

# **ANSWER ME, GOD**

*Crying out in Lament  
to a God who Hears and Acts*

a Bible study for small groups

by Sierra S. Neiman  
CHTH 573 (Summative Project)

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# Preface

When I tell people that I am deeply interested in the theology and praxis of lament, I receive one of two responses. Either people stare at me blankly, not sure what this word *lament* actually means, though they think it sounds like something international diplomats do. Or they recoil in shock, as if I've just pledged to eat nothing but pickled beets for the rest of my life.

Before beginning to write the lesson material that fills these pages, I jotted down several reasons I believe in lament. These are the beliefs that propel me toward this interest.

I believe in lament because...

- ◇ I believe in honest, authentic relationships.
- ◇ I believe God desires honest, authentic relationship with creation.
- ◇ I believe in justice.
- ◇ I believe in seeing all of humanity find and use its voice constructively.
- ◇ I believe in the possibility of positive transformation/change.
- ◇ I believe in a God who hears.
- ◇ I believe in a God who loves.

- ◇ I believe in a God who acts.
- ◇ I believe in deep joy.
- ◇ I believe in never giving up on God.

The study of lament also beautifully combines my key areas of interest: theology, biblical studies, and spiritual formation.

If one or more of these beliefs resonates with you, or if you are curious to see how these three fields of study can join together informing real-life relationship with God, I hope you will join me on this journey into better understanding lament.

I also hope you will join me if you are ready to give up on God. Perhaps life has been cruel to you and you can only conclude that God is either completely detached from you or completely non-existent. If this is your story, what do you have to lose in finding permission in these pages to take up protest with the God you once thought you knew?

This project is the culmination of several lament-related research and reflection projects—as well as much thinking on the topic—I have engaged in during my nearly five years of seminary. I poured my research into papers, including “Matthew 15:21-28: Dogged Pursuit of Dynamic Divine-Human Relationship,” “Pinned in an Album of Affliction: Simone Weil’s Theology of *Malheur*,” and “How Can all be Well? Julian of Norwich Illuminates a Paradoxical Inseparability of Suffering and Love.” I felt that my work would eventually come together in my own academic thesis—one hundred or so footnote-heavy pages in which I would delve deep into the intricacies of a very narrow facet of lament. But then I thought about the time when I shared reflections on lament with a house-church community as we huddled around my dinner table, munching on bread and sipping wine. Or the time I presented a workshop on lament to a group of college students at their university’s fall retreat; by a crackling fire in a lodge living room we put pen to paper and let our

hearts flow straight to God's, while tears formed in some students' eyes. My hunger for more moments like those made me realize I need to do my part in pulling lament out of the lofty heights of academia and help it live and breathe again in communities of real people, just like lament did many years ago when that biblical tradition began.

In addition to studying lament academically, I endeavor to practice it in my own life. In the face of my own heartaches and heartbreaks, confusion, despair, anguish, and anger, I have cried countless tears and pled my cases with God. I have also received the gift of friends who join me in this fray, who pick up my cries and bring them before God themselves, and who sit and listen with me for God's response. And I become this kind of lament partner for other people, as they face suffering of their own; sometimes I feel I am a magnet for the depressed and downtrodden, so I desire to learn how to serve them well and direct their hearts to God.

Yet despite my academic studies, my own experience, and my participation in others' lament, I readily acknowledge that I have only felt and seen a slim slice of all that it means to suffer, to try to look up from the entangling grip of despair and seek out God. Women and men in other corners of our global community face forms of suffering I cannot fathom. Even those closer to me geographically—the people in line in front of me at the coffee shop or the gas pump, my next-door neighbors, the people in my church community—face struggles and horrors I cannot pretend to grasp.

Because my own knowledge, experience, and perspective are limited, I piece together these pages as a study that invites your participation. Only when the cries of our hearts intermingle will we be truly “in this together,” supporting and learning from each other as we seek to better live in relationship with our mysterious God.





# Introduction

The people of the time and place we call the “ancient Near East”—the culture from which the text of the Bible and Christianity itself emerged—believed in shaking a fist at God when life was bleak. Their first response to pain, suffering, despair was not to try to shrug it off and convince themselves that what they were facing was somehow “for the best.” Their first response was to break down. In front of God. To let their weary and crushed hearts have free rein to shout at God, to tell God that this is not right.

Consider the words of Psalm 88:

- <sup>1</sup>O Lord, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
- <sup>2</sup>let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry.
- <sup>3</sup>For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol.
- <sup>4</sup>I am counted among those who go down to the Pit; I am like those who have no help,
- <sup>5</sup>like those forsaken 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.
- <sup>6</sup>You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep.

- <sup>7</sup>Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me  
with all your waves.
- <sup>8</sup>You have caused my companions to shun me; you have  
made me a thing of horror to them. I am shut in so that  
I cannot escape;
- <sup>9</sup>my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call on you,  
O Lord; I spread out my hands to you.
- <sup>10</sup>Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the shades rise up  
to praise you?
- <sup>11</sup>Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faith-  
fulness in Abaddon?
- <sup>12</sup>Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving  
help in the land of forgetfulness?
- <sup>13</sup>But I, O Lord, cry out to you; in the morning my prayer  
comes before you.
- <sup>14</sup>O Lord, why do you cast me off? Why do you hide your  
face from me?
- <sup>15</sup>Wretched and close to death from my youth up, I suffer  
your terrors; I am desperate.
- <sup>16</sup>Your wrath has swept over me; your dread assaults destroy  
me.
- <sup>17</sup>They surround me like a flood all day long; from all sides  
they close in on me.
- <sup>18</sup>You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my  
companions are in darkness.

How does the thought of approaching God like that make you feel? What would it be like to get into the habit of spilling our guts to God instead of trying to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and paste a smile on our face? What if our first response to the pain and suffering of others became not looking for a positive spin on the situation, but instead joining with those people in crying out to God that their situation is not right?

This study is an invitation to better understand the biblical tradition of lament. As we look at the theme of lament in the Bible, we will seek to become more aware of instances of lament in Scripture, and to better understand what the peoples of the ancient Near East believed about God and their relationship with God. Those insights will help us better understand how these

people practiced lament, and what they believed the act of shaking a fist at God would actually accomplish. This study is also an invitation to pick up the biblical tradition of lament and boldly carry it into life today.

Throughout this journey you will have the opportunity to ask questions—of yourself, of the Bible, and of God. You will also have the opportunity to listen for the answers to these questions in your own personal reflection, and within the community of people with whom you are engaging in this study. In some studies that include reflection questions, the questions serve as a minor supplement to check one’s comprehension of the preceding text. This study is different in that the reflection and discussion questions elaborate on and clarify the lesson material, while also allowing suggestions for you to apply the material to your life. Try responding to the questions at the end of each lesson on your own, and then share your responses with the people in your group. Shared reflection can enhance everyone’s learning, increase our capacity for authenticity and honesty, and provide us with a time to discern God’s response together.

You will see that the full text of the Bible passage that corresponds with each lesson is included inside this booklet, for your convenience. Read through the full passage, even if the passage is familiar to you. For more in-depth study, look up and read the passage in other Bible translations. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical text in this study is from the New Revised Standard Version.

Before delving deeper into lament, take a moment to write down what questions, hopes, and fears you have as you approach this study. Throughout this study, if you feel an inability to incorporate lament into your own spiritual journey, or aversion to doing so, express these feelings to God and to your group, and study Appendix A: Blocks to Lament to see if you can identify what is happening inside of you.

