

LAMENT

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LAMENT

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy. 21 When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. 22 So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. -- John 16: 20-22: 20

While the depth of grief experienced varies widely from one person to the next, it is remarkably democratic in its presence across the spectrum of humanity. We all experience grief to some extent - some of us more than others. But what do we do with it? Where do we put it? On occasions where grief's downpour overcomes our capacity to contain it, how do we enlarge our soul to hold grief's waters?

No easy answers here, but the sheer volume of scripture devoted to lament seems to suggest that we start there. So, what is it to lament?

Usage:

Lament or one of its derivatives is used 115 times through scripture. This doesn't include the many Psalms that are actual songs of lament, and the entire book of Lamentations - 5 chapters of gut-wrenching laments for Jerusalem after the city is sacked by Babylon.

What can we glean from the way the word is used in scripture?

First: Lament is active, both solitary and communal.

There are 56 times that a word in Hebrew or Greek is translated to *lament*. Of those 56 times, 40 are Hebrew words that suggest some sort of singing or audible grieving done communally. This is significant. That's not to suggest that this is the only way to truly lament, though - consider David in the wilderness or Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Second: Lament is not complaint

Proverbs 10:28 says "The hope of the righteous brings joy, but the expectation of the wicked will perish." How often do I disguise complaint as lament? What's the difference? Lament is birthed of humility; complaint of pride. Lament recognizes, accepts, and courageously walks into the full brunt of grief. Complaint seethes, "why not them?"

Application:

A great first step is to validate that lamenting is good. It's the appropriate reaction when faced with grief, and God hears our lament. It's different than complaining. Rather, it's the brutal honesty that deepens our relationship with Christ - who was a man of sorrows, well-acquainted with grief, and well-acquainted with lament.

Interested in digging deeper?

- What does it look like to invite God into your grief?
- What does it look like to invite others into grief?
- What does it look like to join a grieving friend or loved one?