



Lament: part 1

Lord, you are the God who saves me;
 day and night I cry out to you.
 May my prayer come before you;
 turn your ear to my cry.

I am overwhelmed with troubles
 and my life draws near to death.
 I am counted among those who go down
 to the pit;
 I am like one without strength.
 I am set apart with the dead,
 like the slain who lie in the grave,
 whom you remember no more,
 who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit,
 in the darkest depths.
 Your wrath lies heavily on me;
 you have overwhelmed me with all
 your waves.
 You have taken from me my closest
 friends
 and have made me repulsive to them.
 I am confined and cannot escape;
 my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, Lord, every day;
 I spread out my hands to you.

Do you show your wonders to the dead?
 Do their spirits rise up and praise you?
 Is your love declared in the grave,
 your faithfulness in Destruction[e]?
 Are your wonders known in the place of
 darkness,
 or your righteous deeds in the land of
 oblivion?

But I cry to you for help, Lord;
 in the morning my prayer comes
 before you.
 Why, Lord, do you reject me
 and hide your face from me?

From my youth I have suffered and been
 close to death;
 I have borne your terrors and am in
 despair.
 Your wrath has swept over me;
 your terrors have destroyed me.
 All day long they surround me like a
 flood;
 they have completely engulfed me.
 You have taken from me friend and
 neighbour—
 darkness is my closest friend.

Psalm 88 (NIV)

Reflection



 Rohingya family, Bangladesh. Photo: Andrew Philip/Tearfund

Today, some church traditions and Christians find lament more natural, while others avoid it. However, the practice of lament is a deeply biblical practice. Many Psalms, in part or in full, offer a cry of lament to God.

In the Christian tradition, to lament is to offer our honest, uncensored pain, heartache and grief to God. It is to take our deepest concerns and grief to God, knowing that God will never reject us for our prayers: no prayer is too honest.

To lament is always an act of drawing near to God, with all our raw questions and unpolished prayers. Lament is a place where Christians bring our emotions to God, even if it does not seem 'pretty' or polite.

God does not always provide the answers to our lament in the ways in which we might like. But as we lament, we share in God's own lamenting over the brokenness of creation. And as we draw near to the safety of God's love, and receive God's compassionate embrace, we encounter afresh God's restorative heart for the whole world.

Reflection questions

1. Is lament a practice that feels natural to you?
2. Many Psalms start with Lament, but end more hopeful (for example, Psalm 89). How did you feel reading Psalm 88?
3. Do you resonate with any specific verses in Psalm 88?
4. Reflect on the global Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on your local community. Write your own prayer of lament to God.



📷 Women's cooperative, South Sudan. Photo: Andrew Philip

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Lament: part 2

The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

Genesis 6:5–6 (NIV)

Jesus wept.

John 11:35 (NIV)

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.'

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

Romans 8:22–23, 26 (NIV)

Reflection

In the above verses we see that we are not alone in our lamenting over the brokenness of creation. The Creator God laments over the wickedness of human sin. Jesus weeps over the death of a friend. The Spirit groans with us.

In our current moment of global crisis, these verses remind us that God is not ignoring our plight; God is not ignorant of the suffering of creation; God has not forgotten nor rejected us.

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As we lament, we join in with the triune God who laments; we draw near to the God who cares for all of creation. Perhaps counter-intuitively, so often it is in our lament that our hope and strength is renewed.



📷 Burned Nigerian church building. Photo: Andrew Philip

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Reflection questions

1. How does it make you feel when you reflect on God lamenting?
2. Have you ever experienced times where lament has renewed your strength and hope?

Prayer

Creator God, we join you in your lament over the brokenness of creation.

We lament over all the suffering in the world.

We consider all the pain and fear being experienced in the world right now.

We think of our neighbours, near and far.

We bring before you now all our honest and real emotions.

We lament, oh God!

Renew our hope and our strength as we look to you, the God who cares and embraces us in our pain.

Lord God, let your kingdom come.

Let your will be done. Amen.