we are quick to justify and rationalize, slow to weep with those who mourn. Move among us, O Lord, like a mighty rushing wind. Tear down that dividing wall of racial hostility that I and so many of us have continued to rebuild, brick by brick. Exchange our hearts of stone for hearts of flesh. Teach us all to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slower to anger. By the Power of the Spirit, turn our apathy into empathy and our hostility into unity.

#### 4. Declarations of Trust - Psalm 88 and Psalm 13

“All true songs of worship are born in the wilderness of suffering,” says Michael Card, songwriter and author.<sup>90</sup> As Card notes in his book, without the pain and suffering that David endured, we would not have in our hands today many of the Davidic Psalms that we cherish. “The Lord is my shepherd” David declares, “and though I walk through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”<sup>91</sup>

This theme of pain refining our faith is true throughout the story of Christianity. Horatio Spafford penned the famous hymn “It Is Well With My Soul” after losing all four of his daughters in a tragic seafaring accident. “When sorrows like sea billows roll / whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say / ‘it is well, it is well with my soul.’” And of course, think of the powerful hymns from

---

<sup>86</sup> Psalm 83:16-18.

<sup>87</sup> Revelation 21:1-8.

<sup>88</sup> Psalm 80:3.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew 7:11

<sup>90</sup> Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, p. 63.

<sup>91</sup> Psalm 23:1, 4.

the African-American Spirituals. “There is a balm in Gilead / to make the wounded whole / there is a balm in Gilead / to heal the sin-sick soul.” I want to be clear: the encouragement these songs provide today don’t justify the pain, loss, suffering, and slavery that informed these songs. No, the testimony of God’s people is this: if we allow him, **God can cultivate trust and undeniable good out from the midst of our worst pains.**<sup>92</sup>

This is a critical juncture of this sermon. Here--having cried out to God, having made your case to him, having demanded he listen and act--you and I now have to make a choice in our lament. We now have to choose to move beyond each step, to not linger indefinitely in our cries or our complaints and demands. We now have the opportunity to choose to *trust*. The language we have used so far has guided us to this point, to a spiritual “safe harbor” of confidence in God.

Notice in **Psalm 13**, David opens his lament with *four* different “how long?” statements.<sup>93</sup> Notice how he demands deliverance: “Answer me, O Lord my God...lest I sleep the sleep of death.”<sup>94</sup> But then notice how he **pivots** to a series of trust statements. “*But*,” he says, “I have trusted in your steadfast love.”<sup>95</sup> He does it again in verses 12-14: “I have been forgotten like one who is dead, like a broken vessel...*but* I trust in you, O Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’”<sup>96</sup> David uses this same technique elsewhere in the Psalms. “For my enemies say, ‘God has forsaken him; pursue and seize him, for there is none to deliver him...*but* I will hope continually and will praise you yet more and more.”<sup>97</sup> “Oh God, insolent men have risen up against me” David says, “*but* you, O Lord, are a God of mercy and grace, slow to anger and abounding in love.”<sup>98</sup>

And yet...this is what is peculiar about **Psalm 88**, and what distinguishes it from virtually every other Lament Psalm: the Psalmist’s prayers are *never* answered. Even when he voices an urgent need, expresses deep crisis, and gives a passionate address to YHWH, the prayer is unanswered. YHWH never speaks. The Psalmist receives no signal of engagement or concern. *Only silence*. And so, the Psalmist concludes: “The darkness is my closest friend.”<sup>99</sup>

But that isn’t the end of the story, though it looks that way. Take a look for a moment at the name of the author: Heman the Ezrahite. We know from the Old Testament<sup>100</sup> that Heman was a leader of musicians and poets that produced several of the Psalms in our Bible today. That means, despite this dark Psalm, and the apparent silence of God, Heman--like so many other God followers before and after him--refused to allow his grief to silence his praises to God and instead used his grief to shape his work. Today, that work has been used to encourage God’s people for 2,500 years. Do you think Heman could have ever imagined that? Do you think

---

<sup>92</sup> I want to be clear here--I am not saying that these songs justify the pain, or make it worthwhile.

<sup>93</sup> Psalm 13:1-2.

<sup>94</sup> Psalm 13:3-4.

