

L A M E N T

CRYING OUT
IN FAITH

CHRISTINE M. CHAPPELL



P U B L I S H I N G

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31-DAY DEVOTIONALS FOR LIFE

A Series

DEEPAK REJU

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For Brianna

May you always pray
and never give up (Luke 18:1)

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How to Nourish Your Soul

A LITTLE BIT EVERY DAY can do great good for your soul.

I read the Bible to my kids during breakfast. I don't read a lot. Maybe just a few verses. But I work hard to do it every weekday.

My wife and I pray for one of our children, a different child each night, before we go to bed. We usually take just a few minutes. We don't pray lengthy, expansive prayers. Usually we're brief and to the point. But we try to do this most every night.

What do you see in these examples? Although they don't take long, these practices are edifying, hopeful, and effective.

This devotional is just the same. Each entry is short—just a few tasty morsels of Scripture to nourish your hungry soul. Add it to your daily Bible reading. Read it on the subway or the bus on your way to work. Read it with a friend or a spouse every night at dinner. Make it part of each day for thirty-one days, and it will do you great good.

Why is that?

We start with Scripture. God's Word is powerful. Used by the Holy Spirit, it turns the hearts of kings, brings comfort to the lowly, and gives spiritual sight to the blind. It transforms lives and turns them upside down. We know that the Bible is God's very own words, so we read and study it to know God himself.

Our study of Scripture is practical. Theology should change how we live. It's crucial to connect the Word with your struggles. Often, as you read these devotionals, you'll see the word *you* because Christine speaks directly to you, the reader. Each reading contains at least one reflection question and practical suggestion. You'll get much more from this experience if you reflect on the texts, answer the questions, and do the practical exercises. Don't skip them. Do them for the sake of your own soul.

Our study of Scripture is worshipful. Maybe you're going through a difficult season. Doubts. Frustrations. Loneliness. Sickness. Heartache. The pressure of life and the inner turmoil of your soul create regular misery. What can you do? How do you wade through this mess and come out the other side? This is where biblical lament becomes vital for your survival. In your hurt or anger, you can turn away from the Lord. And things will only get worse. But by God's grace, if you pivot, and turn to God, and express your troubles, your cries turn into an act of worship. Faith drives you to the throne of grace to unload the burdens that you can't carry on your own. The authors of Scripture can teach you lament, because it's on most every page. Lament is an act of worship, and every one of your personal laments communicates to the Lord that "I can't make it through this life without you."

If you find this devotional helpful (and I trust that you will!), reread it in different seasons of your life. It will help remind you of God's goodness and power and promises whatever your griefs and pain. So, work through it this coming month, and then come back to it a year from now, to remind yourself about what God and the gospel teach us about cultivating a life in Christ.

This devotional starts you on a wonderful journey in which you'll grow in Christ. After you finish reading (and rereading) it, if you want more, you'll see more resources listed at the end of the book. Buy them and make good use of them.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Deepak Reju

Introduction

ARE YOU DISCOURAGED by disappointment? Languishing in loathing? Do you live with fresh loss or lingering depression? Are you feeling shaken by change or racked with guilt and regret? Carrying a chronic burden with no immediate end in sight? Do you fear the future? Are you facing an enemy? Feeling forsaken . . . forgotten . . . *alone*?

Do you wonder if it's possible to grieve honestly yet still hope earnestly in Christ?

That was my experience. Somewhere along the way, I bought into the notion that it's wrong to be anything other than happy. Grief wasn't something we talked about when I was growing up. My panic and depression often felt overwhelming, and I looked for relief first in the prescription pill bottles on top of the fridge, then in all the wine and liquor I could find.

I wish I could say that salvation brought an immediate end to my emotional struggles, but it didn't. Yet in the years that followed, I discovered that God *wanted* me to bring my anguish before him in prayer; he invited me to cry out in faith and find refuge in him, not a bottle. As I meditated on the psalms of lament in particular, the Spirit helped me to express difficult thoughts and emotions to God. The more I spoke to him honestly about my troubled spirit, the less disillusioned I became when my problems did not resolve.

To this day, the Lord continues to use my study and practice of lament to help me “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Whatever the occasion for *your* pain may be, God extends the same gracious help to you now. He will be your comfort and strength as you draw near to him through prayers of lament—he's gone before you to give voice to your unhappiness in his Word. It's not unfaithful to pour out your anguish to him as the psalmists

did (see Ps. 62:8). The Father wants you to cry out in faith to him when you're distressed (see Ps. 50:15).