*God of all mystery, God who our mortal minds can never fully know, show us a bit more of who you are. Let us not slip into seeing you the way we want to see you or stay in the place of seeing you as we always have, but let us see you in truth, as you are. We approach you boldly, but with awe. You created us with the capacity for relationship with you, and we long to better understand how to be good stewards of that amazing capacity. Open our eyes so that we can see you; open our ears so that we can hear you; open our hearts and minds so that we can know you.*

*Amen.*

## Lesson 1

# For Crying Out Loud

## *Pleading with God for Justice*

**Lesson Text:** Exodus 2:23-25 (see Exodus 1—2 for more context); Exodus 3:7-10

### **Exodus 2:23-25**

<sup>23</sup> After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God. <sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. <sup>25</sup> God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

Think about the following situations. How does justice stand a chance of breaking through in each instance?

- ◇ A young child is bullied on the school playground
- ◇ A group of children are forced to work in a factory rather than go to school
- ◇ An employee is denied equitable pay or fair working conditions
- ◇ A group of people is denied access to necessary healthcare

- ◇ One partner in a marriage relationship is physically or emotionally abused by the other
- ◇ A village lacks clean drinking water
- ◇ A person's body is treated as another person's property
- ◇ A team member's opinion is not taken seriously because of her or his age, gender, or race

The first step in creating a way for justice to break through is someone—or a group of people—acknowledging that something about the situation is not right. Second, that person or group of people needs to decide that change can and must happen; the situation must not continue as it is. Third, that person or group of people needs to speak or act in a way that calls for change, calling out to a person or group who can work to bring about the change.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes this process is quick and easy. Other times this process is so slow that we wonder if we can see the approach of justice at all. But rarely does movement toward change happen when there is silence.

Exodus 2:23-25 provides a biblical picture of people crying out against unfair treatment, and voicing their cry directly to God. The Israelite people, who knew that God specially chose them as God's people, decided the oppression they faced as Egypt's slaves was not right. Believing that the situation should not continue as it was, they **groaned, cried out, cried for help.**

What happened next? The biblical account says that God **heard** their groaning; **remembered the covenant** with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; **looked** upon the Israelite people; and **took notice** of them.

In these three verses, we receive a story of active relationship between God's people and God. Instead of passively accepting their slavery, the Israelites exercised their God-given capacity

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to enter into active, dynamic relationship with the God who made them. The fact that God took the Israelites' cries seriously is obvious in reading the text that immediately follows. In Exodus 3 we read about God entering into conversation with Moses, calling out to him from the burning bush. Look particularly at Exodus 3:7-10:

<sup>7</sup>Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup> So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

This is lament. Lament is refusing to passively accept injustice—whether that injustice is a global concern or a personal concern—and instead acknowledging that the situation is not right. Lament is exercising our ability to enter into relationship with God by giving full voice to our hurt, our confusion, our despair when we cry out to God. Lament is believing that God is a God who hears, that God is a God who hates injustice, and that God has complete power to change the situation.<sup>2</sup>

### Reflect and Discuss

1. How do you feel about the idea that God was moved to action by the Israelites' cries for help? How do you feel about the idea that the Israelites endured oppression under the Egyptians until they cried out to God?
2. Where do you see injustice in the world today, in your community, or in your own life? How have you responded?

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3. Oftentimes people pray for peace when injustice seems to prevail. What are your thoughts about responding to injustice by asking God for peace?

4. As you have read and reflected, have you learned anything about lament that surprises you?



## Lesson 2

# Hey, Moses...Take a Sad Song and Make it Better

## Taking Part in Bringing about the Change We Seek

**Lesson Text:** Exodus 3—4:17

### Exodus 3—4:17

<sup>1</sup>Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. <sup>2</sup>There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. <sup>3</sup>Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” <sup>4</sup>When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>5</sup>Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup>He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup>Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, <sup>8</sup>and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>9</sup>The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. <sup>10</sup>So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

<sup>11</sup>But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" <sup>12</sup>He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain." <sup>13</sup>But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup>God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup>God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.

<sup>16</sup>Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup>I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.' <sup>18</sup>They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The Lord, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days' journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God.' <sup>19</sup>I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. <sup>20</sup>So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. <sup>21</sup>I will bring this people

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into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; <sup>22</sup>each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor's house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians."

<sup>1</sup>Then Moses answered, "But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, 'The Lord did not appear to you.'" <sup>2</sup>The Lord said to him, "What is that in your hand?" He said, "A staff."<sup>3</sup>And he said, "Throw it on the ground." So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. <sup>4</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, "Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail" —so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand— <sup>5</sup>so that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you." <sup>6</sup>Again, the Lord said to him, "Put your hand inside your cloak." He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous, as white as snow. <sup>7</sup>Then God said, "Put your hand back into your cloak" —so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body— <sup>8</sup>"If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. <sup>9</sup>If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground."

<sup>10</sup>But Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." <sup>11</sup>Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? <sup>12</sup>Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." <sup>13</sup>But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." <sup>14</sup>Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. <sup>15</sup>You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what

you shall do. <sup>16</sup>He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. <sup>17</sup>Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

We left the Exodus story with God hearing the cry of the Israelites, and promising to deliver them from their slavery and bring them to a land of their own, a land so rich with blessing the Bible refers to it as a “land flowing with milk and honey.”

What is important to note is that just as God was moved to bring about the Israelites’ deliverance because of their entering into dialogical relationship with God, so does God ask for the Israelites’ participation in bringing about the deliverance they asked for. Again, we see that God is engaging humanity’s capacity for relationship with God, a capacity that God designed.

The Israelites, then, were not able to casually drop a complaint in God’s complaint box and go to bed in their decked-out sleeping cabins on the night train that would lead them into the land flowing with milk and honey. Instead, God asked them to roll up their sleeves and act to bring about this change. And God chose Moses as the one who would lead the journey out of despair and into prosperity.

Exodus 3 and 4 relate an interchange between Moses and God. From the outset, we see that this is not a conversation between equals. God asserts authority by commanding Moses to remove his sandals before approaching the bush from which God speaks, because God’s presence makes the place holy. Yet even as the one who is perfectly holy, all powerful, and supreme over all creation, God invites Moses into conversation and asks for Moses’ active participation in God’s plan.

When God tells Moses that Moses is going to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses balks. Moses’ series of “what-if-this-happens?” questions seem to suggest Moses is looking for a

way out, perhaps hoping God will say, “You’re right, Moses! I never thought of that before! Let me just take care of this myself while you go back to shepherding your sheep.” But God persists in demanding Moses’ participation.

A new lesson in lament emerges here: After we have cried out to God, insisting that the situation is not right and that something needs to change, we need to listen for God’s response, which often comes in the form of an invitation for us to be active in bringing about the change we seek. In other words, we need to be prepared to partner with God in—to borrow a sentiment from the Beatles—taking our sad song and making it better.

### **Reflect and Discuss**

1. Have you ever felt God calling you to step up and take action to bring about the sort of change you longed to see? How did you respond? What happened?
2. If you have been crying out to God, telling God that something is not right, yet nothing seems to be changing, is it possible that God is waiting for you to roll up your sleeves and work on bringing about this change? Even if you feel like the “victim” in a situation, and even if it seems that all change must come from a person or situation outside your control, reflect on this in prayer, opening yourself to the possibility that God might be waiting for your partnership. Also seek insight from the members of your spiritual community, as they might be able to see an invitation from God that you are not able to see.



## Lesson 3

# Why?!

## *Suffering for What Will Not Change*

**Lesson Text:** Job 1:1-5, 13-22; 5:17-27; 6:4; 7:13-20; 42:1-6, 10-17

### **Job 1:1-5, 13-22**

<sup>1</sup>There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. <sup>2</sup>There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. <sup>3</sup>He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.

