

## Writing a Prayer of Lament

Laments can be categorized into four stages: **Address, Complaint, Request, and Expression of Trust**. These Psalms are spoken with raw honesty, placing confidence that we can approach our merciful, powerful God with an honest heart and share our complaints and requests; a cry that this situation is not in alignment with God's person or purposes. It's a cry that expects an answer from God, and therefore results in hope, trust, and joy rather than despair. Laments can be both personal and communal, addressing situations which are going on in individuals life or the state of the nation. As we practice writing a Psalm of Lament, take a moment to think about what's been on your heart. **Is there an area of your life in which there is not Shalom - no peace, wholeness, or health? Are there community or worldly events which are not aligning with God's kingdom?** These prayers are written in short sentences and are not meant to use fancy wording, use the wording you would use in your everyday life as you write your lament.

I'll work through each stage of a lament, sharing what each section's purpose is, how we see it in Psalm 13, and how you can write your own.

- 1) During the **Address** stage, the writer cries out to GOD. This initiates a conversation, a prayer, with the God who is ever present, who cares for us, who is merciful, and who invites us into a personal relationship with Him.

In Psalm 13, we see this as the writers cries, "How long, O Lord?"

**Exercise:** Write out a name of God. This can be a name you are familiar with such as Lord, Father, Jesus, Abba, or God. You can also address God as a name of His character which relates to your Psalm of lament - God of Justice, Healing God, God of comfort. What role does God play in this situation? What name do you ascribe to him?

- 2) In our second stage we enter into **Complaint**, it is an honest and specific naming of a situation or circumstance that is painful, wrong, or unjust. This circumstance would not be in alignment with God's character or purpose for the world and does not have a place in His kingdom. This section gives room to emotions and honest questions.

Psalm 13 reads "How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?"

**Exercise:** Name what's on your heart. What is the source of your grief, sorrow or anger? What painful situation is before you? (Feel free to be specific here and include more than just a couple of sentences if it helps). Speak of the coronavirus, share how sad your heart is that you can't see a loved one, express your anger towards human trafficking.

- 3) In our third stage we move into the stage of **Request**, revealing that the psalmist expects a response, an answer. He or she expects that God will be able to do something about the situation. It's a cry for God to "do something!"

Psalm 13 reads “Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death, and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him.” and my foes will rejoice when I fall.”

*Exercise: How are you longing for deliverance? What do you want God to do?* This can seem like a demand, but actually these strong requests were a common mode of prayer within the worship of Israel. In what ways do you long to see Him move?

- 4) Our last stage is the **Expression of Trust**, this is where the psalmist affirms who God is and puts their trust in Him. Every single lament has this expression of trust with the exception of Psalm 88.

Psalm 13 finishes with the Psalmist declaring “But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord’s praise, for he has been good to me.”

*Exercise:* Just as I mentioned at the beginning when we were addressing God, this is a time when you can name a Character of God. This portion is both for affirming who God is, but I have found it also is a time that brings hope to myself after speaking despair. I am reminded that He is a God who loves me, who is powerful, who hears my prayer. *As you reflect on your prayer, in what ways will you choose to put your trust in God? How can you declare His character? Recount the ways in which God has responded to your suffering in the past. What evidence do you have that he will show up again? Who do you know God to be based on your experiences with him? Looking beyond your current circumstances, what are the reasons God is nevertheless worthy of praise and trust?* Articulate these as clearly and honestly as you can.