<sup>95</sup> Psalm 13:4.

<sup>96</sup> Psalm 13:12, 14.

<sup>97</sup> Psalm 71:10-11, 14.

<sup>98</sup> Psalm 86:14-15.

<sup>99</sup> Psalm 88:18.

<sup>100</sup> 1 Chronicles 6:33-39.

Spafford could have when he wrote “It Is Well With My Soul”? Do you think our African brothers and sisters suffering in slavery could have ever known the legacy their songs and spirituals would leave behind? And yet, because they persevered through the darkness, because they trusted in God, the light shone through, and darkness did not overcome them!<sup>101</sup>

As Christians, we will encounter the silence of God. And when we ponder that divine silence, we must remember the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. There is no doubt, as the gospel narrative shows us, that on that day of YHWH’s deepest need and abandonment--a need expressed by Jesus quoting a Lament Psalm, Psalm 22--YHWH does not answer Jesus’ cries. He is silent and absent.<sup>102</sup> “Abba, father,” Jesus laments, “why have you forsaken me?”<sup>103</sup> His death occurs in the context of *divine abandonment*, a ripping and tearing at the heart of the Trinity, a moment of self-emptying that has been understood by the church for thousands of years as the *quintessential moment of confrontation between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Death*. And there, in that critical moment, the silence of God evoked from Jesus what it can also draw from us--a powerful blend of patient waiting and impatient demand, and an act of honesty and trust that defies the Powers tempting us to deny our good God.<sup>104</sup>

When we choose to trust, ***we choose to believe what we know to be true, even though the facts and experience of suffering all around us call that belief into question.*** We choose to remember the testimonies of God’s handiwork in our lives. We revisit all of the ebenezers we built as monuments to God’s faithfulness in our lives. Lament helps us do all of this--it keeps us turning toward trust. It gives us language to walk through the wilderness and emerge from the Valley of the Shadow of Death. And when we do that, when we embrace our father in moments of despair, we defy the Enemy and the powers that wage war against him.

Some days, our statements of trust will sound like confident declarations! Other times, we may need to just crack open our Bibles and force ourselves to rehearse basic truths about God, the ones we find at the end of many Lament Psalms. But no matter what we do, we must not stop making the pivot we see here in the Lament Psalms, the pivot we see in Jesus’ own abandonment. We must continue to lean in and trust. This is how we learn to live between a hard life and God’s promises, how we learn to sing and worship when suffering comes our way.

Having learned this fourth step in the journey of lament, please consider offering your own declaration of trust. As before, I will offer mine here, and you are welcome to join me:

*God, Father, King, we are your people, the sheep of your pasture. We are desperately in need of you, as is this world. And yet, we are confident. Confident that the good work you have begun in us you will one day complete. Confident that you will conform us into the image of your Son. Confident that you can make it impossible for the world to deny the truth of your Kingdom. Be our salt and light, Lord--purifying us, revealing the truth, and dispelling the darkness--so that we too might be*

---

<sup>101</sup> John 1:5, 2 Corinthians 4:6.

<sup>102</sup> Mark 15:34.

<sup>103</sup> Matthew 27:46.

<sup>104</sup> Job 1:8-12.



*your reconciled people, marked by peace and justice, fueled by hope in a resurrected Savior, and known for our love and unity. May this be true, even as you are true. We trust you to do it. Amen.*

### **III. RE-TELL: Proclaiming God's Kingdom through Lament**

Family, through this series, I have become convinced that Christian lament is powerful, unnerving, and essential to our faith walk. It is how we can begin to reckon with the brokenness not only in our world, but in our communities and in ourselves. It is the critical first step before rushing to take any action. It awakens us to the cosmic conflict all around us and invites us to confront the Enemy with the peace of Christ. It deepens our intimacy with the Father. And it is how we till the soil of our souls, day after day, weeding the gardens of our lives, making room for the life-giving fruit of the Holy Spirit.

My prayer is that these four steps--Persistent Prayer, Courageous Complaints, Bold Demands, and Declarations of Trust--will be helpful, practical guides for you as you cultivate your own lament practices. We certainly have much to lament, both within ourselves and our community.

