



## Psalms of Lament

*From Raewynne Whiteley's talk:*

It takes courage to reclaim lament. It takes courage, because to lament goes against our culture's passion for success. It goes against the common wisdom, that we should "get over it", move on with our lives. It goes against the pictures of God that so many of us get fed as children or in the media — the angry authority figure who would destroy us if we dare challenge him; the abstract being who set the world running and then walked away; the blond haired blue eyed gentle Jesus, meek and mild. What it asks us instead, is to be willing to open ourselves to a God who cares what we think and what we feel, and can take whatever we say.

And lament takes courage because it requires us to be honest, brutally honest, not just with God but with ourselves. And that's no easy thing. It's much easier to kid ourselves. To say, this isn't really all that important, it hasn't really affected me. To say, I don't need any help, can do it on my own. To say, I've dealt with it, it doesn't trouble me any more.

Lament doesn't allow us to play that game. It invites us, even forces us, to admit that everything is not okay. It stinks. We're angry, we're upset, we're resentful, we're hurt. And we want God to do something about it.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? \*  
and are so far from my cry  
and from the words of my distress?  
my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not answer; \*  
by night as well, but I find no rest...

But the laments of the psalms don't just leave us there. They don't just leave us to wallow in the misery of our own experiences and emotions. If you read through the lament psalms, what you'll discover is that while some of them just stay with the lament, in most of them there comes a point when things begin to change. The mood shifts; suddenly you can hear the faint possibility of hope. So that something that began with the deepest despair, ends with a note of confidence and trust.

For he does not despise nor abhor the poor in their poverty;  
neither does he hide his face from them; \*  
but when they cry to him he hears them.

### Praying with a psalm of lament

Choose one of the following psalms of lament and reflect on it.

Psalms 12, 22, 60, 80, 90, 126, 44, 74, 83, 94, 137, 58, 79, 85, 123

- What are your first impressions of the psalm?
- How did it make you feel?

- How does it connect with your own feelings when you are faced with a world gone wrong?



**Come to me  
all you that are weary  
and are carrying heavy burdens,  
and I will give you rest**

Matthew 11.28-30

- When you hear Jesus' invitation, "Come to me" how does that make you feel? What would you like to tell him when you come to him?
- As you reflect on your life, what is weighing you down? Where are you angry, disappointed, struggling with God? Where do you feel pain?
- Where is grace at work in your life? Looking back, where can you see beauty emerging out of ugliness? Where can you see beauty coming out of pain?
- Bring all the things you've been thinking about today into the presence of God. Imagine God's arms wrapped around you, holding you as if you were a tiny baby, safe and secure.

*Bitter-sweet,  
a poem by George Herbert*

And all my sowre-sweet dayes  
I will lament, and love.

AH my deare angrie Lord,  
Since thou dost love, yet strike;  
Cast down, yet help afford;  
Sure I will do the like.

I will complain, yet praise;  
I will bewail, approve:



**A breathing prayer:** To say slowly and rhythmically as you breathe in and out:

I breathe in your goodness to me this day

- ❖ Every small kindness I have received
  - ❖ Every glimpse of your beauty in people
  - ❖ Every play of your beauty in creation
- I breathe in from you O Lord.

I breathe out to you the hurts and disappointments of this day

- ❖ Every word or action of another I felt harmed by
  - ❖ Every way I felt diminished and put down
  - ❖ Every insecurity of mine that made me vulnerable
- I breathe out to you O Lord

I breathe in your healing and wholeness

- ❖ For every harsh word, your gentle word to me
  - ❖ For every lack of care your tenderness to me
  - ❖ For every turmoil, your deep peace for me
  - ❖ For every fear of mine, your strong presence with me
- You are within me, O Lord

### Time to walk

*Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for the sowing  
Shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves [Psalm 126.6]*

These days we are more appreciative than ever of the gift of being able to walk. Walking also allows our deeper feelings to be gently processed. Even



when we are struggling with the heavy weight of fear and grief, we can find refuge in the physical rhythm of our steps and awareness of the world around us. The landscape is large enough to hold whatever burdens us.

You may find it helpful to let your hands fall open and downwards as you walk, allowing what you carry to slip away for a while.

You may find you are walking side by side with Jesus – like those disciples along the road to Emmaus – telling your story or simply enjoying the company.

Some days there may be something you take with you on your walk – a small stone, a fallen leaf... a physical embodiment of a hope, loss or need you are aware of. Somewhere along your walk there will be a place to leave it, resting it in creation and in the God of creation. Perhaps you will see something on your walk that speaks to your heart – perhaps even to take home with you as a reminder of the presence or the hope you found along the way.