

An Everyday Lament

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 25 February 2024

Preacher: Mike Deyle

[0 : 0 0] So today we'll be in Psalm 4. So, I watched a little mini-series. I guess I haven't seen all of it yet, but it's called All the Light That We Cannot See.

And the main character in there, her name is Marie, and she's a young blind girl, and she lives in World War II France. When she was young, her father knew that in order for her to navigate through life and not live as a shut-in, cooped up in her home, she'd need to have some way to understand and navigate the realities of the unpredictable and dangerous world that she was in.

So her father paced off the city, and he created a wooden model in their home. He laid out buildings, parks, sidewalks, and streets, and she could stand at the table and run her fingers through the model and slowly learn how to interact with her surroundings.

She'd learn to find comfort in certain touch points, like building corners and signposts and smells from the bakery. So she'd navigate like two blocks, or turn left and go two blocks from this corner and your home, or six blocks straight ahead and you'll get to the park.

In unpredictable situations, and despite the different day-to-day circumstances, she could have the confidence to continue on to her destination. And the Psalms are like that for us.

[1 : 2 5] Like Marie's father gave her the model of the city, our good and loving father gave us the Psalms, so we too have touch points. We know that in life we face times of joy and peace, but we'll also face suffering.

We'll be surprised by what life brings us because we're blind to what tomorrow holds.

So as we continue to run our fingers through the Psalms slowly and learn them now, it means we'll have more comfort and confidence in how we can continue to trust in and relate to God in the future.

Knowing that he will continue to remain the same loving father, desiring for us to draw close and rely upon him as we navigate the many peaks and valleys that we will walk through in life.

The Psalms are where we go to when we don't have the words to describe what we feel, when we don't know how to pray or even what to pray for, and when we're seeking comfort, we can turn to them.

[2 : 2 9] So if you'd open your Bibles, we'll be in Psalm 4 and Josie will read for us. To the Choir Master, with stringed instruments, a Psalm of David.

Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness. You have given me relief when I was in distress. Be gracious to me and hear my prayer. O men, how long shall my honor be turned into shame?

How long will you love vain words and seek after lies? But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself. The Lord hears when I call to him.

Be angry and do not sin. Ponder in your own hearts on your beds and be silent. Offer right sacrifices and put your trust in the Lord. There are many who say, Who will show us some good?

Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. In peace I will both lie down and sleep.

[3 : 40] For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. So we don't have a lot of background information or context about this particular psalms.

A lot of people have paired it with Psalm 3, and they think that it fits in with the same time period as when David had fled from Absalom. And that might be the case. You can find that, if you want to read that, you can find it in 2 Samuel.

But we just don't know for certain. We do know that it's a psalm of David. We know that it was written to be a song, and it's structured as a prayer of lament.

Many have considered this to be an evening psalm. Some of the English translations, that's what the inscription on the top says. As I was learning and preparing for today, I found that this psalm is actually really relatable.

And ironically, I found that when I was laying in bed, unable to sleep, wide awake, just staring at the ceiling, just wondering how do you even start unpacking this text.

[4 : 53] So, I don't know if you guys find yourself lying in bed awake at night, but when I drink a lot of caffeine in the evenings, it seems to be more common than it used to be.

We've all probably, to one degree or another, experienced what David went through. One of the main themes that I see that develops in this psalm is just the relational aspect of it.

His vertical relationship with God and his horizontal relationship with others and how he interacts with the two. It's not hard to see how we can identify with that.

This is an everyday lament. So, this is a disclaimer section. You're going to see the screen. When you see the scripture, it's going to look a little different.

And I've done that on purpose and I've thrown a curveball to the preparations of the slides. So, I'm thankful for how they came out. This is just to show us how we can better understand poetry and biblical.

[5 : 58] Sometimes there's hard things and it's just dense and hard to understand. So, the text will be on the screen and it's just a tool. But if you're looking to break down the psalms that you're maybe not understanding and get a little deeper into it, you can try this.

You can try to highlight themes. You can look for related words. Jeremy taught us about parallelism when there's like a repeated line. And if, yeah, like I said, if you have a psalm that is hard to understand or you want to learn better, this is just a good tool.

It's nerdy and it's wonderful. But it's not, it's not, yeah, we're moving on. So, how we're going to identify the different parts of this today is right here.

So, this book, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercies, the author identifies four different parts of a lament, a prayer of lament.

And it's not always going to come in a perfect order, but it shows us a path that we can move from doubts and fears in our circumstances to trust in the Lord. I think it'll be helpful for us today as we go through this to keep these in the back of our mind and try to identify where they're at.

[7 : 22] So, the four things are turning to God, bringing our complaint, asking boldly, and then finally choosing to trust. So, the first part in David's psalm is turning to God.

