

# A Survivor's Prayer

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Date: 18 February 2024

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lord, remember what has happened to us. Look and see our disgrace. Our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our houses to foreigners.

We have become orphans, fatherless. Our mothers are widows. We must pay for the water we drink. Our wood comes at a price. We are closely pursued. We are tired and no one offers us rest. We made a treaty with Egypt and with Assyria to get enough food. Our ancestors sinned. They no longer exist, but we bear their punishment. Slaves rule over us.

No one rescues us from them. We secure our food at the risk of our lives because of the sword in the wilderness. Our skin is as hot as an oven from the ravages of hunger.

Women have been raped in Zion, virgins in the cities of Judah. Princes have been hung up by their hands. Elders are shown no respect. Young men labor at millstones.

[ 0 : 58 ] Boys stumble under loads of wood. The elders have left the city gate. The young men, their music. Joy has left our hearts. Our dancing has turned to mourning.

The crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned. Because of this, our heart is sick. Because of these, our eyes grow dim. Because of Mount Zion, which lies desolate and has jackals prowling in it.

You, Lord, are enthroned forever. Your throne endures from generation to generation. Why do you continually forget us? Abandon us for our entire lives. Lord, bring us back to yourself so we may return.

Renew our days as in former times, unless you have completely rejected us and are intensely angry with us. Thank you. If you fall out of an airplane and you count to 12, you will be traveling about 120 miles an hour.

We call that terminal velocity, which is sort of a funny term. But that is as fast as you will get going. You won't get going faster than that. But unless if you do something to change your aerodynamic profile, you will be traveling about 120 miles an hour when you hit the ground.

[ 2 : 24 ] And that will likely be terminal. But on January 26, 1972, a Serbian flight attendant named Vesna Vulovic was serving on a plane that exploded in midair.

And Vesna fell about 33,000 feet. Plenty of time to count to 12. She suffered a broken skull and three broken vertebrae, and she was in a coma for 27 days.

But unlike the other 27 people on board this airplane, Vesna survived. The deadliest aviation disaster that had a single survivor.

Northwest Airlines Flight 255, which crashed in Michigan in August of 1987. 154 people on the plane lost their lives, plus two people who were on the ground.

The only survivor, the only survivor, was a four-year-old girl named Cecilia Chacon, who survived this deadly aviation accident.

[ 3 : 47 ] Lamentations number five is a survivor's lament. It's a lament for those who survive the catastrophe, for those who live through the disaster, for survivors who are left behind to grieve the loss, for survivors who experience the lingering effects of trauma and abuse, for survivors who wrestle with shame that refuses to tap out.

Lamentations five is the language of loss. From the lips of those who are learning, my life will never go back to the way that it was.

Things that are done cannot be undone. Things that are said cannot be unsaid. What is experienced just can't be forgotten. This is a lament for when pain is not relieved, and healing is not received, and losses are not restored, and shame remains uncovered.

Lamentations number five is a survivor's prayer. We know that it is a prayer because the survivor asks for the grace of God's attention.

Look at verse number one. Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us. Look and see our disgrace. [ 5 : 43 ] Now, we don't want to read this and think that this is please remember what you are forgetting. That's not the idea here. It's not please remember what you are forgetting.

It is please pay attention to what you are ignoring. What does the poet want God to pay attention to?

He wants God to take notice of what has befallen us. Look at what has become of us, your people. Lord, Yahweh, consider the covenant. Consider your people. pay attention to what has become of us.

It's like a child saying, Mom, you promised. Do what you promised. Consider our disgrace.

[ 6 : 51 ] Pay attention to our shame. This is what survivors do. Survivors ask for the grace of God's attention.

Look and see our disgrace. Verse number two, our inheritance has been turned over to strangers, our homes to foreigners.

foreigners. This is an appropriate time for me to give you a little something about Hebrew poetry. When we think about poetry in English, we tend to focus on things that rhyme.

