

Good
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Lamentations 3:19-23

“Stop crying or I’ll give you _____.” I’m not going to ask if your parents ever said that to you when they were administering discipline, or if you said it to your children. The debate could take up our entire Bible study time discussing the nuances of how to handle tears of protest versus tears of remorse and repentance. Here’s one you could answer about discipline: After administering discipline did you hug your child? Why would it be important to administer the discipline AND the hug? How did you decide when and how to administer the hug so you wouldn’t confuse them about their bad behavior?

“Stop crying or I’ll give you something to cry about.” Ponder this: Does our Heavenly Father ever say that to us as His children? What does the Bible indicate about God’s openness to our tears, even after His discipline? What does scripture teach us about how He administers the “holy hug” of a loving Father?

This week we spend one session of study on the book of Lamentations. We don’t often hear or use the word “lament” in our everyday conversations. The subject of biblical lament showed up in sermons during COVID 19 as our world was overwhelmed with such a large crisis. The definition of lament is “crying out in grief: wailing, complaint.”ⁱ If there is a book in the Bible about lamenting, it must be a topic God’s children should understand.

The point: Lament (crying out to God) is not only a noun, it’s a verb and followers of Christ need to know how scripture teaches us to lament to our Heavenly Father. We also need to understand what we can expect from Him when we lament. He doesn’t tell his children, *“stop crying.”* He says, *“Bring me your tears and I will dry them with faithful love, mercy, compassion, and reason for hope.”*

The book of Lamentations is five chapters, each one a separate poem. It documents the terrible suffering after Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. Chapters 1-2 and chapters 4-5 document the suffering of the nation. Right in the middle, chapter 3 is the “centerpiece” of the book that gives God’s people a picture of a restored relationship with God. The author of Lamentations is not specified but the general consensus is that Jeremiah likely wrote these five poems.

Last week, we said sometimes our pain comes from God’s discipline, which proves He is a loving Father. Sometimes our pain is just because we live in a fallen world but God uses that suffering to grow our faith and trust in Him.

Lamentations chapter three makes it plain that Judah’s situation was the result of God’s discipline caused by their sin. The writer says, *“¹ I am the one who has*

seen the afflictions that come from the rod of the Lord's anger. ³ He has turned his hand against me again and again, all day long.”ⁱⁱ We will begin our study in verse 19 where God's mercy and love began to break through the dark night of the soul the people of Judah were enduring.

Lamentations 3:19 (NLT) — 19 The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. **20** I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.

- Lamenting to God begins with crying out about our circumstances with all the emotions we are feeling. This isn't timidly praying, "*I don't mean to complain Father.*" This is a raw and real unburdening of our despair.
- We're told, "There are around 65 Psalms (that is nearly half of the Psalms) that are Psalms of lament. Psalm 3, 13, 22, 42, 44, and 60 are just a few of them." Rob Brockman writes, "This should tell us something – lament is an important part of the human experience! Just as much as the Christian ought to come before God with songs of thanksgiving and praise, we ought to come before God with lament."ⁱⁱⁱ Listen to some of the language of lament from scripture:
 - **Psalm 10:1 (NLT) — 1** O Lord, why do you stand so far away? Why do you hide when I am in trouble?
 - **Psalm 13:1 (NLT) — 1** O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way?
 - **Psalm 42:3 (NLT) — 3** Day and night I have only tears for food, while my enemies continually taunt me, saying, "Where is this God of yours?"
- Your translation of verse 20 may describe the writer's soul as "downcast", "bowed down" or "depressed." Psalm 44:25: ²⁵ *For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground.* ^{iv} That is LOW!
- When we are at our lowest and life is hardest do we run from God or to Him? When we are "pressed down" we should "press in" to our Heavenly Father. Trials and sadness should drive us to more intimacy with Him.
- A child instinctively runs to their loving parent when there is trouble.
- The writer cried out about his grief, but his tone changed with verse 21:

21 Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: **22** The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. **23** Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. **24** I say to myself, "The Lord is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!"

- In his book *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*, Mark Vroegop defines lament as, "*a prayer of pain that leads to trust,*" (pg. 28).^v We see that in these verses.
- Healthy lament allows for complaint and grief but it calls us to shift to recalling the unchanging character of our Heavenly Father.
- When we turn our eyes from our problems and look at Jesus, "*...the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace.*"^{vi}

- “The word for “steadfast love” in the original Hebrew (*chesed*) means “loyal love.” Psalm 136 repeats over and over: “*his steadfast love endures forever.*”^{vii} No one loves like God loves. Because of His character He will never stop loving His children. We may grieve Him and disappoint Him but we can’t do anything to cause Him to stop loving us. Imagine that!
- His “mercies” never cease. His “compassions” and “pity” for us never run out. There is a fresh supply every day. We’re reminded of the manna God provided Israel in the wilderness.
- If we hunger for God’s compassion the supply is never exhausted.
- Verse 23 inspired that wonderful hymn: “Great Is Their Faithfulness.”
- God is consistent, reliable, stable, never changing: He is always faithful!
- Verse 24: “The Lord is my portion (inheritance.)” God gave portions of the Promised Land to the tribes of Israel as their inheritance but to the tribe of Levi, His priests, He gave no land because, “*The Lord himself is their special possession.*”^{viii} For us: If we have Jesus we have all we need.

