

Learning To Lament Well

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[0 : 0 0] All right, so if you would please turn to Psalm 13 if you're not already there. I struggled with what I wanted to share with you today because I kind of wanted to follow up with what we talked about last week, grief and the goodness of God.

I'm sorry, this is kind of like a crane. I'm going to put that there. It's like a crane or a flamingo's head. It's very distracting. Anyway, so I wanted to do a follow-up on grief and the goodness of God because there really is so much to be covered and so much said, and there was a lot said last week just in pure volume of content and how quickly we went through it.

It almost makes it seem like it was just a quick, easy, oh, he's got an answer for it. And that's that. By no means did I intend for that to be the case.

It was meant to be a flyby overview of the issue of grief and how it pertains and how we see the goodness of God through our grief. So part of me wanted to do a follow-up on that, which is what we are ultimately going to do.

Part of me wanted to get back to the book of Acts, but I considered the fact that Chase Wilson's preaching next week. On June 18th, the Robertson family will be giving an update on their time in Kenya and what it means moving forward, so don't miss that in two weeks.

[1 : 3 3] And I said, you know what? I don't see the point in going back to Acts for a week and then two weeks off. So I said, let's go back to this topic of grief and lamentation. Isn't that so exciting?

So today I want to look at this topic of learning to lament well. There are books, many books written on this very issue, books that I have even sitting on my desk right now, a book that I've already read this past week that was really helpful and good as it relates to trials and hardships and grief in life and how we address it.

And so I think it's important that we learn to lament well. And what does that mean? Because there are many things that we learn about as we gather together as a church. We learn about the goodness of God and the mercy of God through the sacrificial death of Jesus.

We focus on that as our time of communion in the Lord's table. We learn about the sovereignty of God through the trials of Job and Daniel.

And as we read through that, and even through our own personal trials that are shared here in the body of Christ and what we have seen people endure and go through. We learn about the benefit of the church as we bear one another's burdens and love our neighbor as ourself.

[3 : 0 0] As we are carrying out the commands of scripture, as we are, to use a term that's been thrown around and I've even used it today. As we are being Jesus to our community and as we are being Jesus to people in the body of Christ.

As we are living it out, fleshing out our faith and showing the love and compassion of God. We're learning about these things. We're learning the benefit of the church body as a whole.

And the list goes on, right? I mean, we can sit here and talk about what other things we learn as we gather together. We learn about one another. We learn about our issues and our problems, or at least we ought to.

And that is one thing that has kind of slipped through the cracks in the church, local church assembly as a whole for, I don't know, however many years, at least in the years that I've been in church.

Very little have I actually seen transparency among the body of Christ and the members of a local assembly where we are being honest with one another about our struggles and our trials and our hardships.

[4 : 11] Not just the cancers or the surgeries or the unexpected deaths or the loss of loved ones through death. Not just that. Those are the easy things to talk about.

But I'll talk about like the things that you personally struggle with that you have a hard time with. I'm talking about the person who walks through these doors and comes into this building and they honestly have a trial and a hardship with alcohol.

They honestly have a trial and a hardship with drug addiction. They honestly have a trial and a hardship with pornography. And they are honest about those things. Things that we look at as personal in nature and maybe too personal to talk about.

And the reality is, is that the whole purpose of the local body and assembly is to come together and to share those burdens with one another. Not in an awkward way, but in a way in which we could be prayerful for and supportive of one another.

And that's one thing we ought to be learning as we gather together. There are people sitting here today who have been attending this church for probably longer than I've been alive.

[5 : 27] And they've been attending church together for equally as long or maybe not quite as long. My question to you, and please don't raise your hand and start outing people.

How well do you know those that you worship with? What is it that they struggle with? What are their hardships? What are their day-to-day pains and battles?

I don't know for sure, but I would be willing to bet the farm that you probably don't know as much as you think you know.

And that has to do more with us individually in our guardedness and our lack of transparency and our lack of desire to be weak before people.

And that wasn't even in my notes. I just felt I needed to share that. But these are things we ought to be learning together and doing together and sharing together.

[6 : 31] One thing that doesn't appear on the list for many, many churches is that we learn how to lament well.

Grief, as we looked at last week, it's a common experience for us in this fallen, sin-cursed world. There's no one, there's no one who has not experienced pain or loss in some form or fashion.