<sup>4</sup>His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. <sup>5</sup>And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did....

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<sup>13</sup>One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, <sup>14</sup>a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, <sup>15</sup>and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>16</sup>While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>17</sup>While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." <sup>18</sup>While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, <sup>19</sup>and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you."

<sup>20</sup>Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. <sup>21</sup>He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." <sup>22</sup>In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong-doing.

Think about the following personal situations, some of which might be situations you have experienced yourself. How do you relate to God in these times?

- ◇ A close friend betrays you
- ◇ Someone you love romantically does not return your affection
- ◇ Your child is killed in an accident
- ◇ You are laid off from your dream job
- ◇ An esteemed mentor or colleague commits suicide
- ◇ Your spouse is diagnosed with terminal cancer

These situations are in some ways quite different from the situations of oppression we looked at in lesson 1, because in



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these situations, the loss or damage feels much more personal and is often permanent. The situations are similar to the situations of oppression, however, in that we can and should still respond by crying out to God that what we are facing is not right. In these instances, our cry is in demand of a response from God that will pull us out of our state of “disorientation” and move us toward “reorientation.”<sup>3</sup>

The biblical story of Job provides a picture of lament in the face of irreparable loss. Job lost his livestock, his servants, his health, his children. The Bible tells us that when all of this happened, Job sat down in the ashes. Ashes symbolize grief, despair, mourning. Job sat in those ashes—he sat in his grief—and his despair was so full that when his friends arrived, they did not even recognize him, because he looked different physically.

The Bible says that Job’s friends sat down in the ashes with Job. For seven days, all were silent, because the tragedy was so overwhelming that no one had even a single word to say. Then after this time of sitting in speechless despair, Job began to lament out loud. He asked God, why, if all of this was going to happen, was he even born? Job doesn’t hold back. He says “the arrows of the Almighty are in me; my spirit drinks their poison” (6:4).

Have you ever felt like that? Have you ever felt like you were being poisoned by God? And if you have, did you feel like you could tell God that?

Take a look at this portion of Job 7:

<sup>13</sup>When I say, ‘My bed will comfort me, my couch will ease my complaint,’ <sup>14</sup>then you [God] scare me with dreams and terrify me with visions, <sup>15</sup>so that I would choose strangling and death rather than this body. <sup>16</sup>I loathe my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone, for my days are a breath.

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<sup>17</sup>What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, <sup>18</sup>visit them every morning, test them every moment? <sup>19</sup>Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle? <sup>20</sup>If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you? (Job 7:13-20)

How do you feel about talking to God this way?

One of Job's friends, Eliphaz, tries to steer Job out of his misery:

<sup>17</sup>"How happy is the one whom God reproves; therefore do not despise the discipline of the Almighty. <sup>18</sup>For he wounds, but he binds up; he strikes, but his hands heal. <sup>19</sup>He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no harm shall touch you. <sup>20</sup>In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. <sup>21</sup>You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, and shall not fear destruction when it comes. <sup>22</sup>At destruction and famine you shall laugh, and shall not fear the wild animals of the earth. <sup>23</sup>For you shall be in league with the stones of the field, and the wild animals shall be at peace with you. <sup>24</sup>You shall know that your tent is safe, you shall inspect your fold and miss nothing. <sup>25</sup>You shall know that your descendants will be many, and your offspring like the grass of the earth. <sup>26</sup>You shall come to your grave in ripe old age, as a shock of grain comes up to the threshing floor in its season. <sup>27</sup>See, we have searched this out; it is true. Hear, and know it for yourself." (Job 5:17-27)

In response to this admonishment that "the one whom God reproves" should be happy, not despising God's discipline, Job persists in stating that his complaint is justified. Like the victim of a crime, Job demands a hearing, with God. "Why have you made me your target?" he demands to know (7:20).

Beseeking God with "Why?!" is what lament looks like in times like this.

Some people might conclude that Job's story has a happy ending. After all, Job 42:10-17 is essentially an "and-he-lived-happily-ever-after" account of how God "gave Job twice as much

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as he had before.” Yet any of us who has ever lost someone special knows that a person can never be replaced. When we look at this story with the intention of learning about lament, our focus must be on the way Job turned to God in his time of despair, gave full voice to his grief, demanded an audience with God, and heard God respond. Our focus, thus, is on Job’s process of moving from disorientation to reorientation.

The reason for Job’s sense of disorientation is obvious: He respected God, he lived a righteous life, yet parts of his life that were incredibly valuable to him were taken away, and that loss did not fit with what Job thought was appropriate. The evidence of Job’s disorientation is also obvious: He sat in ashes and did not speak for at least a week, his physical appearance changed, and when he did speak to God he wailed about wishing he had never even been born. Job’s new sense of orientation—his reorientation—does not come because God explains why these things happened. God, in fact, does not offer Job this kind of explanation at all, a reality that matches our own experience of finding that God does not generally answer that “Why?!” question—at least not in a way that makes sense to us. I believe that Job’s reorientation was not even the result of God eventually giving him twice as much as he had before, because as already mentioned, a person who we lose is a person we can never actually replace. Instead, I surmise that Job reached a point of reorientation—a point at which he progressed through grief and accepted his loss even while not necessarily celebrating it—in the process of engaging in dialogue with God.

God responded to Job’s request for a hearing by giving Job just that. Rather than nodding passively and trying to embrace Eliphaz’s advice about accepting discipline happily, Job responded to the circumstances honestly, acknowledging that he was not

at all in a place where he could joyfully accept discipline. Job took the opportunity to lament wholeheartedly, knowing that he had the full attention of the God who had the power to keep these tragedies from happening. The book of Job shows the long, drawn-out dialogical exchange between Job and God—a picture of true mutual engagement. Through this process of Job finding his voice, using his voice, and listening to God’s voice, Job reached that point of reorientation, as indicated by Job’s words to God that mark the end of this interchange:

<sup>1</sup>Then Job answered the Lord: <sup>2</sup>“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. <sup>3</sup>‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. <sup>4</sup>‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.’ <sup>5</sup>I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; <sup>6</sup>therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1-6)

Biblical scholars suggest that “I despise myself” in this passage should actually translate to something more like “I relent” or “I recant,” and that “repent” here may also relate to consolation.<sup>4</sup> Thus, rather than regretting that he engaged in this interchange with God, Job is expressing that he has reached a point of acceptance.

### **Reflect and Discuss**

1. Have you ever tried to expedite the process of moving from disorientation to reorientation by trying to call a painful situation “good” when your mind and heart did not actually see the situation that way? Was there someone or something that seemed to expect you to do that? What was that experience like?

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2. Have you experienced this movement from disorientation to reorientation in your own life? If so, how did that process unfold? Did you find an answer to the “Why?!” question? Did God ask you to take some kind of ownership of seeing your own despair yield to acceptance?
3. Are you living in disorientation right now? If so, how are you relating to God in regard to these circumstances?
4. Although our reorientation happens in our own relationship with God, other people are often essential to our process of listening to God and making sense of life in the midst of disorientation. Do you have the sort of friends, counselors, spiritual directors, or mentors who can partner with you in your time of lament? If not, express this need to God, and be alert to who God might draw you toward.
5. Is someone close to you living in disorientation right now? If so, how might you respond to her or his situation?



## Lesson 4

# Poetic Pleas

## *Psalms of Lament and their Place in Community*

**Lesson Text:** Psalm 6; Psalm 22

### **Psalm 6**

- <sup>1</sup>O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath.
- <sup>2</sup>Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror.
- <sup>3</sup>My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord—how long?
- <sup>4</sup>Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.
- <sup>5</sup>For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?
- <sup>6</sup>I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping.
- <sup>7</sup>My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.
- <sup>8</sup>Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.
- <sup>9</sup>The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer.