David isn't wallowing in his suffering. He's making an active decision to turn to God and voice his pain. He comes out the gate pretty hot. If you see in verse 1, his first words, he says, answer me when I call.

That's a pretty bold demand to make to the God of the universe. So, how I have related to this is when Audrey was little, I asked her, she said, it's okay to bring this up.

When Audrey was little and she really wanted us to make sure she was paying attention to her, she would come right up close and she would put her hands on the side of our head and she would just like make intense eye contact with those blue eyes.

And she would say, look at me. You have to be real secure with your relationship in order to address someone that confidently.

[8 : 35] David introduces God here in an unusual way also. He says, God of my righteousness. So, righteousness is a relational word that usually means to be in a right relationship or in like good standing with each other.

But specifically in this situation, God has considered David to be just or innocent. It helps us to see that David's inability to sleep is not a direct result of his own sin.

His vertical relationship with God is secure. It's his horizontal relationship with others that's broken. David is being treated unfairly here.

Not by God, but by other people. David has turned to God and now in the middle part, he's going to bring his complaint. He is being treated unfairly.

And here we see the heart of David's pain crying out. He says, O men, how long shall my honor be turned to shame? How long will you love vain words and seek after lies?

[9 : 42] He's feeling the brokenness of his horizontal relationships. This is not hard to connect with. I'm sure most of us have been hurt like this at some point.

But this is more than just an everyday besmirching. The Hebrew word for men is not just the generic or usual word, which is ben adam.

But here, it's men that hold some position of honor or elevated dignity. It's bene ish. When we look at the ESV and NIV translations, we don't see that as clearly.

But the CSB translation, if you're looking at that, it's very helpful. And it translates it to exalted ones. So these men are slandering David's name and making him look bad to others.

It's bad enough when we experience others around us spreading lies and creating rumors. But when it's someone within a community that's in an authority or an elevated position, it only increases the shame that we feel.

[10 : 50] We can be left with more questions than answers. How many people are talking about this? Why don't they just leave me alone?

Why would they believe that about me? Don't they know me better than that? That's shame. Even though David's confident that his vertical relationship with God is good, David's in right relation with him, it doesn't mean that he doesn't feel the very real pain and weight of shame.

He can't just shrug it off and act like everything's good. He's going to have to face the effects of this every day. He's not just hiding at home by himself. He's going to run into people wherever he goes.

The royal court, the city gate, the well, maybe even the gas station. I'm sure if he had a holiday, he'd like their roller dogs too. They're pretty choice.

So in verses 3, 4, and 5, David's prayer pivots a little. He's still praying to God, but it's worded in a way that's sort of double-sided advice.

[12 : 07] It's what he would maybe tell his aggressors if he could talk to them while simultaneously reminding himself what his response should look like. Haven't you ever thought, boy, I'd like to really give that person a piece of my mind?

And then, in true North Dakota fashion, you don't say anything ever to them. That may be what's going on here. Verse 3, David says, But know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself.

The Lord hears when I call him. If these instigators would have heard David's prayer, these words would have cut them. This statement carries both an explicit and an implicit meaning.

Explicitly, David's using the personal name of God, and he's showing that he has a close and intimate relationship, and that God hears him when he calls. And implicitly, David is saying that these men are not in a right relationship with God.

These men are not righteous. And that can be hard when we think about it. So we could say that David's being judgmental, but he's not.

[13 : 23] David knows that he's in right relationship with God, but it isn't because David's better than them. What he's doing is recognizing that they are right now actively turning away from God, and it would be better for them if they didn't.

We also have to remember that David is giving voice to his pain as he brings it to God. He's not judging these men. He's sorting through and wrestling with his emotions. The word *godly*, which in Hebrew is *hasid*, it's a relational word.

It's an idea that's bigger than we can cover today. But for now, what we need to know is that one aspect of God's nature is *hesed*. So those words are eerily similar, and that's on purpose.

In our English Bible translations, we see that as steadfast love or sometimes loving kindness. I think the CSB uses loving kindness. That attribute of God, it combines love and generosity and promise-keeping faithfulness all into one idea.

It's not something that God does, but rather it's an expression of who God is. David doesn't receive God's *hesed*, his steadfast love, because of anything that he's done.

[14 : 42] He continues to receive it because it's God's nature. This is grace. It's not earned or deserved. It's freely given because that's just how God is.

So, God is *hesed*, and because David receives that free gift from God, he's able to turn to others and respond in a similar way. That makes David *hasid* or *godly*.

Do you see how those words are relational and they work together? You can't be *godly* without God. So, verse 4, David says, David is experiencing firsthand the pain of living in a broken and fallen world.

It's a far cry from God's ideal of human flourishing that we first see in the garden. It's not sinful to be angry when we can see relationships bruised by the effects of sin.

We should be mad. Things are not the way that they should be. But, don't let go of the rest of what David's saying here. The same two-sided advice continues on.