For example, we might say, roses are red, violets are blue, don't ever forget that I love you. Right? It has a nice rhyme to it. This is how English poetry often works. But Hebrew poetry is not based upon rhyming.

[ 7 : 59 ] Instead, they use this idea of parallelism. And parallelism means you state something, and then you state something else that is intended to clarify, or expand on, or nuance, the first thing that you said.

So look at verse number two again. Our inheritance, our land, has been turned over to strangers. In other words, people who are not part of our family.

But then notice how it gets worse. Our homes to foreigners. Not just people who are outside of our family, but people who are outside of the covenant.

Do you see how that parallelism works? First statement, second statement, and the second statement is going to clarify, or emphasize, or nuance what the first statement says.

We'll see this again and again in this text. There is instability that has been caused by the destruction of family units.

[ 9 : 08 ] Verse three, we have become orphans, fatherless, and our mothers are like widows. So notice that there is a literal effect of husbands and fathers and brothers.

There's a literal effect of the men being killed, but then there is also a figurative, a metaphor effect in that second statement. Our mothers are like widows.

In other words, there is not only literal destruction of family units, but those who remain are vulnerable, like widows, insecure, like orphans.

there is a loss of their heritage, loss of their ancestry, loss of their tribal affiliation. There is no longer any means for them to track back their continuity through generations.

That has been lost. Verse number four, we must pay for the water we drink, and the wood we get must be bought.

[ 10 : 20 ] This reminds me a little bit of like the movie The Lorax, when Mr. O'Hare is selling filtered air. That's kind of what's happening here.

The things that they need for their daily lives, wood, and water, to cook and to clean, they have to pay for it, and dearly.

Verse five, our pursuers are at our necks. We are weary, and we are given no rest.

They feel like they're being watched all the time. It's like someone is breathing down their neck all the time. I don't like this feeling.

I have only played paintball, I think, twice in my life, and the second time may be the last time that I ever played paintball. I mean, if you ask and you really want me to go, I'll go, but I'm terrible at it.

[ 11 : 25 ] And the last time that we went to play paintball, someone came up behind me and shot me in the back, which you're not supposed to do.

You're supposed to give the person an opportunity to yield and to give up if you catch them in the back. But he shot me right in the back, and that hurt, and I don't like pain.

I have a very low pain tolerance. I couldn't sleep that night because I kept thinking that someone was breathing down my neck.

I don't like that feeling. Verse six, we have given the hand to Egypt, Egypt, and to Assyria to get bread enough.

They are so desperate that they are willing to try to make an agreement with a group of people who used to enslave them to try to get enough bread to get by.

[12:30] They're desperate. This is like when you have a bad attitude with your mom, and then you have to ask your mom for help with your homework.

Or, when you disobey your dad, but then you have to go back to your dad and try to get your dad to make what you want for dinner. How awkward and embarrassing.

Verse seven, our fathers sinned and are no more, and we bear their iniquities. It's like the poet is saying, look, they sinned, but they're dead.

We participated in that sin, but we didn't get to die. We live on, facing the consequences for the sin. Verse eight, slaves rule over us. There is none to deliver us from their hand.

[13:36] They are ruled by lackey Babylonian yes-men, Brunos, right? That's sort of the stereotypical Bruno, but not the one that we don't talk about.

the other kind of Bruno, where you're just a big tough guy, but you're just reporting to the boss man and doing exactly what you're told and nothing else.

I think that's the metaphor here. We get our bread at the peril of our lives because of the sword in the wilderness.

Daily life is very difficult. We don't know exactly what the sword in the wilderness means. It could be that this is a metaphor for the drought. It could be that this is meaning that when we go out to try to scrounge around for food outside the city, people are attacking us and trying to kill us when we go out there just to scrounge around for some food.

We're scared for our lives and as a result of this, our skin is hot as an oven with the burning heat of famine. They are malnourished.

[14:47] sick, feverish. women are raped in Zion and young women in the towns of Judah.

Notice the parallelism that we talked about earlier in this text. It starts with a broad group of people, women, but it says women, this broader group of, broader category of people, are treated like this in a small part of the area in Zion.