<sup>10</sup>All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror;  
they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.

**Psalm 22**

<sup>1</sup>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are  
you so far from helping me, from the words of my  
groaning?

<sup>2</sup>O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by  
night, but find no rest.

<sup>3</sup>Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you deliv-  
ered them.

<sup>5</sup>To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and  
were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup>But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and  
despised by the people.

<sup>7</sup>All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they  
shake their heads;

<sup>8</sup>“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver— let him  
rescue the one in whom he delights!”

<sup>9</sup>Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me  
safe on my mother’s breast.

<sup>10</sup>On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother  
bore me you have been my God.

<sup>11</sup>Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no  
one to help.

<sup>12</sup>Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround  
me;

<sup>13</sup>they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and  
roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of  
joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my  
breast;

<sup>15</sup>my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks  
to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup>For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encir-  
cles me. My hands and feet have shriveled;

<sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me;

<sup>18</sup>they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my  
clothing they cast lots.



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- <sup>19</sup>But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid!
- <sup>20</sup>Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog!
- <sup>21</sup>Save me from the mouth of the lion! From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
- <sup>22</sup>I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
- <sup>23</sup>You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
- <sup>24</sup>For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.
- <sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
- <sup>26</sup>The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!
- <sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.
- <sup>28</sup>For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.
- <sup>29</sup>To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.
- <sup>30</sup>Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,
- <sup>31</sup>and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

We have looked previously at the action or process of lament that we observe through lament's expression in the Bible's stories (narrative), as in the case of the Israelites crying out for God's deliverance. We have also looked at lament in the Bible's account of Job crying out for God to respond to him. Let's look now at lament as a specific literary genre, or what we can call "formal lament." Here we will look at what happens when people decide to deliberately assemble words into a lament

form. Our focus will be on the book of Psalms, since that is where we can most easily identify these words of formal lament.

Of the 150 psalms included in the biblical book of Psalms, roughly 44 are psalms of lament.<sup>5</sup> This figure is approximate because it does not account for the psalms that are difficult to classify, some of which contain echoes of lament language and style. The content (or focus) and structure of each of these psalms varies, but biblical scholars have noticed some general patterns. Just as a haiku or limerick typically follows a specific format, so do psalms of lament—a form of biblical poetry. Scholars vary in the names they assign to the elements of a formal lament, and some recognize elements that others do not, but most point to something resembling the following list of standard pieces, in the order in which they typically appear:<sup>6</sup>

1. address
2. complaint
3. petition
4. motivation
5. plea for vengeance
6. praise and rejoicing

Other scholars note that a psalmist might also include an expression of trust or confidence in God,<sup>7</sup> and possibly a confession of sin.<sup>8</sup>

The **address** is the psalmist directing the lament to God. The address signifies that the psalmist believes the lament has a real, listening audience, and that the audience is a being (God) whom the psalmist knows personally. The nature of the address might offer insights into the nature of the relationship between God and the psalmist—possibly showing closeness, trust, respect.

The **complaint** is the psalmist laying out the issue, often with strong, vivid language.

In the **petition**, the psalmist asks, demands, or pleads with God for something relating to the complaint. Theologian Walter Brueggemann says this is the place where the psalmist works to “mobilize” God<sup>9</sup>—to call for God to act.

**Motivation** is the component with which the psalmist adds extra strength to the petition, presenting God with reasons to take the petition seriously and to answer it.

The **plea for vengeance** is another almost embarrassingly raw reaction to the pain the psalmist feels. The psalmist wants those who have done wrong to him<sup>10</sup> to be paid back.

Finally, many lament psalms conclude with rejoicing and **praise to God**, either for the response that already happened or the response that the psalmist expects. At other times, the psalmist vows to offer praise once God rectifies the situation, which is to say, once God brings about reorientation.

We can observe these pieces in Psalm 6:

**Address:** “O Lord”

**Complaint:** “I am languishing”; “my bones are shaking with terror”; “my soul also is struck with terror”; “I am weary with my moaning; every night I flood my bed with tears; I drench my couch with my weeping. My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of all my foes.”

**Petition:** “Do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath”; “be gracious to me”; “heal me”; “turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love”

**Motivation:** “For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who can give you praise?”

**Plea for vengeance:** “All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.” (Some might not consider that this is worded as a “plea,” but this is as close as we come to a “plea for vengeance” in this psalm.)

**Praise and rejoicing:** “The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord accepts my prayer. All my enemies shall be ashamed and struck with terror; they shall turn back, and in a moment be put to shame.”

Let’s take a closer look at where the psalms of lament came from, and how the people before us used them.

Many people believe that King David wrote the majority of the psalms—laments, and the others as well. This is not surprising, as David’s name appears with 73 psalms, and 13 of these psalms refer to an event connected with David’s life.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, other portions of Scripture tell us that David was a musician, who composed songs of lament (2 Samuel 1:17) and thanksgiving (2 Samuel 22). Although it is possible that King David did in fact write many of these psalms, we cannot be sure. This is because the people of the ancient Near East did not approach the issue of authorship the way people in Western culture do today. In our highly individualistic Western culture, where we want to make sure that our accomplishments bring us attention and that any praise we garner does not inadvertently fall to someone else, we put our names on what we write. Ownership of our words is so important to us that we even came up with a name for the offense of claiming someone else’s words as one’s own: *plagiarism*. But King David, the other people of the ancient Near East, and the people who—many years later—put together the pieces of what is now our book of Psalms, did not hold this same perspective. Scholars suggest that editors long after David’s time attached David’s name to the psalms even though the psalms’ actual authorship was uncertain. In that culture, this was not deceptive, but a completely acceptable way of saying something to the effect of “these psalms are in the tradition of the well-known, music-loving, poetic King David.”

Before formal laments found themselves in written form, poets may have delivered them orally after being asked to compose laments for particular circumstances.<sup>12</sup> Many laments in some way reference the temple—the place of worship—suggesting the laments had a connection with communal worship.<sup>13</sup> Lament psalms, whether their content focused on communal concerns (such as warfare) or on an issue afflicting an individual (such as illness), were likely used regularly in community, in gatherings for worship.<sup>14</sup> Some scholars suggest that the transition from crying out to God to praising God that we note in many of the lament psalms comes because worshipers would voice their plea in the presence of a temple priest, and then the priest would offer the lamenter assurance of God’s response, which would cause the lamenter to respond with jubilation.<sup>15</sup>

These laments may also have been used outside of worship in the temple, in smaller family circles or in individual devotion.<sup>16</sup> Some may have been composed by people lying in their sick beds, hiding from persecutors, or crouching in prison cells.<sup>17</sup>

As noted previously, some laments focused on a situation impacting an individual, such as illness, individual sin, or persecution, while others focused on a situation a community faced, such warfare, famine, plague, or exile.<sup>18</sup> In some instances, lament psalms do not show the psalmist crying out to God about the wrongfulness of a situation, but crying out to God about God’s own self.

The fact that many psalms are vague in the circumstances they describe allows people like us, generations later in a wholly different time and place, to embrace with their words and use them as our own. Look at Psalm 22:1, for example: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” The Gospels of Matthew

and Mark show Jesus using these very words himself, when he was being crucified.

