

Responding with Lament

By Sabrina Chan



Why lament?

Many of us find ourselves living in a very different reality now or have been preparing for a future that has changed significantly. Grieving those losses and expressing our questions is part of our relationship with God. The spiritual discipline of lament enables us to go to God honestly, and helps our hearts and minds be ready to hear and receive.

What is lament?

A psalm of lament is song or poem that cries out to God in times of sadness, loss, anger, or despair. In the book of Psalms, about 40% of the psalms are laments, and an even higher percent have laments incorporated in them. They can be personal (e.g. Psalm 13) or communal (e.g. Psalm 12).

Psalm 13 is an example of a **personal lament**, with 3 main sections:

1. An **honest complaint** – What have you lost that you’re grieving? What are you struggling with as you look inward or outward?
2. An **earnest petition** – What do you want to ask God for in this time?
3. An **expression of trust** – How can you acknowledge God’s past work in your life? Who do you want to remember that God is? Sometimes this is aspirational, as you’re reminding yourself of God’s goodness.

Tip: The key is *honesty* with God. God is big enough for our anger, questions, fears, and doubts. God wants to hear from us and wants to be in a relationship with us.

Communal laments can include the same elements and answer the same questions, but about our community (e.g. What has our community lost that we’re grieving?). They are often about injustice, putting our anger and sadness in front of God, and calling out to God as the one who can restore, heal, and bring justice.

Invitation

Create your own psalm of lament—personal or communal. Write 1-2 lines per section and express yourself to God. Welcome others to do the same and share them with each other.

Tip: You don’t need to be a good writer to write a good psalm of lament. Focus on *honesty over poetry*. If it flows well, that’s just bonus.

Psalm 13 Common English Bible (CEB)

For the music leader. A song of David.

- Honest Complaint**
 - ¹ How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
 - ² How long will I be left to my own wits,
agony filling my heart? Daily?
 - How long will my enemy keep defeating me?
- Earnest Petition**
 - ³ Look at me!
Answer me, LORD my God!
Restore sight to my eyes!
 - Otherwise, I’ll sleep the sleep of death,
 - ⁴ and my enemy will say, “I won!”
My foes will rejoice over my downfall.
- Expression of Trust**
 - ⁵ But I have trusted in your faithful love.
My heart will rejoice in your salvation.
 - ⁶ Yes, I will sing to the LORD
because he has been good to me.

My Psalm of Lament

Honest Complaint

Earnest Petition

Expression of Trust