Yet there are many Christians who, though they are being loved by others, are left to figure out how to grieve on their own. And in that process, as they're trying to work through their grief and their hardship and their heartache, there are feelings of pain and hurt that are met with emptiness and loneliness.

And that leads to feelings of bitterness and anger toward God who has sovereignly allowed them to endure the trial that they are enduring.

Many people have left the church and abandoned the faith because they did not know how to lament well. I want to share with you, I was listening to a podcast about this some time ago.

- [7 : 48] a guy by the name Brad Binkney, he's a pastor in Kentucky, he's a certified biblical counselor. He wrote, if I recall right, he wrote the excellent book called Gospel Treason. And he shares this story, he says, a woman in our church grabbed me right after the third service in the past couple weeks. She's so dear, and she always sat right in the third row with her husband.
- He died suddenly, no prior notice. They were just working in the yard, he wasn't old, and she walked around the corner to greet a neighbor. When she came back, he was stretched out on the ground.
- She thought he was just kidding. He was a real jokester. But she went over and she couldn't wake him, he was blue, he was dead. To her credit, she's been in church every Sunday since the funeral.
- But she grabbed me a few weeks ago and I could tell she was almost ashamed. And she whispered, Brad, I want you to know I'm having terrible thoughts about God.
- [8 : 51] I'm angry and I know I shouldn't think this way. And he goes on to give a little more detail. He says, I assigned her some chapters of lamentation, Psalms of lamentation and said, let these give voice to your feelings.
- You're not alone. You're not the first to have felt this way. And he goes on to say, he says, I believe what we learn from the Psalms of lamentation is that we have permission to voice our complaint to God in prayer.
- That's not the same as complaining out loud about God to other people. That's sin. These are prayers. Dark prayers, but they're prayers.
- I thought that was a very insightful share. prayer, you know, that, you know, we, if you've read through the Bible much, if you've read through Psalms, you've come across these prayers.
- You've come across these Psalms that, that almost seem, that make you feel a little awkward, may almost seem a little blasphemous in what they're saying and what the writer is putting out there.
- [9 : 59] But it's important for Christians to remember what 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 16 and 17 says. It says that all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- All Scripture is given to us by God for our benefit. He desires that his children be complete. That means these difficult, dark Psalms that make us squirm and maybe make us wonder like, should this even be in the Bible are there for our benefit.
- And namely, as we're going to look at today specifically a Psalm of Lamentation, they're there that we may grieve properly. Last week, I gave you an outline to help you through your grieving process and gave particular Scripture references as it related to each point.
- I kept that outline in this week. But I also want to take that outline and go through Psalm 13, very short Psalm, six verses.
- And I wanted to see how it applies, how that outline applies with this text and how we see it work itself out. And I encourage you this week, go back through the outline, go back through those Scripture references, read them, pray through them, and just learn to lament well.
- [11 : 43] Learn to grieve well. So we've read through it.
- Let's go ahead and read through Psalm 13 again just to regain what the text says here. Psalm 13, verse 1. How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?
- How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

[12 : 56] So as we start to go through this outline that I gave you last week, we get to first the occurrence of grief. The occurrence of grief. So like many of the lament psalms, there is no clear indication in the text of what exactly is going on in David's life when this was written.

One common suggestion is that this maybe is the time that Saul had his men hunt David from place to place. Or maybe another suggestion is when Absalom, his son, rises up against him and causes David to flee for his life.

So whether his life was in danger at the hand of his father-in-law or his son, he would certainly have adequate cause for grief. But the fact that the psalm does not have a direct context allows us as readers to make personal application of that text.

We know that in verse 2 the trial that David is facing is in the form of a dominant enemy. How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

So what exactly is that enemy that David was facing? Well, as a man of war it could be a literal military force. As mentioned earlier it could have been Saul or Absalom.

[14 : 18] They could fit the bill. As could any other foreign force that he fought against in his lifetime. David was a man of war. God used him mightily in that fashion.

And so it could be anybody. It could be a literal soldier. A literal enemy that he's actually fighting against. It could be something else.

For each of us here it's not likely though there are some that it has been that it would be a literal soldier in war. For us it could be and even if it was somebody who has fought a soldier in war it could also be these things too.

It could be an abuser in the home. It could be an ex-spouse. It could be an unruly child. It could be a contentious neighbor.

It could be a terminal disease. It could be death or impending death of a loved one. It could be an unreasonable boss or co-worker.