Reflect on the following words from psalms of lament, and see if any of them strike a chord with you:

- ◇ “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.” (Psalm 22:14-15)
- ◇ I’m tired of all this—so tired. My bed has been floating forty days and nights on the flood of my tears. My mattress is soaked, soggy with tears. The sockets of my eyes are black holes; nearly blind, I squint and grope.” (Psalm 6:6-7 *The Message*)
- ◇ “Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?” (Psalm 10:1)
- ◇ “Long enough, God—you’ve ignored me long enough. I’ve looked at the back of your head long enough. Long enough I’ve carried this ton of trouble, lived with a stomach full of pain. Long enough my arrogant enemies have looked down their noses at me.” (Psalm 13:1-2 *The Message*)
- ◇ “My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me continually, ‘Where is your God?’” (Psalm 42:3)
- ◇ “My soul is full of troubles.” (Psalm 88:3)
- ◇ “I am like those who have no help, like those forsaken among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you [God] remember no more.” (Psalm 88:4-5)

- ◇ “For I am poor and needy, and my heart is full of pain.” (Psalm 109:22 NLT)
- ◇ “For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead. Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.” (Psalm 143:3-4)

While these words may stir our hearts as if we originally spoke them ourselves, the numerous lament portions that refer to “enemies” or “foes” might be more difficult to relate to and incorporate into our own conversation with God.<sup>19</sup> If the concept of “enemies” does not seem to immediately connect with your life, consider thinking about “enemies” as those parts of you that keep you from living out of your true image-of-God self. These are the parts of us that some people refer to as “woundedness,” “brokenness,” “defense mechanisms,” “fears,” or “baggage.” Perhaps for you this is the persistent, nagging voice in your head that says you are not good enough, or that you failed or will fail. Perhaps this is the addiction that seems to control your life. Perhaps this is the part of your past that still cripples you today. How do you feel about seeing “enemies” this way? With this perspective, can you read a psalm such as Psalm 59, Psalm 70, Psalm 94, Psalm 109, or Psalm 140—one that asks for deliverance from enemies—and find in it new application for you?

### **Reflect and Discuss**

1. Flip through the biblical book of Psalms, and identify psalms of lament. Find at least one to look at more closely, and read it in several Bible translations or paraphrases.<sup>20</sup> What parts of these psalms particularly stand out to you? Are there any words, phrases, or images that you find particularly striking?

2. Take a closer look at one of the psalms of lament and try to identify each of the literary lament components.

3. Are you surprised or confused by any of the literary lament components? If so, which components? Why do those stand out to you?

4. Is there a phrase from the psalms of lament that beautifully expresses how you or someone close to you is feeling? Consider writing down that phrase and posting it in a place where you will often see it, and use those words as your own prayer.

5. Write your own psalm of lament. If structure and guidelines are helpful for you, try to follow the lament structure presented in this lesson. If this structure impedes your flow of honest emotion, abandon the structure and simply write your own authentic expression of your heart to God. God hears whether we follow a formula or not.

6. Learning to lament means learning to be in touch with our emotions, and to let ourselves experience and acknowledge the fullness of our emotions. Sometimes this is hard or scary; sometimes we know why this is, and sometimes we do not. If, when you think about expressing your pain this honestly, you feel anxiety or a desire to “change the channel” in your mind to something else, recognize this and see if you can sit with this realization for a while. Tell God this is hard for you. Tell the members of your spiritual community that this is hard for you. Ask God what God would like to say to you about this, and be alert for God’s response. (Note: Appendix A: Blocks to Lament lists common hang-ups people experience when learning to lament. Reading through this list may help you to better identify what is happening inside of you.)



## Lesson 5

# Knocking and Knocking and Knocking and Knocking

## Persistence in Lament

**Lesson Text:** Matthew 15:21-28; Luke 11:5-13

### Matthew 15:21-28

<sup>21</sup>Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” <sup>24</sup>He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” <sup>26</sup>He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>27</sup>She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

One of the most delightful characters in the Bible, in my opinion, is the unnamed “Canaanite woman” of Matthew 15:21-28.<sup>21</sup> She’s bold, she’s persistent, she’s not easily dissuaded or flustered, she’s smart and a quick thinker, and she exhibits all of this by engaging in a lament-like interaction with Jesus, even though in the context of her society she had no real right to approach Jesus at all.

We can learn from her. When the people around us tell us, in essence, that we need to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps and paste a smile on our faces before we approach God, we can learn from this woman who took a risk and went against what the people around her would have said was appropriate. When we feel like God has no real reason to consider the plea of people like ourselves, we can learn from this woman who approached Jesus even though she was a Gentile and not a Jew, and therefore on the periphery of his ministry. And when we are bold enough to present our case to God, but the change or reorientation we seek does not come, we can repeat our cry, taking an example from this woman who persisted in bringing her case forward, when less stalwart folks would have shrugged their shoulders and trudged home without hope.

Really, what we see here is linguistically and theologically beautiful. Matthew takes the same story captured in Mark 7:24-30, and presents it in a way that would cause the eyes of his Jewish audience to widen in surprise not just because of the content of this account—as shocking as it is—but by the lament structure in which Matthew presents it. While the writer of Mark’s Gospel probably wrote for an audience personally detached from Judaism’s practices, Matthew wrote for the Jewish community—a people group who could trace their lineage to the Israelites who cried out to God while enslaved by the Egyp-

tians, and a people who, for generations, had been engaging in the worship services that utilized psalms of lament. For this audience, Matthew uses a lament structure to present the dialogue between Jesus and the Canaanite woman.

As mentioned in the previous lesson, formal lament has a structure, and that structure is usually made up of some variation of the following components: address, complaint, petition, motivation, plea for vengeance, and praise and rejoicing. When we examine Matthew 15:21-28 line by line, we see the first four of these components, which are the components most universal to formal laments.

“Lord, Son of David”—**address**

“My daughter is tormented by a demon”—**complaint**

“Have mercy on me”—**petition**

“Lord”—**repeated address**

“Help me”—**repeated petition**

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table”—**motivation**<sup>22</sup>

What makes this passage especially captivating is that in between the woman’s address, complaint, petition, and motivation, we are privy to Jesus’ response. And through the interchange we note that the woman had several opportunities in which she could have observed that her crying out was getting her nowhere, and she could have given up. In response to her first plea, “Have mercy on me” (v. 22), Jesus is silent. The woman could have lost hope or been embarrassed and turned to go home. But she stays, and Matthew implies that her petitions continue. We might suspect that she repeats her plea more persistently than this gospel account actually records, because in verse 23 we read that the disciples say to Jesus, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” The disciples thought she was

downright annoying. Jesus then says, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” Matthew does not indicate whether Jesus directs these words toward the disciples or the Canaanite woman, but it seems fair to conclude that all were within earshot. The woman then resumes her address (“Lord”) and petition (“help me”), this time intensifying each element by kneeling (a beseeching posture) before Jesus.

Jesus responds by saying something shockingly blunt: “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” Matthew prefaces Jesus’ statement with “he answered,” which might suggest that Jesus directed this statement at the Canaanite woman who just spoke, and who is kneeling at his feet. But these words serve the dual purpose of answering the Canaanite woman and also giving instruction/explanation to the disciples. Conceivably the disciples nod with understanding, remembering Jesus said something similar when he taught from the mountain (see, for example, Matthew 7:6). “Children” referred to the “children of Israel” or Jews, and “dogs” was a derogatory name for Gentiles. If the woman has a reason to stand up and stomp home, resigning herself to the belief that the healing she wants just isn’t “in the cards” for her and her daughter, she has that reason now. But the Canaanite woman hears, for the first time, that Jesus makes a spoken reference to her and her people: *Dogs*. Previously he merely implied his view of her—she is one who is *not* among “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But here Jesus names her—*dog*. Although this would have been considered an openly derogatory designation,<sup>23</sup> the woman responds plaintively again, knowing she has Jesus’ attention. This time she bolsters her plea, crafting a concise, intelligent, motivational argument to match and even complement the potency of Jesus’ name for her:

“Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27).