Our hurt wants a hearing and our heartache a healing—God knows that neither do well to be silenced or ignored.

In the pages that follow, it's my aim to help you process your pain with the Lord through *biblical lament*. This prayer language gives voice to pain and grief so they can be heard and healed. It enables us to cry out to God in such a way as to promote emotional authenticity while maintaining our reverence. And that's the tricky part of praying to God in pain—it's not natural for us to hold our hurt and Christ's hope simultaneously, let alone humbly! It's far more common for us to blow up at him or bottle up our emotion in our distress. But prayers of lament give us a third, redemptive option—through them, we bow down before the Lord in trust as we bring all our troubled thoughts and feelings to him.

Talking honestly with God about pain is hard enough. But actually trusting him in it? That might sound beyond your reach today. You may have significant faith-related questions and doubts as a result of what he's permitted in (or hasn't removed from) your life. The Lord may seem more like the source of your strife than the solution to it. If this is the case, know that your pain will find a voice in this book. While any believer can benefit from what I've written in this devotional, it's especially aimed at those who feel discouraged, confused, or forsaken in their affliction.

More than finding a voice for your pain, however, my goal is that you'd also find a fresh sense of hope in your sorrow. Life in a broken world is hard, and we're not going to gloss over the reality that evil, sin, and death touch us all. Yet biblical lament does more than honestly acknowledge our suffering—it teaches us to bring our grief before God without surrendering ourselves to despair. I won't be serving you well if we stay stuck in commiseration for thirty-one days, as if unresolved sorrow were the *truest* part of your story. Rather, I want to help you see Jesus more clearly from where you stand—both as the Man of Sorrows who

understands your grief, and as the risen Redeemer who sustains your hope. As you practice bringing your pain to him in lament, he will teach you how to hold truths about “earthly things” and facts about “heavenly things” in tension (John 3:12). Suffering is hard and sorrow is real, to be sure. But neither is ultimate, because Christ reigns supreme over all.

The next thirty-one days have been carefully crafted to take you on a journey. Specifically, we’ll be walking through the same psalms of lament that have ministered to me in grief. As we explore the language of lament in the songbook of God’s people, we’ll also discover some of the major theological facets that undergird these desperate cries of faith. These facets are organized into five devotional sections that trace lament’s *groan*, reveal Christ’s *gospel*, savor God’s *grace*, discover his *goals*, and direct our eyes to the hope of *glory* that awaits us in Jesus. Before you work through these readings (and their reflection prompts), consider inviting a trusted friend, mentor, counselor, or prayer partner to walk with you through this book—someone who can intercede on your behalf when words fail or grief feels heavy.

Since lament is *prayer language*, the more you practice it, the more fluent you’ll become. But perhaps you’re not even sure what lament is—let alone how to practice it! To support you on your progress toward fluency, I’ve included a brief introduction to lament that offers a concise, memorable framework for crying out to God in faith. Reference this as you practice lamenting to God on your own in the coming days and weeks.

But recognize also that your performance in prayer is not on trial here. Indeed, you may find that some of your grief is “too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). You might not feel comfortable letting hard thoughts or emotions come to the surface, or even know how to explain the anguish you’re feeling inside. Even so, know you have excellent backup. Jesus and his Spirit are interceding for you (see Rom. 8:34). In your pain, you do not groan alone.

Learning to Lament

WHEN GRIEF, ANGER, OR ANXIETY arise within us, lament provides a pathway to take refuge in God through prayer. But how exactly does that work? While not offering a strict formula to follow, the psalmists tend to move through four major movements as they cry out to God in faith. They address the Lord, voice distress, petition for help, and almost always include an expression of confidence or praise.¹ Unlike a formula, these movements are *fluid*, meaning they don't always happen sequentially, nor do they appear in equal measure from psalm to psalm. Still, it's helpful for us to name them. These faith-filled movements show that while the specific content of laments can vary, their aim is always the same: bringing anguish to the Lord in trust.

