

The Psalms as a Vehicle for Lament & Sorrow

The Psalms is an essential that this book, which has informed both public and private worship in the history of Israel and the Church, must also play a role in shaping and informing our own lives of worship! This book is **one of spiritual catharsis**, which especially in times of sorrow can provide healing to our soul.

In fact, Chief reformer, **John Calvin calls the book, “an anatomy of all parts of the soul.”** Danjuma Gibson has said that the Psalms of Lament reveal things about both God and our humanity giving us, **“a vocabulary that retains our humanity.”** As one surveys these Psalms of lament and their literary impact, they will be able to begin to develop a *theology of suffering*—especially as it pertains to worship!

Drs. Danjuma Gibson and Cory B. Wilson define **lament as, “grief work...[the] process you engage in to come to terms with what has been lost, way of life, person image of the way you thought things should have been...without doing that we diminish our sense of humanity.”**

There is a brutal honesty in **Psalms 51**, and **130** which remind us theologically of the transparency we can bear before the God that knows our heart and our conscience. Psalms too that deal with lament in light of innocence; Cf. Ps. 7:3-5 & Ps. 17:4-5).

Psalms 88 presents a unique documentation and experience of suffering—a seemingly unanswered prayer. As identified above in the previous section Psalm 88 does not contain a neat resolution to the Psalmist’s pain...as *Heman the Ezrahite* faces the maladies of life he petitions God, “Day and night I cry out to you” (vv. 1-2, 9b, 13-14). Unlike Psalm 38, and 41 (also Psalms of the Sick), no confession of sin is found, and no clear resolution is presented—the only elements to be found are the problem of illness, the complaint against God and the lingering petition of a man suffering from illness.

Where a solution isn’t immediately found, God is still merciful in providing a medium through which we can petition Him, and communicate the depth of human suffering, anguish, and emotion. Hassell notes the, **“very fact that lament figures so prominently in a collection of religious literature like the Psalms means that the Hebrew faith drew the circle wide enough to accommodate human complaint.”**

Psalms of lament can purposely and intentionally shape/mold our own contemporary art—namely our focus poetry. **English poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning does this powerfully in her own poem “Cowper’s Grave”.** The work centers around Jesus’s “cry of dereliction from the cross.” The poem reads:

“Immanuel’s **orphaned cry**
His universe hath shaken—
it went up single, **echoless**,
‘My God, I am forsaken.’ ”

It is this poem Hassell writes that captures the essence of lament Psalms while also expressing the idea that Jesus’s cry was, “echoless, so that no other human being would ever have to utter that cry again...”.

Individual psalms of Lament include: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142.