The Canaanite woman addresses Jesus the way a Jew would come before the God of Israel,<sup>24</sup> and shows him (as well as Matthew’s audience) who she believes him to be and pushing him to be fully who he is.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus clearly stands in the “Divine” position just as the Canaanite woman clearly stands in the “human” position in the lament structure of Matthew’s text, but as Jesus sorts through his thoughts about the “lost sheep of Israel” he is working out his case like a human before God. Thus it could be said that God is a third figure in this example of Divine-human interaction, with Jesus having alternating (or simultaneous) Divine and human roles.

Matthew’s words in the following verse suggest that Jesus gives the Canaanite woman his full attention now, and speaks directly to her for the first time. “Then Jesus answered *her*, ‘*Woman*, great is *your* faith! Let it be done *for you* as *you* wish” (v. 28, emphases mine).

Once the interaction between Jesus and this woman begins to intensify, it is easy for us to lose sight of the disciples who stand on the sidelines, perhaps still wondering why Jesus is paying so much attention to a Gentile woman, and an annoying one at that, when there are “lost sheep of Israel” to attend to. Immediately after reporting that Jesus healed the woman’s daughter and commended the woman for her faith, Matthew says Jesus left that place, “passed along the Sea of Galilee, and went up the mountain” (v. 29). We can only wonder what conversations unfolded between Jesus and his disciples on that hike. Perhaps they talked about what Jesus himself taught about persistence and asking:

<sup>5</sup>“Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; <sup>6</sup>for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.’ <sup>7</sup>And he answers from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.’ <sup>8</sup>I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. <sup>9</sup>“So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. <sup>10</sup>For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. <sup>11</sup>Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? <sup>12</sup>Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? <sup>13</sup>If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:5-13)

### Reflect and Discuss

1. What do you think about Jesus’ responses to the Canaanite woman? Is it possible that he was hoping to draw her out and keep her engaged with him, rather than hoping to see her apologize and turn to walk home?
2. What emotions arise for you when you consider that Jesus changed his mind about healing this woman’s daughter?
3. How do we hold in tension the ask-and-it-will-be-given-you concept presented in Luke 11:5-13 (and Matthew 7:7-11; John 14:13-14; John 15:7; John 16:24) and the concept that God already knows what we need, as expressed in Matthew 6:31-33 and Luke 12:29-31?

4. Imagine that a friend has just read Numbers 11 and becomes concerned that if she or he persists in asking God for something, God will respond by giving it, but then what that person asked for will be awful, like the meat that made the Israelites sick. Is this a fair parallel? A legitimate concern?
5. In your own experience of crying out to God, can you identify with feeling nothing but silence in response? Can you identify with feeling something that sounds like a “no”? Reflect on your experience.
6. As discussed previously, after crying out to God, our responsibility is to listen for God’s response. How do we discern the difference between silence or something that sounds like a “no” that should actually stir us to plead our case again, and silence or something that sounds like a “no” that is working toward reorienting us beyond what we had originally envisioned?





## Lesson 6

# A Time to Dance

## *Celebration as Part of Lament*

**Lesson Text:** Exodus 15:1-21; Psalm 30

### **Exodus 15:1-21**

<sup>1</sup>Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea. <sup>2</sup>The Lord is my strength and my might, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him. <sup>3</sup>The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. <sup>4</sup>“Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea; his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea. <sup>5</sup>The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone. <sup>6</sup>Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power— your right hand, O Lord, shattered the enemy. <sup>7</sup>In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble. <sup>8</sup>At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea. <sup>9</sup>The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them. I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’ <sup>10</sup>You blew with your wind, the sea covered

them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. <sup>11</sup>“Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? <sup>12</sup>You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them. <sup>13</sup>“In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode. <sup>14</sup>The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia. <sup>15</sup>Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away. <sup>16</sup>Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O Lord, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by. <sup>17</sup>You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O Lord, that you made your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will reign forever and ever.” <sup>19</sup>When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. <sup>20</sup>Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. <sup>21</sup>And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

### Psalm 30

- <sup>1</sup>I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.
- <sup>2</sup>O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, and you have healed me.
- <sup>3</sup>O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.
- <sup>4</sup>Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.
- <sup>5</sup>For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.
- <sup>6</sup>As for me, I said in my prosperity, “I shall never be moved.”
- <sup>7</sup>By your favor, O Lord, you had established me as a strong mountain; you hid your face; I was dismayed.

## A Time to Dance

<sup>8</sup>To you, O Lord, I cried, and to the Lord I made supplication:

<sup>9</sup>“What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?”

<sup>10</sup>Hear, O Lord, and be gracious to me! O Lord, be my helper!”

<sup>11</sup>You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,

<sup>12</sup>so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

My belief is that those of us who feel passionate about lament, or even those who are simply curious about lament have something in common: We are people of great hope. In fact, we might believe in hope more than many of the people we interact with every day. This is because lament is not about giving up and saying that life is hopeless and that real joy can never be found, even though in our times of lament we might say things like that. Lament is about drawing attention to those places where darkness seems to have eclipsed the light, and doing so because we cannot handle the darkness on our own. We believe strongly that light should and can come to that dark place.

Those of us who believe in lament do not simply complain. We approach God with belief that the situation can change; we listen with open minds and open hearts for God’s response; and we are ready to roll up our sleeves and take part in bringing about the change we seek, or to let God reorient us to a new reality in which we see the situation differently.

Those of us who lament most deeply and passionately are also those of us who should be the most jubilant celebrators.

Let us learn again from the ancient Israelites, who cried out to God when they were oppressed in slavery by the Egyptians. As mentioned earlier, after the Israelites cried out to God,

God heard their groaning. God remembered the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looked upon the Israelite people, and took notice of them. And then God called out to Moses, asking Moses to step up and lead the people out of Egypt and onward to that land so rich it was “flowing with milk and honey.”

Anyone familiar with this epic narrative knows that leaving Egypt was not easy for the Israelites. With Aaron’s help, Moses repeatedly sought Pharaoh’s permission for the Israelites to leave. Pharaoh continually refused to grant this permission, and was so incensed by Moses and Aaron’s request that he made the work of the Israelite slaves harder than before. And then there were the plagues that came and afflicted the Egyptians because of Pharaoh’s refusal to let the Israelites leave: Water turned to blood; frogs, gnats, and flies appeared by droves; livestock died; people’s skin broke out in festering boils; thunder roared and hail pummeled the earth; locusts destroyed crops; the darkness of light stopped giving way to light; and the Egyptians’ firstborn animals and firstborn children perished. God unleashed tremendous power on behalf of the Israelites’ cry. God also pulled the Israelites into a period of waiting. Life in the land flowing with milk and honey was not an instantaneous reality.

Drama continued to unfurl itself in the story of the Israelite people. Shortly after they finally departed from Egypt, the Israelites found themselves caught between the expansive Red Sea and a storm of angry Egyptians chasing after them. When the Israelite people reached the opposite side the Red Sea—safe, and free from their Egyptian pursuers—they celebrated. They were not yet in the land that God promised them—indeed, they would roam through the wilderness for many years before they reached it—but they were living in a story that gave evidence to the fact that God had heard them. Most likely, none of them had

asked for God's response to come with the strenuous beginning they had just experienced, yet still they rejoiced because God heard them and remembered them and noticed them and was working to deliver them.