Learning the language of lament can feel intimidating at first. When I first started studying and practicing lament,² I wanted a simple way to remember these movements in my own prayer life. For me, they served as markers on the pathway—ones that moved me through my distressing thoughts and feelings toward a posture of humble worship. After giving it some thought, I realized that turning to the Lord through lament is like *evacuating* to high ground when waves of sorrow swell. To capture this mental picture of taking refuge, I settled on the acronym EVAC:

E: Engage God

V: Voice complaint

A: Ask for help

C: Choose to trust

Over the next thirty-one days, you will be prompted to practice lament on your own. Let this acronym serve as a guide as you grow more familiar with the language the psalmists use in

these kinds of prayers. Though our survey of thirty-one different psalms together will offer deeper insights into these four movements, Psalm 13 offers a helpful example of EVAC at work:

- Engage God: “How long, O LORD?” (v. 1)
- Voice complaint: “Will you forget me forever?” (v. 1)
- Ask for help: “Consider and answer me, O LORD my God” (v. 3)
- Choose to trust: “But I have trusted in your steadfast love” (v. 5)

While other laments in the Psalms aren’t always as linear, David’s prayer in Psalm 13 shows the general trajectory of taking refuge in the Lord through authentic yet reverent prayers about pain.

If you want to explore biblical lament further, you can use the psalms in this devotional as a springboard for personal study. Read each psalm in its entirety and look for EVAC at work. As you go, note the various phrases the psalmists use for each movement (and even borrow them as you need to!). Over time, these movements will become familiar markers on your pathway—leading you honestly before God in prayer and deepening your faith in his steadfast love.

HEARING THE GROAN
OF LAMENT

DAY 1

Groaning for Words

My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long? (Ps. 6:3 NIV)

WHICH IS EASIER for you to describe: the situation you're in or the anguish you feel? Perhaps your current story includes disease, disorder, disability, disunity, divorce, depression, or even death itself. While talking about the facts may seem simple enough, articulating how you truly *feel* about your troubles may present a bigger challenge. Sometimes words aren't sufficient to explain our inner world. Sometimes our thoughts are so dark and despairing, we dare not try to speak them aloud—let alone speak them to God.

In moments like that, prayer can feel out of reach. Rather than drawing near to the Lord, we may hesitate to approach him at all because we cannot name the “great anxiety and vexation” within us (1 Sam. 1:16). Crying out in faith can feel burdensome, as though God only welcomes tidy prayers and composed hearts.

Thankfully, prayers of lament are not full of pretense. And sometimes, they're not even full of words! Take Psalm 6, for instance. First, David opens his prayer by addressing the Lord (see v. 1). Next, he tries to express his pain (see v. 2). But by the time he gets to today's verse, his words have all but sputtered out. So great is his grief, all he can manage to pray is “How long, LORD, how long?”

In the original language, the syntax of verse 3 is just as broken as David is¹—his cry of faith is incomplete and nonspecific. Yet notice how he remains God-facing. His words fail, but his communion with God persists. Though sorrow leaves David unable to say more in the moment, he continues to engage the Lord through his groan. This is instructive for you today as you come before the

Lord in prayer. You can bring your broken cry to God in faith because he knows your heart, even when your words run dry.

Lament is how we pray when trouble renders us speechless.

Whatever you're facing right now, you don't have to fully describe how you're feeling in order to engage the Lord in your sorrow. He's not waiting for you to find the "right" words to explain your inner turmoil. If all you can manage to pray is a borrowed cry from David's lament, trust that the Holy Spirit will pick up where you sputter out (see Rom. 8:26). The Lord gave us lament so that we might remain God-facing when anguish leaves us with nothing but groans. You may not know what to say—but he knows what you mean.

Reflect: What past or present situation is distressing you today? How would you describe the anguish you feel in response to this situation? What is the "How long?" question you most want to bring before the Lord today?

Reflect: Do you sometimes feel unsure about talking to God in your grief because you aren't sure what to say or how to say it? In Matthew 6:6–8, Jesus reminds us that we do not need to speak "many words" for the Father to hear us and know what we need. How does this truth alleviate the pressure to "perform" in prayer? What might it look like to approach God honestly even when words feel inadequate?

Act: Biblical lament is the practice of engaging God in prayer during times of distress. That means talking to him about your pain and anguish—something that can feel intimidating or uncomfortable at times. Borrow David's words from Psalm 6:3 and use them as a springboard for prayer today. If additional words fail you, remain before the Lord and entrust your anguish to him.

DAY 2

Groaning for God

*Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you
hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps. 10:1)*

IF YOU SPEND enough time around children, you'll eventually hear one say to another, "Why did you do that?!" Sometimes it follows a stolen toy, an unkind word, or a shove that seemed to come out of nowhere. The question is rarely asked after careful reasoning. It's the instinctive complaint of someone who feels hurt.

In today's verse, the psalmist speaks to God in a similar way—his question is more about voicing complaint than gaining understanding. He protests that the innocent suffer violence while the wicked prosper and say, "God won't see—he's hidden his face!" (see v. 11). Why does the Lord—our "very present help" (Ps. 46:1)—seem so far away when such evils take place?

