

WRITING A PRAYER OF LAMENT

Ref. Paul Miller, A Praying Life and Tremper Longman, How to Read the Psalms

“Both the child and the cynic walk through the valley of the shadow of death. The cynic focuses on the darkness; **the child focuses on the Shepherd.**” (Paul Miller, A Praying Life)

A lament is a specific type of prayer in the midst of sorrow, longing, and the feeling that things aren't as they are supposed to be. We are always dependent on God. We cry out to God in lament when we feel we have nowhere else to turn. It's a child-like prayer that is aware of the darkness but also focused on Jesus, our Good Shepherd.

Lament neither gives up on hope nor does it ignore reality. It recognizes where we are and where we need to be and cries out for God to narrow that gap.

In Romans 4:18, Paul uses an unusual phrase to describe Abraham's lament: “In hope he believed against hope.” Abraham stakes his life on hope, but never takes his eyes off reality. That's faith expressed through lament.

Lament expresses faith in God and expects God to act. It recognizes God rightly gets the glory if the situation changes. Refusing to lament attempts to short-circuit God and attempts to limit his ability to act. It allows you to claim credit if the situation ever changes.

Writing A Lament (Adults)

The Psalmists typically follow a basic pattern when they write their laments.

Direct Address | Address God (usually Yahweh) directly, expressing dependence on him. You have nowhere else to turn; as one scholar wrote, to turn anywhere else is blasphemous idolatry.

Lament / Cry for Help | Express your specific complaint to God.

Confession of Sin / Assertion of Innocence | Sometimes you suffer because of something you've done. Other times you suffer because of something done to you. And other times it's a combination of both. Confessing your sin is a sign of humility; taking responsibility for another's sin is refusal to admit hurt and can be a sign of arrogance.

Imprecation | Imprecation leaves your desires for justice, vengeance, and vindication with God, asking him to act. This side of the cross, imprecation should include a longing for repentance, meaning the punishment for the sin falls fully on the shoulders of Christ. It can also include a longing for those in authority (often the government) to execute justice.

Confidence in God's Response | The expression of confidence in God often starts with, "But you..." This is a theologically full statement, often including applicable attributes of God.

Praise | Most laments end with a statement of praise to God.

Writing A Lament (Children)

Dear God,

You are the great king over everything and you are my father.

I need your help because, _____.

When I think about this, I feel _____.

Here is how I want you to help _____.

I can't fix my problem, but you can! You are the most powerful one in the whole universe. So please help me. Please fix this. Please make it right.

Thank you for listening to my prayer, my father, almighty God.

Amen.