The Israelites' song, recorded in Exodus 15:1-21, praises God and recounts what God did for the Israelite people. Just as God remembered the Israelite people, so would the Israelite people remember God. The Bible says that all the women among the Israelite people danced with tambourines, celebrating much like the psalmist, who said "You have turned my mourning into dancing; you have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy, so that my soul may praise you and not be silent. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever" (Psalm 30:11-12).

The divine God joyfully entering into a dialogical relationship with people, and hearing us and answering us—moving us out of disorientation and into reorientation—is truly cause for tremendous celebration.

### **Reflect and Discuss**

1. Reflect on the struggles the Israelites had to endure between the time that God promised to rescue them and their crossing of the Red Sea. If you are familiar with the larger story, reflect also on the struggles and long wait they faced before finally reaching the land flowing with milk and honey. Does this give you any new insights about the lament process? Does it raise any questions?
2. What do you think about the Israelites stopping to celebrate before their journey into the land flowing with milk and honey was complete? What does this say about the Israelite people?

Would you have felt cause to celebrate at this juncture? Why or why not?

3. Celebration for the people of the ancient Near East often involved feasting, music, and dancing. What does celebration look like in your life? Do you put the same amount of energy into celebrating as you put into crying out to God?

4. The people we read about in the Bible made a point of not only celebrating God's help, but making a means to remember it. Sometimes this involved creating a physical reminder of what God had pulled them through—such as the twelve stones from the dry bed of the Jordan River that the Israelites set up to memorialize God cutting off the river's waters as they carried the ark of the covenant (Joshua 4), or the stone pillar Jacob erected to remind himself of the abundant but not-yet-realized blessings God promised him in a dream (Genesis 28). Have you ever created something, purchased something, or captured something in a work of art that serves as a lasting reminder of how God responded to your cries? Would trying this in the future be meaningful for you?

## Afterword

In a sense, my own work on these lament lessons has been like sprinting on a surge of adrenaline. After learning the word *lament* at the beginning of my seminary journey almost five years ago, I found a name to attach to a concept that in retrospect I see had captivated my heart for years. I quickly felt drawn to learn, write, and teach about this, but as each of the last few years unfolded, I found I did not have the emotional strength to delve into a topic that—while built on hope—echoed loudly with despair. I was living often in disorientation. But then I began to see light overpowering the darkness as God pulled me into reorientation. And in that place of standing in the light I found the strength I needed to accept God’s invitation for me to take on this project.

But I write with full awareness that I have not mastered lament. I write with full awareness that pains more piercing than anything I have journeyed through with someone or experienced myself, may still lie ahead for me. And I write with full awareness that someday I may be so socked in by impenetrable despair that the process of interacting with God that I describe here will seem naïve and hopeless. Yet I write with conviction that engaging with God this way is appropriate. I hope my lament

partners will remind me of this when I need them to. Because not lamenting is not good.

God designed us to cry out to God, just like God designed babies to cry out to their mothers for nourishment and comfort. I am still haunted by a story I read several years ago of a married couple who visited an orphanage in the former Soviet Union, with the intent of adopting a child. The husband spoke of entering the orphanage and experiencing its silence. None of the babies cried. When this man strained his ears, all he could hear was the faint creaking of cribs as babies tried to rock themselves to find comfort. They had given up on crying, believing in their own infant minds that no one would respond with the care they needed.<sup>26</sup>

Friends, let us not lose our voices. Let us not lose our sensitivity to feel pain and know that something is not right. Let us instead embrace our capacity to enter into honest, authentic, vulnerable, hope-filled, dynamic relationship with our Creator, so we can catch a glimpse of the depth of God's compassion for humanity as we see light break through darkness. And in the moments when we are silent, may our silence be the result of reaching that place where our souls are fully enveloped in God's care, provision, and love, like the silence of the contented child the psalmist speaks of—the weaned child at her or his mother's breast (Psalm 131:2).



## *Appendix A*

# Blocks to Lament

Lament is often neglected in our own faith communities, so adopting lament as part of your personal and communal way of approaching God can be difficult. If you find that you are struggling to accept the idea that lament is not only an acceptable way to approach God but also a necessary way to approach God, prayerfully consider the following common “blocks” to lament. Does one or more of them reflect your own situation? If so, ask God how you should respond. If you have trouble seeing yourself in this list, or if you find yourself here but you do not feel clear about how to move beyond your point of hang-up, ask for the insights of the members of your study group.

**I am not emotional and I especially do not like to dwell on suffering—how gloomy.** “Emotional” or not, we all feel emotions. Learning to lament means learning to be in touch with our emotions, and to let ourselves experience and acknowledge the fullness of our emotions. For all of us this is hard or scary

sometimes, but some of us can move past those hurdles more readily, perhaps because we have tried it and begun to realize that the path to the “land flowing with milk and honey” runs through the “wilderness” rather than skirts around it.

**I want to be in control.** Lament means breaking down and admitting that we are powerless to change a situation ourselves. Lament means being willing to wait for God, which sometimes takes a long time. Lament also means being willing to listen for God’s response, which sometimes will not sound like what we initially hoped for. When we maintain a tight grip on a situation rather than hold it up to God with open hands, honest lament will be difficult.

**But children in Africa are starving.** Deeply engrained in many of us is the sense that in the grand scheme of the world’s concerns, our own issue is so small and insignificant that it is wrong for us to make a big deal about it. This broad perspective that sees beyond self is immensely valuable and mature. Nevertheless, bearing any kind of suffering secretly and feeling shame about admitting to God that we are in agony impedes the relationship that God wants to have with us—the relationship that can give us real life. Perhaps we do need to be reoriented to a new understanding of our situation, but that reorienting is for God to do. Lamenting is refusing to stifle our pain and refusing to pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps.

Special note for lament partners: When someone invites you into the sacred space where you hear about the pain in that person’s life, realize that she or he may have had to do a great deal of work to move past this “but-children-in-Africa-are-starving” hurdle before sharing with you. This is often especially true for introverts, helping- or “rescuer”-oriented people, and

people with a strong independent/self-sufficiency inclination. Be very respectful of this person's process, and be sensitive to not react in a way that pulls her or him back into being ashamed of admitting personal pain or anger, even if from your perspective the issue seems small.

**What if change does not come?** Some of us are afraid of getting our hopes up and becoming emotionally caught up in a process that may not actually result in change.

**What if change actually comes?** As strange as it may seem, this may be a genuine—perhaps subconscious—hang-up for some of us. Although we say we want change, our identity might be so thoroughly bound up in us being “the victim,” “the lonely one,” “the sick one,” “the oppressed,” or “the bereft” that we do not know who we would be or what our lives would be like if change really came. We are secretly comfortable just where we are.

**Everything is great right now.** Perhaps you feel like you are in the “land flowing with milk and honey” right now, and so the thought of lament seems difficult to grasp. Sometimes we are genuinely in this place, and when we are, we need to celebrate (for more on celebration as part of the lament process, see Lesson 6)! Sometimes, however, we perceive our personal situation and what we see in our larger communities as wonderful or at least tolerable simply because we are afraid of letting ourselves see suffering. Be honest.

**I don't know what to ask God for.** As mentioned in Lesson 4, lament involves not just a “complaint” but a “petition”—we tell God what we feel is wrong and ask that God change the

situation (or respond to us) in a particular way. Sometimes when our despair has been deep and/or long-lasting, our ability to imagine how things could be different diminishes.

**Being angry with God seems blasphemous.** Because Christianity in the West, especially evangelicalism, emphasizes praising God and finding joy in the work of Christ, we may feel confused by life's struggles and guilty when we lack joy. Often our faith communities do not give us room to express disappointment or anger with circumstances—and especially not with God—leading us to believe that approaching God this way is entirely inappropriate.