[15 : 26] It could be any of these things. The list is almost inexhaustible. I could open it up for a comment and we could probably go another 15 minutes of enemies that you could name personally because you have endured them and faced them or are currently facing them.

According to a recent Gallup poll, the percentage of U.S. adults who report having been diagnosed with depression at some point in their lifetime has reached 29%, nearly 10 percentage points higher than in 2015.

The percentage of Americans who currently have or are being treated for depression has also increased to 17.8%, up about 7 points over that same period of time since 2015.

So depression and treatment for depression is on the rise. That indicates that there's an increase and a rise in grief and hardship and trials.

Another alarming statistic according to the National Institute of Mental Health based on stats from 2020, suicide was the 12th leading cause of death overall in the United States.

[16 : 44] It was the second leading cause of death of individuals ages 10 to 14 and 25 to 34 and it was the third leading cause of death for individuals ages 15 to 24.

And there were nearly twice as many suicides as homicides. Depression and suicide rates are on the rise with both being indicators of the hopelessness that many people suffer because of the trials that they endure.

because of the enemies that they have over them. And really there's very little indication that Christians are faring better in these categories than non-Christians.

John Stott who is a tremendous theologian and Christian writer he says the Christians chief occupational hazards are depression and discouragement. Depression and discouragement.

Charles Spurgeon the so-called prince of preachers says our work when earnestly undertaken lies us open to attacks in the direction of depression.

[17 : 53] The bottom line point is that we all have a context in which our grief comes to bear on our lives. We all have a context in which we will face hardships and trials and grief and be overwhelmed by it.

now let's so but Psalm 13 we don't have we don't know exactly what it is but that's okay because it can still be very applicable to us today. It is.

And so you get that the occasion for grief David was facing it that's why he wrote this. Now you get to the outpouring of grief and that's particularly in verses 1 through 4.

The how long how long questions and the desire for David for God to consider him and to hear him and to answer.

You look at this in verse 1 you see that David had a feeling of abandonment by God. The mere question of how long is a phrase of desperation.

[19 : 00] It's almost it's like an exhaustive like I don't really know what to say type of question. It's like oh really like oh Lord I don't know what to say at this point.

I'm just overwhelmed like the words are not there. And then so it's like he gives this how long oh Lord question then like the feelings of grief and hardship and frustration and lament come out.

And he's asking like will I be forgotten forever? how long will you be hidden from me? And how how many of us have been at that point where whatever it is you're going on.

So like say I'm not pointing out any one particular issue that somebody's going through because it's different context but I know people have them. Have you been to that point in your life in what you're dealing with where you just feel like God has forgotten you completely?

He's hiding his face from you. He's not giving you answers. He's not giving you comfort. He's not giving you deliverance from whatever that enemy is that you're dealing with.

[20 : 16] David's there. That's where David's at here. And he's saying Lord will you forget me forever? Am I supposed to just deal with this? How long will you be hidden from me?

This concept of God hiding his face. How long will you hide your face from me? That's an expression of shame toward an individual in that context, in that culture.

And I quote Deuteronomy 32 verse 20 where God's talking about his children who have turned and chased after other gods and gone away from him. And he said I'll hide my face from them.

I will see what their end will be for they are a perverse generation. Children in whom is no faithfulness. There's a shame that God has towards his people because they have sought other gods and means besides himself.

He says I will hide my face. They will not find me. I will not be found and all that's going to happen is their destruction. And that's where David's at.

[21 : 22] He feels like he can't find God anywhere. That God's not revealing himself in any capacity. And he feels like the only hope or the only thing that's going to happen to him is destruction.

So there's this, verse 1, there's this feeling of abandonment by God. Verse 2, there's the feeling of being forgotten. Sorry. Yeah, feeling of being forgotten.

See, David was at the point of being his own counselor. counselor. See that? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

He feels abandoned by God, so he feels like he needs to be his own counsel. He needs to be his only hope. The common teaching in our society is that the answers to life can be found within.

The answers to life can be found within. If you look deep enough, if you look long enough, you will find the strength or wisdom you need to pull through a hard situation. And the pride of individuals who have pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps mask the very real pain they feel having to endure their trials alone.

[22 : 44] I've met an individual or two like that. They're proud of themselves. They put a lot of stock in who they are and what they're capable of dealing with. Well, I've pulled myself up.