But Lament is not the destination, family. It is the beginning of deep self-reflection that, in many cases, will produce within us an impulse to confess and repent. We know that both of these things--confession and repentance--are genuinely *good* things, gifts from God that breathe life into our dry and weary souls. We see this in Joanne's testimony today; look at how much good came from her family's eagerness to engage in lament, confession, and repentance!

By engaging in lament--outlined in the way we have processed together--I believe we can begin to reckon with our griefs shoulder-to-shoulder with a Heavenly Father. We can allow the dry wilderness to cultivate worship and thirst for the Living Water.<sup>105</sup> We can see Jesus suffering alongside us.<sup>106</sup> But we can do more than that--we can begin to unearth and confront the hidden idols that have cluttered our souls.<sup>107</sup> Our minds and hearts can begin to be tuned, like an instrument, to the harsh clangs of sin and brokenness within and around us. Our laments can soften our hearts and set us in motion away from our defensive reflexes and towards confession and repentance. And by emptying ourselves in this way, by humbling ourselves, we can begin to proclaim the Kingdom of God to dry bones, and then watch as life springs up.<sup>108</sup>

Lament is a critical first step to experience these blessings. And given all the brokenness in the world, and in ourselves, we have much to lament, much to confess, and much to repent of and turn away from. Look within yourself, look around, look beyond this world and see the cosmic forces eager to lead us astray. Be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry.<sup>109</sup> And as you do that, I pray you will be led by your laments to the arms of our Savior and King, the

---

<sup>105</sup> Jeremiah 2:13, John 4:10.

<sup>106</sup> Romans 8:35.

<sup>107</sup> Isaiah 44:9-20.

<sup>108</sup> Ezekiel 37:1-14.

<sup>109</sup> James 1:19.

Man of Sorrows. I pray that you'll join me on this journey so that we can continue to cultivate this oft-forgotten spiritual discipline together.

Please pray with me:

*Lord, Father, we know that you are unchanging, and that your love for us is everlasting. Your past faithfulness anticipates your future restoration, when you will wipe away every tear from our eyes, and when death shall be no more. Teach us, O God, how to lament until then. Awaken us to the spiritual conflict that surrounds us, and equip us to engage it with peace. Soften our hearts to the pain of others, the pain we cause, and the pain you suffered and suffer still on our behalf. Lead us to humility, to weeping, to complaints, and to hope like a shepherd leads his flock to refreshing streams. Come, with power, and renew our spirits. Keep us moving forward in your work, step by step. See your church unified. Confront our idolatries. Lead us in love. Amen.*



# PSALMS

*THE SOUNDTRACK OF A GODLY LIFE*





**YOU ARE INVITED!**

**MACC Development &  
PEACE AND JUSTICE IN DETROIT**

# **48214 Street Party for JUSTICE**

**CELEBRATING THE LIFE of our Neighbors  
Cornbread & Phone Guy, lets not forgot our Kings!**



**1** O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

**2** Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cries!

**18** You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;  
my companions have become darkness



- I. **RE-WIND:** The "WHAT" and "WHY" of Lament
- II. **RE-LEARN:** The "HOW" of Lament in the Psalms
- III. **RE-TELL:** Proclaiming God's Kingdom through Lament



**1** O LORD, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.

**2** Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cries!

**18** You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;  
my companions have become darkness





- I. **RE-WIND:** The “**WHAT**” and “**WHY**” of Lament
- II. **RE-LEARN:** The “**HOW**” of Lament in the Psalms
- III. **RE-TELL:** Proclaiming God’s Kingdom through Lament





GENESIS



REVELATION

 PSALMS

GENESIS

REVELATION

David

The Psalms

The Prophets

 PSALMS

GENESIS

REVELATION

David

The Psalms

The Prophets

The Father

The Holy Spirit

Jesus Christ

 PSALMS

"Lament is a prayerful expression of anguish and hope that softens our callous hearts and steadies our shaken souls.

It is a stubborn insistence that things cannot remain this way, a holy anger that is put to speech, and a grief that produces a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

It is to our pain what thanksgiving is to our joy."