**God already knows my situation anyway, so why practice lament?**

or

**I do not believe I can actually change God's mind.**

As stated in endnote 2, this study builds on what theologians call an “open” view of God. In this view, God's knowledge is perfect, but this does not mean that God knows everything that is going to happen in the future. God, in God's omnipotence, has left some aspects of the future not yet settled. This means God knows what is settled and also where possibilities lie. In these places of possibility, we have an invitation to utilize our God-given capacity to be in dynamic (rather than passive) relationship with God, talking with God, beseeching God, questioning God. In the open view, prayer is more than an act of obedience to God or worship of God; prayer shapes those places of the future that are open for possibility.

In his very readable introduction to the open view of God, Gregory A. Boyd says “God displays his beautiful sovereignty by deciding not to always unilaterally decide matters. He enlists our

## Blocks to Lament

input, not because he needs it, but because he desires to have an authentic, dynamic relationship with us as real, empowered persons....In the open view, God has sovereignly ordained that prayer be one of our central means of influencing what transpires in history.” *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000) 96-97.



## Appendix B

# Suggested Resources for Further Learning

I consulted numerous sources in writing this lesson material. Below is a small sample of these resources to assist you in your own further study of lament.

Boyd, Gregory A. *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.

Brown, Sally A. and Patrick D. Miller. *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.

Brueggemann, Walter. "The Costly Loss of Lament." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 57-71.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007.

Ellington, Scott. *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008.

Gunkel, Hermann. *Introduction to Psalms: The Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*. Translated by James D. Nogalski. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998.

Hughes, Richard. *Lament, Death, and Destiny*. New York, NY: P. Lang, 2004

Weems, Ann. *Psalms of Lament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995. (A collection of 50 lament poems/ psalms that Weems, a Presbyterian elder and lecturer, wrote herself in response to the death of her 21-year-old son.)

Westermann, Claus. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Translated by Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981.



# Acknowledgments

My interest in lament as an academic study arose when I first read Walter Brueggemann's provocative article "The Costly Loss of Lament," which Dr. Roger Nam assigned in his spring 2009 Old Testament II class at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. Roger has served as my advisor throughout my seminary education, including supervising this lament-lesson project. I am grateful for the ways he continually calls out my giftedness and helps me to envision using my gifts in ways that would otherwise seem unattainable to me.

Paula Hampton, my friend and former co-editor, enthusiastically reviewed these lessons and advised me on ways I could make my writing stronger and cleaner. Paula, you may cringe to see that I was too stubborn to take all of your suggestions (alas, the double punctuation marks remain at the end of *Why?!),* but I hope you know I am thankful for the ways you helped me avoid embarrassing typos and excessive wordiness.

I am deeply grateful for my own lament partners, who have helped me begin to understand the goodness of having others know and carry my burdens. SH, JH, and AC, you are the partners who have been especially dear to me in recent years;

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thank you for bearing with me letting me sit in “ashes” for as long as I need to.

Finally, my heart is too small to contain enough gratitude for you, God who knows me and hears me.

# Notes

<sup>1</sup> See also Walter Brueggemann's list of four points of insistence that the lament Psalms make. Walter Brueggemann, "The Costly Loss of Lament," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36 (1986): 62.

<sup>2</sup> This study builds on what theologians call an "open" view of God. In this view, God's knowledge is perfect, but this does not mean that God knows everything that is going to happen in the future. God, in God's omnipotence, has left some aspects of the future not yet settled. This means God knows what is settled and also where possibilities lie. In these places of possibility, we have an invitation to utilize our God-given capacity to be in dynamic (rather than passive) relationship with God, talking with God, beseeching God, questioning God, listening to God. In the open view, prayer is more than an act of obedience to God or worship of God; prayer shapes those places of the future that are open for possibility.

In his very readable introduction to the open view of God, Gregory A. Boyd says "God displays his beautiful sovereignty by deciding *not* to always unilaterally decide matters. He enlists our input, not because he needs it, but because he desires to have an authentic, dynamic relationship with us as real, empowered persons.... In the open view, God has sovereignly ordained that prayer be one of our central means of influencing what transpires in history." Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 96-97.

<sup>3</sup> Numerous theologians have noted Walter Brueggemann's discussion of the cycle of "orientation" to "disorientation" to "reorientation." See Walter Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> See commentary on this passage in Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, 3rd edition (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), Hebrew Bible p. 773.

<sup>5</sup> John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 469.

<sup>6</sup> See Walter Brueggemann, foreword to *Psalms of Lament*, by Ann Weems (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995); Gail R. O'Day, "Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman," in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 120; Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981), 52.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 55; William S. Morrow, *Protest Against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> William S. Morrow, William S. Morrow, *Protest Against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Walter Brueggemann, foreword to *Psalms of Lament*, by Ann Weems (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), xi.

<sup>10</sup> The male gender is assumed for the writers and the biblical psalms.

<sup>11</sup> John J. Collins, *Introduction to the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 461.

<sup>12</sup> William S. Morrow, William S. Morrow, *Protest Against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 68.

<sup>13</sup> William S. Morrow, William S. Morrow, *Protest Against God: The Eclipse of a Biblical Tradition* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 71; see, for example, Psalm 26:8 and 27:4, which refer to the house of the Lord; Psalm 28:2, which refers to the holy sanctuary; and Psalm 43:4, which refers to the altar of God); see also Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: the Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 123ff.

<sup>14</sup> See Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 7; Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: the Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 82-83, 123.

## Notes

<sup>15</sup> Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 29.

<sup>16</sup> See Carleen Mandolfo who examines “non-cultic” use of laments, *God in the Dock: Dialogic Tension in the Psalms of Lament* (New York, NY: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 150-155.

<sup>17</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: the Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 128-129.

<sup>18</sup> See William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic Wm. Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 435, 438.

<sup>19</sup> Hermann Gunkel closely examines the concept of *enemies* in the psalms of individual lament, and concludes that *enemies* could have referred to a vast array of people or groups, depending on the circumstances surrounding the psalmist. He notes how broad *enemies* becomes when one takes into account Psalm 139:21, which states, “Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?” Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms: the Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel*, trans. James D. Nogalski (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 151.

<sup>20</sup> [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com) provides free access to numerous versions and paraphrases of the Bible, and includes a helpful “parallel” tool that allows you to look at one passage in a couple of versions side by side.

<sup>21</sup> Material on Matthew’s Canaanite woman adapted from my paper entitled “Matthew 15:21-28: Dogged Pursuit of Dynamic Divine-Human Relationship,” written November 2009 for BIST 508: New Testament 1 (Gospels and Acts) taught by Dr. Kent Yinger.

<sup>22</sup> Gail R. O’Day notes the lament structure of this passage in her article “Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman,” in *A Feminist Companion to Matthew*, edited by Amy-Jill Levine (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004); Scott A. Ellington also notes the passage’s lament content in *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008), 175-180.

<sup>23</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Matthean Social History* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen House, 1988) 150. For other negative uses of

## ANSWER ME, GOD

*dog* in the Bible, look at 1 Samuel 16:43; 1 Samuel 17:43; 1 Kings 21:19, 23; 2 Kings 8:13; Philippians 3:2; and Revelation 22:15.

<sup>24</sup> O'Day, "Surprised by Faith: Jesus and the Canaanite Woman," 122.

25 *Ibid.*, 125.

26 <sup>26</sup> Russell D. Moore, "Abba Changes Everything: Why Every Christian is Called to Rescue Orphans," *ChristianityToday.com*, July 2, 2010, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/july/10.18.html> (accessed November 21, 2012).

**To continue the conversation,  
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