I've not had anybody around and I've gotten through all right and that person will be fine. Don't worry about it. You know, type of mentality. And the reality is that that's a mask.

That's a mask that is masking the pain of having to do it alone. God has created us as relational beings who need one another to survive well.

And that is why he refers to the church as a body of believers who are to build one another up. We are a body. We are individual members of it.

We are different parts of the body and we contribute to one another's health and goodness. So David was at the point he felt forgotten.

[23 : 50] He thought he was his own counselor. He said, I have to do it myself. And you know what's sad? We've been there. What happens when kids reach a certain age, typically the teenage years and such, they start less relying on their parents and listening to their parents and they start listening more to their friends.

Right? And this is something I warn against a lot like in youth ministry and when I was teaching at OVCS is guys, because we listen to our friends and seek our friends' advice and counsel, that's an acknowledgement of the fact that we realize we need it.

But we need to find counsel from people who are wiser, and that probably is not your friend, because they're still trying to figure out all the same stuff you are.

Don't counsel within yourself. Go to a counselor who has more wisdom and guidance, and that's God, ultimately. And that's what David's saying. He's like, I don't have anybody else.

He was hiding, clearly. He had nobody else to confide in. He felt alone. He felt abandoned. Verse 3, he was depressed to the point of feeling like death is the only hope.

[25 : 15] Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. David's depression was so severe that he wanted to die. And that's not uncommon.

That's not uncommon in our society. That's not uncommon maybe in your life, where depression can grip you so hard that you just think death is the only hope and answer.

And the statistics I shared with you earlier point to that same fact. Depression's on the rise. the treatment for depression through medicinal means and such is on the rise.

Suicide's on the rise. There's hopelessness abounding. Severe depression and the rate of suicide are increasing.

depression. When people begin to endure the full weight of stress and trials in the world that we were not created to withstand alone, then hopelessness creeps into the point of despair.

[26 : 24] But our world, we've had an attempt, there's an attempt to answer the issues of depression in mankind. There are many trained in the area of psychology and psychiatry that have concluded that depression is a result of chemical imbalances in the brain with very little to no dependable pathological studies to support their conclusions.

But because they've made these conclusions, as a response to this dilemma, pharmaceutical companies have developed and distributed at alarming rates antidepressants, which are believed to balance out those supposed imbalances.

Unfortunately, this approach to treating depression does not deal with clear circumstantial factors that play into the equation. And they only seek to provide a feeling of, you know, a feel-good feeling in the midst of difficulty.

Yet, even with all the antidepressant use in America, this should be alarming too. We're still seeing a rise in depression and suicide. We see the rise in depression, we see the rise in suicide, we see the rise in treatment, in the distribution of antidepressants, and it's still not solving the issue.

And with that being the case, it should be a red flag that's saying, okay, maybe that is not the problem. People are still reaching the point of being overwhelmed just as David did almost 3,000 years ago.

[27 : 59] Verse 4, David, he's outpouring a grief, his enemies will rejoice in his defeat. As God's chosen king of Israel, the last thing that David wanted was for his enemies, and by extension, God's enemies, to have a sense of victory.

God is David's foundation, and on that foundation he will not be shaken. But if he is shaken, then that will give God's enemies cause for rejoicing.

If David gives up, if David dies, if David ends his own life, then his enemies can rejoice and say, okay, he's gone, he's out of here, and that God whom he served and believed in and put his trust in was not enough for him, could not deliver him from his own hand.

That similar mindset exists in Daniel's day. We covered that a few weeks back when we were in the book of Daniel on Wednesday Bible study. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Judah and he sacked Jerusalem.

And for him, it was more than just a military leader defeating another army or another military, getting another military victory under his belt. For him, it was more about his God defeating the God of Israel.

[29 : 18] That is how that culture, that is how that Middle Eastern culture mindset was, was that my God is bigger and greater than your God. And so Nebuchadnezzar comes in, takes out Israel. He ultimately has defeated the God of Israel.

And the God of Israel is nothing. And it was that sense of pride that Nebuchadnezzar had because his God won the victory and the reason why Yahweh needed to humble Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4.

He got too big for his britches. But ultimately that military victory for Babylon would have not just been seen as a military victory but as a victory of one God over another.

And David didn't want that. He said, no, I don't want my enemies to feel like they prevailed over me and to rejoice because I'm shaken. Lord, answer me. The experience of the righteous is not just grief without relief.

