

The Biblical Process of Lament: Complain
(based on Mark Vroegopp's book, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*)

In order for you to learn how to experience the mercy of lament, you need to learn to complain. After we take the first step of turning to God in prayer, the next is bringing our complaints to him.

Bringing our complaints to God isn't about venting self-centered frustrations at God when life has not turned out like you planned. It doesn't give you a right to be angry with God (that is always wrong).

Many people fall into one of two camps when walking through suffering: anger or denial. Some people are so filled with anger at God that they live in a self-made prison of despair and bitterness for the rest of their lives. Others seem to think that godliness means a new form of stoicism. "Everything's fine," they say. But it isn't.

Biblical complaint offers an alternative. Through godly complaint we are able to express our disappointment and move toward a resolution. We complain on the basis of our belief in who God is and what he can do. A lament honestly and specifically names a situation or circumstance that is painful wrong, or unjust - in other words, a circumstance that does not align with God's character and therefore does not make sense within God's kingdom.

If we are going to understand how to lament, and if we are going to discover the grace in it, we must learn how to complain the right way.

1. Read Psalm 10:1-11 and list the psalmist's complaints.
 - a. What is troubling him?
 - b. What questions does he have?
 - c. What accusations does he make?
2. Is there any language that you feel uncomfortable with in this passage? Explain why or why not.

Complaint gives voice to our hard questions. The longer we live, the more pain we see. God could intervene, but there are times - many times - when he chooses not to. That's the tension of complaint.

1. Read the following passages, and record the questions that the psalmist asks: Psalm 22:1; Psalm 44:23-24; Psalm 80:12; Psalm 88:14; Psalm 13:1-2; Psalm 35:17; Psalm 74:10; Psalm 94:3; Psalm 137:4

These psalms give us permission - even encouragement - to lay out our struggles, even if they are with God himself.

2. How do you feel when you read these questions?
3. Are there any questions that you have about these questions?
4. How comfortable would you feel asking God these types of questions? Explain why.

Asking God questions is not the only aspect of biblical complaint. Psalm 10 also shows us the value of telling God our frustrations. There is something helpful and right about regularly laying out the specifics of our pain.

1. Go back and read Psalm 10.
2. Explain, in your own words, what the cause of the psalmist's complaint is.

The psalmist turns his powerless position into a platform to call out to God. His blunt complaint is an opportunity to redirect his heart. Rather than allowing painful circumstances to rule him, creating bitterness or despair, he lays out his angst. The specificity sharpens the prayer. The frustrations expressed in lament push him further toward God, not away.

How to complain the right way:

1. It must be done with a humble heart. Proud, demanding questions from a heart that believes it is owed something from God will never lean into true lament. Come with your pain, not your pride.
2. Use the boundary of biblical language to keep your complaint on track. Let the complaints of the psalmists guide your language.
3. Be honest with God about your pain, your fears, or your frustrations. Remember that you have a Savior who understands your struggles.
4. Complaint was never meant to be an end in itself. It is designed to move us along in our lament. Complaint is a turning point of lament. Let it push you toward what comes next: asking God for help.

Questions:

1. Before reading this homework, what was your perspective on complaining to God?
2. Why do you think complaint is a central element of lament?
3. What was comforting and encouraging about what you read in the sample lament psalms?
4. How is complaining the right way spiritually helpful?
5. When is complaint sinful and wrong?
6. Make a list of complaints you've offered or should have offered to the Lord in past times of trouble, suffering, and hardship.
7. As you think about the troubles and hardships that you are facing today, what complaints would you like to humbly offer to the Lord?

Prayer:

Write a prayer to thank the LORD for allowing you to be honest with him.