

Jacob's Well



Lesson Title: Themes in the Psalms—Psalms of Lament



Key Concept: The Psalms provide an honest reflection of our human nature and the nature of God. Psalms of lament exemplify a healthy and welcomed form of communicating our distress to God.



Scriptures:

“O God my rock,” I cry, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief, oppressed by my enemies?” Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, “Where is this God of yours?”

(Psalm 42:9–10 *New Living Translation*)

“Arise, O Lord! Rescue me, my God! Slap all my enemies in the face! Shatter the teeth of the wicked!”

(Psalm 3:7 *New Living Translation*)

Context Scriptures: The 65 Psalms of Lament, Jeremiah, Lamentations



Lesson Thoughts:

In the church, we have many sayings that represent principles we feel are important. One of these sayings is “I won’t complain.” The point of this catchphrase is that there is no need to complain, or that we shouldn’t. Despite the things we suffer in this life, God is always good, and we are always blessed. To complain means that we have lost sight of these facts. However, in the Scriptures, complaining looks a lot like the acceptable and healthy practice of expressing our distress to our God, which is called lamenting.

In the book of Psalms, songs or prayers of lament offered on behalf of the individual or the community are prevalent, almost half (65 of 150) of the entire book! Not only are psalms of lament numerous, but they often follow a pattern—a cry, the one we cry to, a complaint, and a request for help. “Now restore us again, O God of our salvation. Put aside your anger against us once more. Will

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you be angry with us always? Will you prolong your wrath to all generations? Won't you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation" (Psalm 85:4–7). These laments are cries of emotional distress, fear of abandonment, shame, vulnerability to the wicked, and confusion about God's methods and timing. "O God my rock, I cry, 'Why have you forgotten me? Why must I wander around in grief, oppressed by my enemies?' Their taunts break my bones. They scoff, 'Where is this God of yours?'" (Psalm 42:9–10). In these laments, God is called on to rescue, comfort, bring clarity and peace, crush enemies, and uphold the honor of his people. "Arise, O Lord! Rescue me, my God! Slap all my enemies in the face! Shatter the teeth of the wicked!" (Psalm 3:7).

Be encouraged! These wailings, expressions of grief, and chants of distress are not only a natural outpouring of our human emotions but a healthy and welcomed interaction with our God, who cares about all that we go through. In fact, we are instructed to give all our worries and cares to God, because he cares about us (1 Peter 5:7). Bottled emotions (which can be an act of denial) wreak havoc on us, our human relationships, and our relationships with God. God requires honesty. When we are hurting, we should cry out to him. When we are confused, we should tell him so. Whatever we face, we should take it to God. Who better to express all that we struggle with than the one who created us, the one who understands us, the only one who can truly help us?

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1) Do you think Christians should lament or complain? Why or why not?
- 2) Are there wrong ways to express our distress? If so, what are some and why are they wrong?
- 3) David wrote the most psalms, and his cries for help often included calls for vengeance. How do you feel about asking God to take revenge? How do you think God feels about it?
- 4) Should we stay in a funk or should lament lead us somewhere else? Where should lament lead us? What happens when we stay in a funk?

Next Lesson: Psalms of Repentance

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- 1) Take some time and read the psalms that express lament, the book of Jeremiah, and the book of Lamentations. Consider who was doing the lamenting, why they were lamenting, and what the benefit of their lamenting was (or may have been).

Individual psalms of lament include:

3, 4, 5, 7, 9–10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12–17, 41, 42–43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142.

Group psalms of lament include:

12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129.

- 2) Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet, because his communication with God was full of sorrow and distress. Was he in the will of God? After reading the book of Jeremiah, answer that question.
- 3) Think about your feelings and the things that cause you distress. Do you express them? How do you express them? Who do you express them to? How does your way of expressing distress help you? How does your way of expressing distress harm you or others?
- 4) The next time you are distressed, write your own lament using the form generally used in the psalms (a cry, the one you cry to, the complaint, and a request for help). If that's too complicated, just direct your complaint to God and get it out in whatever way it comes.

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Notes and Reflections, cont.