- I. **RE-WIND:** The "WHAT" and "WHY" of Lament
- II. **RE-LEARN:** The "HOW" of Lament in the Psalms
- III. **RE-TELL:** Proclaiming God's Kingdom through Lament













Recalibrate our **LAMENTS** + Recalibrate our **HEARTS**



 **PSALMS**





- I. RE-WIND: The "WHAT" and "WHY" of Lament
- II. RE-LEARN: The "HOW" of Lament in the Psalms
- III. RE-TELL: Proclaiming God's Kingdom through Lament



- 1 O Lord, God of my salvation,  
I cry out day and night before you.
- 2 Let my prayer come before you;  
incline your ear to my cry!
- 3 For my soul is full of troubles,  
and my life draws near to Sheol.
- 4 I am counted among those who go down to the pit;  
I am a man who has no strength,



**5** like one set loose among the dead,  
like the slain that lie in the grave,  
like those whom you remember no more,  
for they are cut off from your hand.

**6** You have put me in the depths of the pit,  
in the regions dark and deep.

**7** Your wrath lies heavy upon me,  
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah



**8** You have caused my companions to shun me;  
you have made me a horror to them.

I am shut in so that I cannot escape;

**9** my eye grows dim through sorrow.

Every day I call upon you, O Lord;

I spread out my hands to you.

**10** Do you work wonders for the dead?

Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah

**11** Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,  
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?



**12** Are your wonders known in the darkness,  
or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

**13** But I, O Lord, cry to you;  
in the morning my prayer comes before you.

**14** O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?  
Why do you hide your face from me?

**15** Afflicted and close to death from my youth up,  
I suffer your terrors; I am helpless.

**16** Your wrath has swept over me;  
your dreadful assaults destroy me.





**17** They surround me like a flood all day long;  
they close in on me together.

**18** You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me;  
my companions have become darkness

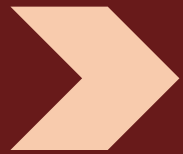




# A PATTERN FOR LAMENT



Persistent  
Prayer



Courageous  
Complaints



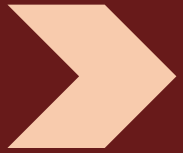
Bold  
Demands



Declarations  
of Trust



Persistent  
Prayer



Courageous  
Complaints



Bold  
Demands



Declarations  
of Trust



## PSALM 88

"When I **cry out** in your presence, let my **prayer** come before you; incline your ear to my **cry**."

"Every day I **call** on you!"

But I, O Lord, **cry** to you; in the morning my **prayer** comes before you..."

## PSALM 77

"I **cry aloud** to God, and he will hear me."

"...in the night, **my hand is stretched out** without wearying, my soul refuses to be comforted."

"When I remember God, I **moan**; when I meditate, my spirit faints."