Do you see it? But then young women, a narrower category of women, are treated like this in a broad area of the region.

So you have sort of this overlapping parallelism intended to help us realize this is the norm. this is the usual. This type of behavior is pervasive.

Violence and abuse against women is common. Princes are hung up by their hands. No respect is shown to the elders.

[16:10] It seems initially as though maybe this is talking about like a public hanging, but remember that this is a survivor's story and public hangings were not the normal means of execution at this time.

So I think there may be something else going on here. It may be that this is describing a particular form of humiliating torture being strung up by your hands or it may be that this is the way that they are putting fear and shame on the survivors by taking the corpses of those who have died and stringing a bunch of these corpses up like lights on your patio.

Young men are compelled to grind at the mill and boys stagger under loads of wood. They are oppressed, they are domineered, forced labor.

Young men in the prime of their life are being treated like animals. There is no social life. Verse 14, the old men have left the city gate, the young men their music.

There is no religious life. Verse 15, the joy of our hearts has ceased, our dancing has been turned to mourning. There is no political life.

[17:38] Verse 16, the crown has fallen from our head. Woe to us, for we have sinned. I think the metaphor here of the crown falling off of someone's head is like a police officer having to turn in their badge or like a military officer being stripped of their rank or like Jews during the Holocaust having their heads shaved.

And they have lost all dignity and all honor and all identity is gone. This is verse number 16, the symbolic end of Judah.

Look at 17. For this our heart has become sick. For these things our eyes have grown dim, hopeless, no future, no light at the end of this tunnel.

For Mount Zion, the temple which lies desolate, jackals prowl over it. Wild dogs are just running crazy over the ruins of the temple. This survivor's prayer asks for the grace of God's attention.

[ 19 : 23 ] Pay attention, Lord, to the things that you are ignoring. suffering. I wonder if you are uncomfortable with a God follower, a Christian, talking about their grief like this.

Does that make you uncomfortable? Maybe you are not sure how you should respond to a sufferer who is describing their suffering, or to an abuse victim expressing their anger, or to an outcast sharing their experience, or to a wounded heart revealing what still hurts.

It is hard to wander around in grief, isn't it? And it is hard to follow behind someone who is wandering around in their grief.

I suspect that we want to say, maybe you should just get over it. You need to find some ways of moving on. Stop dwelling in the past.

Because talking about pain and shame and expressing grief and complaining about injustice and exposing the truth of wrongdoing, all of this can feel so unchristian.

[ 20 : 58 ] Lamenting Lamentations 5 teaches us that it is neither unhealthy nor unchristian to talk about grief.

Biblical lament does not look for a shortcut around grief. Biblical lament does not try to silence the grief of others.

Biblical lament embraces grief. The survivor's prayer asks God to pay attention to our grief.

There's a second feature of the survivor's prayer and we find it in verse number 19.

But you, O Lord, reign forever. Your throne endures to all generations.

[ 22 : 01 ] Why do you forget us forever? why do you forsake us for so many days? Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored.

Renew our days as of old. Unless you have utterly rejected us and you remain exceedingly angry with us.

This little truth in verse number 19 this is how I imagine a cell phone that is nearly dead feels when you plug it into the wall charger and suddenly that power starts surging into that phone's battery. Maybe this is a better metaphor. This is how it feels when you are underwater and you're not sure if you're going to get another breath and then your head pokes through crest through the top of the water and you gulp in a breath of air and you realize I'm going to make it I'm going to live I'm going to survive that's this verse but you Lord reign forever this is the survivor's prayer the survivor asks for the grace of God's attention and the survivor believes that the Lord still reigns the Lord reigns even when people are cruel and wrongdoers win the

Lord reigns even when liars keep on lying and cheaters don't get caught the Lord reigns when abuse is ignored and injustice is tolerated the Lord reigns when evil is permitted and you suffer as a result of it when you have survived the disaster when you have survived the catastrophe but you are just barely hanging on and your future seems as unclear and as hopeless as those in Jerusalem believe survivors believe the Lord is still in control pain doesn't reign the Lord reigns God's people are desperately needy for God's grace they need