[16 : 14] David himself won't let that anger spill over into sinful actions. He's able to see how these men slandering his name are wrong and sinful, and still, his only action is to continue to trust in the Lord and be diligent to remember his steadfast love, his *hesed*.

So, the other side of the coin there is, if his aggressors would hear David and take his advice to heart, they would stop.

They would just stop pursuing the lies and false words against David, and they would turn to the Lord. In the last section, David echoes the lament of others.

In verse 6, he says, There are many who say, Who can show us some good? We should hear that little chime in our head when we hear this, that little ding.

Kids, any of you guys still awake? Yeah? Do you guys remember in the Bible, do you guys know where the first place the word *good* is used?

[17 : 23] Page numbers? Anyone have a page number? Do I get it? Yeah. It's real close. I'd say one, maybe two. If you've got a lot of commentary in the beginning, it's probably...

If you're in a study Bible, there's so much. You have to flip a lot. Yeah, it's in the garden, right? So that word is *to*. And remember, it's not just a generic good, but it's like, what's good for human flourishing?

Those around David are seeing how his situation is playing out, and it seems no one is flourishing. How can there be any good when everything looks this bad?

So far, David has turned. He's complained. And now we're going to see the third component. He's going to ask boldly.

Verse 6. David says, Lift up the light of your face upon us, O Lord. So David is referring with this line. He's referring to number 6.

[18 : 24] It's known as the Aaronic blessing. And we'll look at that maybe if I had that in the slides. Maybe not. I'll read it to you. It says, The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel.

You shall say to them, The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.

So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them. Do you guys see what's going on here?

Do you get it? David isn't asking for God to make his face shine on himself. This is a blessing for all Israel. David's response to reviling isn't to revile in return.

It's to bless. It's a surprising turn that I wasn't expecting. Here's the last step of lament David's going to choose to trust.

[19 : 37] Verse 7, he says, You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound. David recognizes that God is the true source of lasting joy and meaning in life.

It will not be found in the many blessings and good things that we receive. Despite the suffering he's going through, David's current situation will not be affected or reduce that joy.

This is an ultimate joy, not an earthly one. David's ultimate joy in life is his relationship with God. Verse 8, In peace I will both lie down and sleep.

For you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety. Earlier I mentioned that Psalm 4 is sometimes referred to as an evening psalm.

So maybe David is lying awake and after tossing and turning in bed, thinking about what he's going through, he's able to turn to God, complain, ask, and trust.

[20 : 41] He's moved from grief to comfort, pain to peace. That's the purpose of lament. David's joy and meaning in life are defined by his righteousness, his right relation with the Lord, not his current situation.

On one hand, life is hard. That's a reality that we're not going to escape. We'll all feel at some point, feel the pain and brokenness of living in the reality of a fallen world.

We may, like David, be slandered and feel shame. Sin stains all aspects of the human experience. But, like we're reminded in the end of Lamentations, the Lord reigns.

God is good and sovereign over all things and always will be. So a paradox is two ideas that are both true but seem to be in opposition to each other.

Do you guys know? I was trying to figure out a good way to describe this. Have you guys ever seen the tag on a pair of Levi's where it's got two horses and the horses, there's a rope tied to the pants and they're going each way?

[22 : 03] That's a paradox. Thanks. Hopefully, you won't ever look at pants quite the same way. But it's like holding two ropes and the ropes are being pulled like the pants and in order for you to stay right where you're at, you have to hold on to both.

If you let go of one rope, you're going to be drug off in the opposite direction. So here's the paradox. Why would a good and loving father who can do whatever he chooses allow people to experience pain and suffering?

So we've got our two ropes. On this side, you've got God. If you let go of God, you'll be pulled into despair. That joy that David was talking about, that comes from God.

His relationship with God, you have to hold on to that rope. You must not let go of God. To let go of the other tension, that's pain and suffering.

And that's not possible. We've all felt the realities of this and even though we wish it weren't true, it is. So our two tensions here are our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with the world and others.

[23 : 25] Biblical lament is how we can hold the tension of that paradox. As we continue to walk towards Jesus, even when we can't see what lies ahead, it lets us move our focus from our current and broken situation to the one who one day will redeem all brokenness.

How do we do that? How do we lament like David? You think. You think about your relationships, both vertical and horizontal, and you really think and ponder like he did.

And it's okay. It's okay to be angry or hurt or sad when your horizontal relationships feel broken or fractured. Don't mask or try to cover those feelings up.

Just really try to understand just how bad it really is. But like David, don't sit in your shame. Or loneliness and become bitter. Keep turning to God and handing that to him.

Like David, our joy doesn't come from our present circumstances, but from our vertical relationship with God. David knew that sin separated him from being in right relation to God.

[24 : 39] David lived under what we call the Mosaic Law. So that's God's law given to his people. And spoiler alert, nobody was able to perfectly follow it. But God has always shown his steadfast love, his hesed.