LET US LAMENT TOGETHER:  
Persistent Prayer



# A PATTERN FOR LAMENT



Persistent  
Prayer



**Courageous  
Complaints**



Bold  
Demands

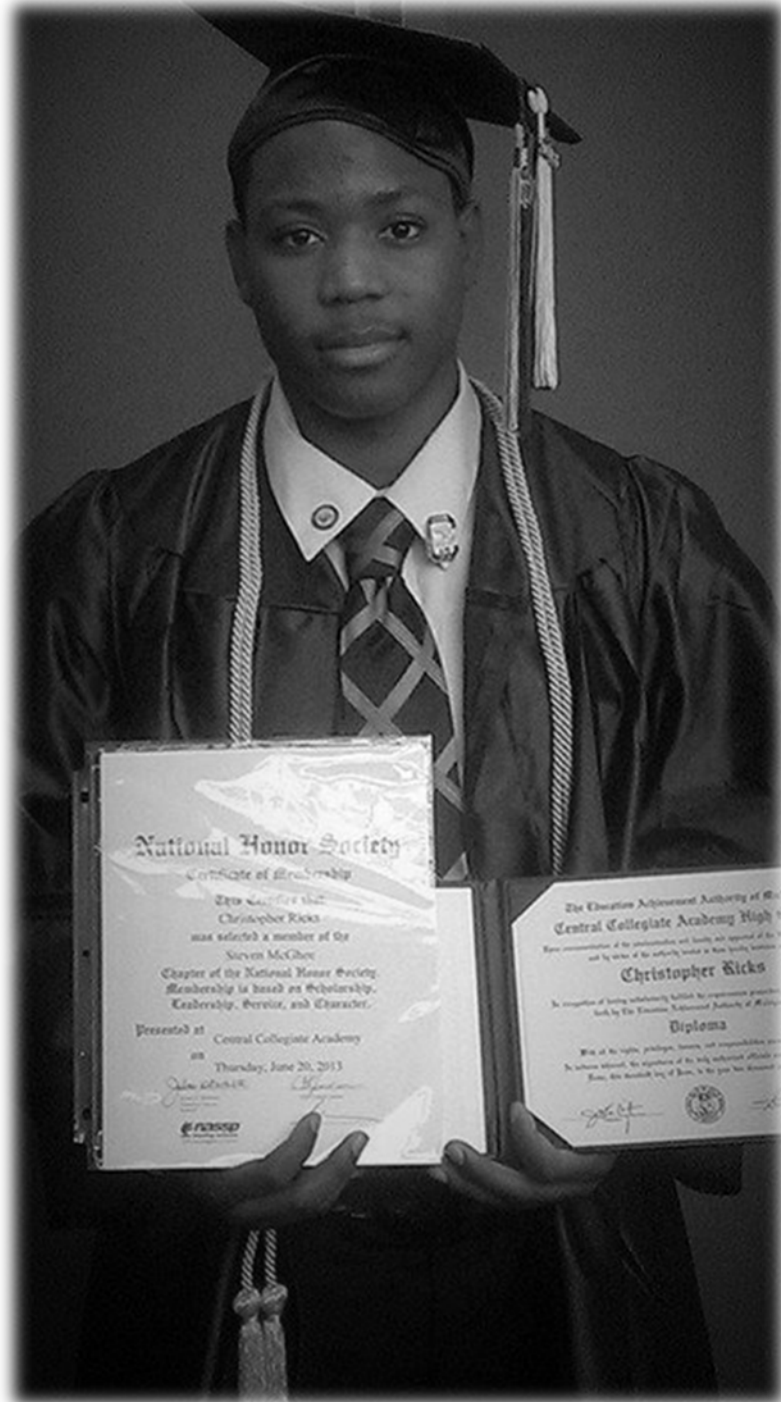


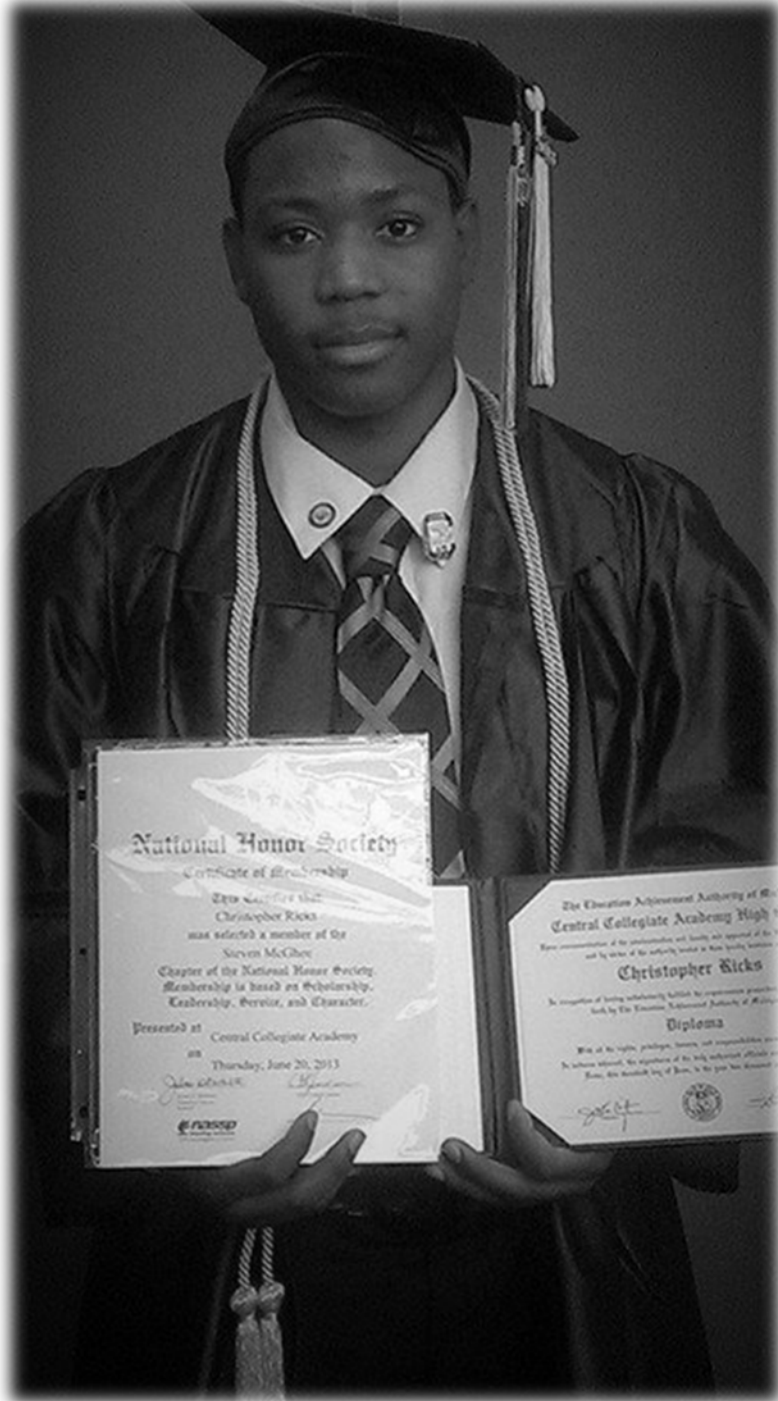
Declarations  
of Trust











Do you work wonders for the dead?  
Do the departed rise up to praise you?



## WHY complaints

"My God, why have you forsaken me?" demands in Psalm 22. "Awaken! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?" "O Lord", the speaker weeps in Psalm 80, "why do you cast my soul away?"

## HOW complaints

"How Long, O Lord?" demands the speaker in Psalm 13. "Will you forget me forever?" "O Lord, how long shall the wicked exult?"



## PSALM 88

"Do you work wonders for the dead?"

"Are your wonders known in the darkness?"

"You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them."

"O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?"

## PSALM 10

"Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

"In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek [the Lord]...his ways prosper at all times."

"The helpless are crushed and sink down..."





Date \_\_\_\_\_

PAY TO THE ORDER OF \_\_\_\_\_ \$

\_\_\_\_\_ DOLLARS

FOR \_\_\_\_\_

LET US LAMENT TOGETHER:  
Courageous Complaints



# A PATTERN FOR LAMENT



Persistent  
Prayer



Courageous  
Complaints



**Bold  
Demands**



Declarations  
of Trust



## PSALM 88

"Let my prayer come before you!"

"Incline your ear and hear my cry!"