25 The Lord is good to those who depend on him, to those who search for him.

- This explains how we access God’s compassion and mercy. We must recognize our dependence and seek Him with all our hearts.
- We must also learn how to patiently submit to His will.

26 So it is good to wait quietly for salvation from the Lord. **27** And it is good for people to submit at an early age to the yoke of his discipline: **28** Let them sit alone in silence beneath the Lord’s demands. **29** Let them lie face down in the dust, for there may be hope at last.

- It’s human nature to resent the idea of wearing anyone’s “yoke.” What we may not realize is that every human being goes through life pulling a heavy load. If we are yoked to Jesus we don’t have to try to pull it alone. His “yoke is easy” and He lightens the load we are pulling.
- These verses boil down to the concept of “trust and obey.”
- Obedience: Waiting on God and not running ahead of Him with my own plan. Listening for His will instead of insisting on mine. Humble obedience.
- The younger we learn to trust and obey God the longer we have to enjoy life as His beloved child. Think of how many people regret the “wasted years” of wearing the “devil’s yoke” as Spurgeon called it.^{ix}
- Then the writer describes the relief of trusting God to deal with evil people.

30 Let them turn the other cheek to those who strike them and accept the insults of their enemies. **31** For no one is abandoned by the Lord forever.

- Remember Jeremiah 50? We need to trust God to “settle the score.”
- Finally, the writer reminds us of the discipline of a loving Heavenly Father.

32 Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion because of the greatness of his unfailing love. **33** For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow.

- The God of the Bible is both a sovereign God and a loving Father.
- Because we trust in His sovereignty we can turn to Him in lament knowing His faithful, steadfast love and mercy will turn our weeping into joy.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- Followers of Christ are commanded to worship and invited to lament.
- Learning how to biblically lament will deepen our relationship with God.
- A friend of mine named Aubrey Sampson wrote a book entitled, *"The Louder Song, Listening for Hope in the Midst of Lament."* She writes, *"If we never acknowledge our pain to God, we will never truly know what it means to praise him on the other side of suffering. It is in our honest crying out to God about our pain that our worship of God grows more authentic. It is in this kind of relationship, this kind of honesty with God that our walks with him become real. Lament is part of the rhythm of a deepening relationship with him."*^x
- When we are at our lowest and life is hardest, do we run from God or to Him? Quoting Mark Voegrop again, *"Laments turn toward God when sorrow tempts you to run from him."*^{xi}
- **2 Corinthians 4:8–9 (ESV)** — **8** We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; **9** persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;
- When we are "pressed down" we should "press in" to our Heavenly Father. Trials and sadness should drive us to more intimacy with Him.
- Our Heavenly Father never says, *"Stop crying or else."*
- Instead He says, *"Bring me your tears and I will dry them with faithful love, mercy, compassion, and reason for hope."*
- **Psalms 56:8 (NLT)** — **8** You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.
- Clearly this lesson has taught us that it's okay for a Christ-follower to cry.
- Often I have marveled at the outward faith of some saints in the midst of tragedy. It's striking that they can be so composed or even display joy in the midst of trials and tragedy. Are they just being stoic or showing a "stiff upper lip?"
- Perhaps they are so outwardly composed to others because they've crawled up into the Father's lap and cried their eyes out to Him.
- Perhaps it's because when the sun came up in the morning their loving Father wiped those tears and fed them on the "manna" of His new mercies. Perhaps they've learned the biblical practice of Godly lament. We should all learn that practice.

ⁱ Merriam-Webster, I. (2003). *Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary*. (Eleventh ed.). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc.

ⁱⁱ Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (La 3:1–3). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://ca.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-art-of-lament/>

^{iv} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ps 44:25). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^v *ibid*

^{vi} <https://www.hymnal.net/en/hymn/h/645>

^{vii} *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2016). (Ps 136:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

^{viii} Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Dt 18:2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

^{ix} <https://answersingenesis.org/education/spurgeon-sermons/1282-the-best-burden-for-young-shoulders/>

^x <https://www.tyndale.com/sites/unfoldingfaithblog/2019/01/22/lament-what-does-lament-mean/>

^{xi} <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/dare-to-hope-in-god>