[ 24 : 49 ] God to act on their behalf that's what the poet says we need restoration restore us we need to be renewed renew us take us back to what it used to be like how can that happen only grace can do that only grace can bring restoration from this devastation only grace can bring renewal!

from this death and so despite the wretchedness of their circumstances that we have had the displeasure of reviewing again this morning the survivor clings to this hope on the basis of God's covenant with his people it is totally impossible that we are utterly rejected but notice the prayer ends with no response from God God is silent this prayer reminds me of Jesus praying in the garden of Gethsemane he also asks God for the grace of his attention father if it is possible take this cup away from me pay attention to what it seems like you're ignoring this cup is coming my way would you please take it away yet not my will but yours be done silence from

God did God hear Jesus that evening in the garden of Gethsemane did the father hear Jesus well of course he did of course the father heard him he got the father's attention he always had the father's attention but there was no other way for hopelessly lost sinners to be redeemed from the destruction and the devastation of their sin and to be reconciled back to God there was no other way no one else could take and drink this cup all the way to the dregs so what does Jesus do upon

hearing the silence from God what does Jesus do he rises from prayer and believing that God is in control he goes forward to the cross despising the shame enduring the pain and Jesus dies to reconcile to redeem hopelessly lost sinners like us part of me wishes that lamentations had a happier ending you know those are the stories we like aren't they stories where the good guys win the bad guys lose good triumphs over evil stories where the good guys ride off into the sunset we like stories that end with and they lived happily ever after those are the stories that we really like but what about when they don't live happily ever after because in the real world a chapter ends and a page turns and a season changes and your community is still scattered and you are still divorced and your loved one is still gone friendships may never be renewed scars remain on your reputation relationships are still a challenge all of your losses have not been restored you are in those cases like the poet of Lamentations 5 you're a survivor but pain is ever present and grief haunts like a ghost and shame is a burden like a backpack full of bricks but my fellow survivors the Lord reigns and in spite of the wretchedness of your circumstances in the middle of your disgrace you can absolutely trust him brothers and sisters when you don't get the happily ever after ending that you were hoping for when your good questions have no good answers when life is hard and

God is silent please do not forfeit your privilege of praying the survivor's prayer ask God for the grace of his attention and believe that God is still in control let's pray father we are grateful for your word we are humbled to receive it thank you for preserving your word for us down through the centuries so that we could have this record of the awfulness inside and around Jerusalem thank you for giving us again and again and again as we have worked our way through these laments glimpses into the wretchedness of their lives we are so humbly grateful that our lives are yet infinitely better than theirs and yet we confess that we too feel the weight of guilt and the scars of shame we know the losses that we have felt we know what it feels like to be a survivor of the catastrophe but to have to live on would you please help us would you please encourage us would you please comfort us would you please remind us of our savior the lord jesus christ would you please keep us faithful to you would you please help us to be people who walk with others through their grief for as long as it takes and point them again and again and again to this beautiful truth the lord reigns we need this father as we prepare to celebrate the lord's supper we know there are areas in our lives where we have strayed from your will for us where we have lingered too long in our anger where we have let frustration build until it is blown up all over those around us father you know where there is bitterness and resentment and a desire to get even and to get revenge these are not the mindsets of survivors who are committing themselves to you would you please help us as we take a few moments holy spirit please help us to sense in a fresh way you're working in our hearts convicting us of our sin and reminding us of our need of a savior father we are grateful for your love that is steadfast and your mercies that are auto renewed help us to find our hope in jesus and in nothing else give us courage to persevere in faith when our circumstances seem dire remind us of your sufficient grace assure us of your promise to be with us give us community [ 34 : 48 ] to love us and walk with us to encourage us and help us to be a community that loves others and walks with others in their suffering and their grief and their shame we ask this for your glory and our good in the name of the lord jesus amen