"But I, O Lord, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you....why do you hide your face from me?"

## PSALM 22

"Be not far from me, for my trouble is near."

"Deliver my soul from the sword...save me from the mouth of the lion."



# 9 Examples of **BOLD DEMANDS** from the **LAMENT PSALMS**

Rise up!

Deliver Us!

Remember!





# 9 Examples of **BOLD DEMANDS** from the **LAMENT PSALMS**

Rise up!

Have mercy on us!

Deliver Us!

Listen to me!

Remember!

Teach me!



# 9 Examples of **BOLD DEMANDS** from the **LAMENT PSALMS**

**"Rise up!"**

**"Have mercy on us!"**

**"Vindicate me!"**

**"Deliver Us!"**

**"Listen to me!"**

**"Let justice be done!"**

**"Remember!"**

**"Teach me!"**

**"Restore us!"**



LET US LAMENT TOGETHER:

Bold Demands



# A PATTERN FOR LAMENT



Persistent  
Prayer



Courageous  
Complaints



Bold  
Demands



**Declarations  
of Trust**









# Balm in Gilead

Lever or Pedal Harp with optional 'cello

Dedicated to "Mother Emmanuel" AME Church, Charleston, SC

African-American Spiritual  
arranged by Rhett Barnwell

The first system of musical notation consists of two staves. The upper staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 2/4. It begins with a series of eighth-note chords: F#4-A4-C5, G4-A4-B4, A4-B4-C5, and B4-A4-G4. The lower staff is in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature, starting with a whole note chord of F#3-A3-C4, followed by a series of eighth notes: G3, A3, B3, C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4.