We see in the concluding verses in verses 5 and 6, we see the overcoming of grief. In verse 5, we see that David has trust in God's mercy to come.

[30 : 32] But, so he lays out verses 1 through 4, his grief. He's poured out his heart. He's laid it before God and he says, but I have trusted in your steadfast love.

My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. With the contrast of but I, David recognizes that even though he feels defeated and in the depths of despair that God will be merciful toward him and that he will see God's salvation.

The Hebrew term for steadfast love is *chesed*. And the core idea of this term relates to loyalty within a relationship. In relation to the concept of love, it denotes God's faithfulness to his people.

When you see this steadfast love, you see that Hebrew term *chesed* in the Old Testament, that is God's relational love and commitment to his people.

And let me tell you something, Christian, that extends into the New Testament as well. When you are in Christ, God's love is poured out, his mercy is poured out on you and toward you and his grace, as he tells the apostle Paul who had a thorn in his flesh and he prayed three times that God would take it away from him.

[31 : 51] He responded to Paul, he says, my grace is sufficient for you. But his grace, nonetheless, is present.

And it's present for David and it's present for you today. Then verse 6, I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Praise in the midst of despair. since God is faithful to his people and he provides for their need, we can look and see how he has done so in our own lives and give thanks for it.

No matter how far down the path of grief and depression we may go, there is always the opportunity to be thankful for what God has done for you.

I think of the incidents in the book of Acts in the middle chapters, Paul is in prison right? And sorry, back up, Peter in prison.

[32 : 55] Oh man, I'm losing my mind here. Anyway, the apostles are in prison and they are praising God. They are basically in stocks or in chains and they are praising God.

They are singing hymns of praise to him. It was Paul. All right, we've settled that. Singing praise.

He's in prison. He could lose his life. But he's praising God, giving thanks to God, praying to God in the midst of a deep trial and hardship and uncertainty.

And that's where David's at. We've seen what his heart is. We understand what grief he's going through. He says, yet I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt by bountifully with me. No matter how far or how deep or dark things get, you can still look back and see how God has dealt bountifully and beautifully with you.

I want to end on this quote. I mentioned Charles Spurgeon earlier and just kind of let him pass. But one thing that's known about Spurgeon is that he dealt with depression.

[34 : 16] It's a major thing and it's amazing that we see it throughout scripture. David, we see it with Jeremiah and we see it throughout scripture of people who are depressed, who are dealing with hardship and grief.

Spurgeon himself, as great of a preacher as he was and as a minister of the gospel, depression was like his thorn in the flesh. It's what he dealt with in life and I want to share this with you.

He says, I am the subject of depression so fearful that I hope none of you ever get to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to. But I always get back again by this.

I know that I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in him. But if he falls, I shall fall with him. But if he does not, I shall not.

Because he lives, I shall live also. And I spring to my legs again and fight with my depression of spirit and get the victory through it.

[35 : 23] And so may you do. And so you must. For there is no other way of escaping from it. let's pray.

Father God, I thank you for your word. I thank you, Lord, that you teach us to lament well. We can grieve well. We can endure our depression well.

And our hardships. And our despair. And the darkness that seeks to overwhelm us. Lord, in Christ, we have victory and hope.

We have life. We have light. He is the light of the world. Lord, I thank you for David's example here in Psalm 13 to pour out our emotion, our feeling, our despair to you.

But yet, Lord, even though we pour out our grief, Lord, we also overcome it by your grace in our lives, by your mercy.

[36 : 36] I pray for anyone here, Lord, who is dealing with hardship and grief and uncertainty and darkness in their life today, that Lord, they would look to you and seek you with their whole heart and their whole mind.

Lord, that they would see the light of life which shines through your word, through Jesus Christ. Lord, that they would see the hope that is offered in the gospel.

We can see the forgiveness that is granted through the blood of Jesus, that they can see the victory that lay ahead.

Lord, though they may feel so deep in despair, that there's no hope in getting out of it. But Lord, we know that is not true because you have won the victory for us and promise it to us and help us to commit and to seek and to long for the victory that is in Christ.

Because, Lord, we long for the day when we no longer have the trials to face in this world. But we know, Lord, the day will come when you will wipe every tear from our eyes and pain and death will be no more because the old things have passed.

[37 : 59] Glory to you, Lord. Amen. Amen. Let's stand and sing 718, day by day.
Amen.