In an act of mercy, God gave them the sacrificial system so even when they failed, by offering a sacrifice, they could get back in right relationship with God. David was reminded of that mercy every time he failed and had to humbly return to God with another sacrifice.

A constant cycle of failing and receiving mercy. And failing and receiving mercy. That's how David was able to hold on to that tension that God was truly good.

But on this side of the cross, we can see the single greatest expression of God's love and faithfulness to his creation. It became a visible reality. We get to look upon Jesus hanging on the cross as the ultimate display of love and faithfulness and generosity.

But it certainly doesn't look like love, does it? But remember Psalm 4. There are many who say, who will show us some good?

[26 : 01] Certainly those who witness the Son of God lay down his life would have said the very same thing. Where is the good? This certainly doesn't look like human flourishing.

What good could come from this? But along with Jesus' death, we also get his glorious resurrection and ascension. He's now seated at the right hand of the Father.

Though everything on that terrible day looked as if all hope was lost, it was actually the beginning of something brand new. Hope springs eternal.

God continues to work his plan of redemption in unlikely places. In life, we won't answer every what if and why question.

We won't check off every box on our list of concerns. But if you are in Jesus, He has redeemed you through His suffering. Jesus, by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead, has taken your sins upon Himself.

[27 : 15] And He became sin on your behalf. And not only that, but He also put His righteousness or His right relation with God on you.

So that because of Jesus, you are now always in right relation with God. He has permanently secured our vertical relationship with God.

a once and for all sacrifice for your sins. Brothers and sisters, because of Jesus, you can firmly hold on to that tension that God is certainly good.

But you can't maintain your grip by your own strength. If it were that way, you would surely let go. I know I have it on good authority that we have a bunch of up-and-coming ninjas around.

How long, Evan, how long do you think you could hang on from one of those bars for? Three minutes? Three minutes is a long time.

[28 : 27] But it's also a long distance between three minutes and forever. But because of His mercy, Jesus is the one holding on to you.

He will never let go. There's no love that's greater than that. So how do we respond then, like David, in our horizontal relationships?

Why don't we just let go and fall into the loving Father's arms? I want to turn to Jesus' words from John 17.

So this prayer, it sits right between the Passover meal and the Garden of Gethsemane where He's ultimately arrested. Verse 15, it says, I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

[29 : 35] For their sake, I consecrate myself that they also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Jesus isn't praying for those who follow Him to be zapped up into heaven and be free of suffering. He's saying, keep holding that tension. You are here for a reason.

There's purpose and meaning for you right where you are, even through your suffering. Those who believe in Christ are joined to Him in mission also.

Being a Christian is a holy vocation. We have a job to do. And the reason Jesus was sent into the world is the same reason why we're still here.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, verse 21 is talking about you. That all of the believers throughout time will be joined into one body, one big C church.

[30 : 52] And that the mission of those people, that's us, is to share the gospel so that the world will believe that Jesus really is the Son of God. And you can't do that if you're not in the world.

This is right where we live, right here in this sometimes messy and broken place, trying to reflect the light of Christ into the world. But we freely receive God's steadfast love, His hesed.

His grace and mercy is our new everyday. Because of that, we have the ability in Christ to live in a godly way. We can work on our horizontal relationships.

We can bless those who revile. And we can share with others the joy that we have because of God's mercy and grace to us. When we walk through suffering, it reminds us how much we need Jesus.

It breaks down any pride in ourselves that might make us think we are better than others or that we can stay in a right relationship by our own works. We recognize that the value and worth of God's mercy to us through the work of Jesus is greater than we could have ever imagined.

[32 : 04] Biblical lament should be part of our everyday walk with the Lord. It's how we can ponder in our hearts like David and be angry that the world isn't the way it should be.

We may be walking around bruised by our suffering, but we can ultimately choose to trust God like David did. Like Marie the blind girl in World War II France, let's be prepared for what we cannot see.

Let's continue to run our fingers through the Psalms and become familiar with them so that we can use them as touch points to help us navigate the ups and downs of life. Life is hard.

God is good and loving. Let's keep choosing to trust in Him. Lord, we just thank You for Your steadfast love.

We thank You for being the same. Lord, we thank You for Your mercy and Your grace to us. And we know that You supply just what we need.

[33 : 19] Lord, I just pray that we just would continue to turn and to trust and to ask boldly. Lord, as we just approach this time of communion together, I pray that we could just take a moment of silence and reflect.

Reflect on Your love and Your character. Reflect on everything that You've done for us in the past so that we can continue to boldly trust You even when we don't know what lies ahead.

Jesus, we thank You for Your humility, for emptying Yourself, for putting on flesh and entering into our suffering.

Lord, we know that You're the one that holds on to us. In Your name we pray. Amen. Amen.