The second system is labeled '(Refrain)' and begins with a measure number '6'. It features a 4/4 time signature. The upper staff starts with a whole note chord of F#4-A4-C5, followed by a half note chord of G4-A4-B4, and then a series of quarter notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The lower staff begins with a half note chord of F#3-A3-C4, followed by a half note chord of G3-A3-B3, and then a series of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4.

The third system begins with a measure number '11'. It features a 4/4 time signature. The upper staff starts with a whole note chord of F#4-A4-C5, followed by a half note chord of G4-A4-B4, and then a series of quarter notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The lower staff begins with a half note chord of F#3-A3-C4, followed by a half note chord of G3-A3-B3, and then a series of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4.

The fourth system is labeled '(Verse 1 & 2)' and begins with a measure number '16'. It features a 4/4 time signature. The upper staff starts with a whole note chord of F#4-A4-C5, followed by a half note chord of G4-A4-B4, and then a series of quarter notes: C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4. The lower staff begins with a half note chord of F#3-A3-C4, followed by a half note chord of G3-A3-B3, and then a series of quarter notes: C4, D4, E4, F#4, G4, A4, B4, C5, B4, A4, G4, F#4, E4, D4, C4.

*(Refrain)* There is a balm in Gilead, to make the wounded whole; there is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.

*(Verse 1)* Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain, but then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

*(Verse 2)* If you cannot sing like angels, and cannot preach like Paul; you can tell the love of Jesus, and say he died for all.

## PSALM 88

## PSALM 13

"Answer me O Lord my God...lest I sleep of death. *But*, I have trusted in your steadfast love."

"I have been forgotten like one who is dead, like a broken vessel...but I trust in you, O Lord. I say, 'You are my God.'"



## Psalm 88

A Song x Psalm for the sons of Korah, to the chief Musician upon  
Mahalath Leannoth, Maschil of Heman the Ezrahite.



LORD God of  
my salvation, I have  
cried day *and* night  
before thee: 2 Let  
my prayer come before thee: incline  
thine ear unto my cry; 3 For my  
soul is full of troubles: and my life  
draweth nigh unto the grave.  
4 I am counted with them that go  
down into the pit:  
I am as a man *that hath* no  
strength: 5 Free among the dead,  
like the slain that lie in the grave,  
whom thou rememberest no more:  
and they are cut off from thy hand.

6 Thou hast laid me in the lowest  
pit, in darkness, in the deeps. 7 Thy  
wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou  
hast afflicted *me* with all thy waves.  
Selah. 8 Thou hast put away mine  
acquaintance far from me; thou hast  
made me an abomination unto  
them: I *am* shut up, and I cannot  
come forth. 9 Mine eye mourneth  
by reason of affliction: LORD, I  
have called daily upon thee, I have  
stretched out my hands unto thee. 10  
Wilt thou shew wonders to the  
dead? shall the dead arise and praise  
thee? Selah.

11 Shall thy loving kindness be  
declared in the grave? *or* thy faithful-  
ness in destruction? 12 Shall thy  
wonders be known in the dark? and  
thy righteousness in the land of  
forgetfulness? 13 But unto thee have  
I cried, O LORD; and in the  
morning shall my prayer prevent  
thee.

14 LORD, why castest thou off my  
soul? *why* hidest thou thy face from  
me? 15 I *am* afflicted and ready to  
die from *my* youth up: *while* I suffer  
thy terrors I am distracted. 16 Thy  
fierce wrath goeth over me; thy

terrors have  
came round  
water; they  
together.

18 Lover and  
from me, a  
into darkness

Bass

Cello

Guit

Percuss

Vocals





LET US LAMENT TOGETHER:  
Declarations of Trust





- I. RE-WIND: The "WHAT" and "WHY" of Lament
- II. RE-LEARN: The "HOW" of Lament in the Psalms
- III. RE-TELL: Proclaiming God's Kingdom through Lament



LAMENT ➤ CONFESSION ➤ *REPENTANCE*

 *PSALMS*





# PSALMS

*THE SOUNDTRACK OF A GODLY LIFE*