Lament is how we cry out to God when he feels distant in our suffering.

This complaint cuts to the quick of a common problem: pain that's compounded by God's perceived lack of consideration or care. Sometimes the deepest pain is not the suffering itself, but the sense that God is absent within it. We long for our Father's nearness, yet in our grief he can feel painfully far away. We seek his face . . . but find shadows. We look to him for pity . . . but see none. Grief deepens as God seems indifferent to our distress—like he's withholding the help that we need. *Hiding himself.*

The appearance of divine neglect, paired with the absence of deliverance, may be a source of tremendous pain for you today. *Why cry out to the Lord in faith, you might wonder, when he appears to stand far away?* But as the psalmist shows us, this perception isn't reason for resignation. His felt sense of God's distance does not

preclude his prayer. Lament is for times when our faith feels confused—it helps us bring our complaint about God to God himself.

Yesterday, we normalized our struggle to find words for our pain. Today, we normalize our struggle to *find God in our trouble*. When you grapple with a sense of God’s neglect, resist the temptation to break communion with him through silence. Bottled-up hurt makes a heart bitter, not better. Faith persists in crying out for God, even when he seems nowhere near (see Matt. 27:46).

Reflect: In your sorrows or struggles, how much of your pain comes from the situation itself, and how much comes from the feeling that God is distant, silent, or indifferent to you? How has that perception affected your prayer life in this season?

Reflect: Sometimes we hesitate to cry out for God in faith because we harbor unspoken or unaddressed doubts about him in our hearts. What doubts about God’s care do you have today? Which aspects of his character (for example, his goodness, wisdom, sovereignty) are you struggling to believe right now—and why? How might those doubts be shaping the way you interpret your circumstances?

Act: When God feels distant, our instinct is often to withdraw from him in silence. The psalmist shows us a better way: He brings his complaint to the Lord in prayer. Make Psalm 10:1 personal today by filling in the blanks: “Why, Lord, do you stand far off in _____? Why do you hide yourself when _____? Lord, it hurts that _____ is happening, but what hurts even more is that you seem _____ (far away / uncaring / hidden / silent).” Expand this prayer through journaling, as the Spirit leads.

DAY 3

Groaning for Mercy

*Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak
with sorrow, my soul and body with grief. (Ps. 31:9 NIV)*

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, my friends and I played a curious game of strength—one that I now question the wisdom of! The idea was to interlock hands with an opponent and then try to twist and squeeze each other's bones until someone surrendered. This was a game in which the strongest player "survived," while the weaker one suffered the shame of defeat (and the occasional sprain). To the players, a cry of "Mercy!" meant that you had finally hit your breaking point. Your pain and discomfort had become too overwhelming to bear.

Maybe today your whole life seems like an unrelenting game of "Mercy!"—one in which you feel constantly twisted and squeezed by a power stronger than yourself. Perhaps your tolerance for pain and suffering is about to expire. Maybe you've hit your limit and feel defeated. We see this reflected in Psalm 31, as David laments his multifaceted troubles. As "affliction, enmity, physical distress, social rejection, slander, and conspiracy" hit him all at once,¹ David's anguish becomes as overwhelming as the problems themselves. He can't take it anymore, so he cries out to God, "Be merciful!"

Or, in other words, "Have mercy!"

As today's verse shows us, the intense pressure David was under had a negative impact on his *whole person*. Both his body and soul were wasted by grief; sorrow skewed his perceptions and sin sapped what remained of his strength (see v. 10). This dynamic rings true for all of us: When troubles overwhelm our ability to cope, they weaken *all* that we are as physical and spiritual beings.

What we need in these moments of weakness is fresh mercy from God—either relief from the pressure or strength to bear it a little longer.

When it feels like we might break, lament brings us to the throne of grace for mercy.

If there's anyone who knows what it means to suffer beneath overwhelming pressure, it's Jesus Christ. The night before his crucifixion, his soul was *overwhelmed* with sorrow to the point of death (see Mark 14:34). The next day, the Romans had to twist and squeeze his bones out of joint in order to nail him to a tree (see Ps. 22:14). And yet Jesus despised the shame of this temporary defeat—he endured unparalleled pain—so that when life becomes too much for you, you would have a merciful High Priest who understands your weakness (see Isa. 53:11; Heb. 4:15; 12:2). So bring all your pressures and pains honestly before the Lord today. His throne is not one of condemnation but one of grace where mercy and help are freely given (see Heb. 4:16). Remember that at the peak of his overwhelming misery, Christ was securing mercy. Not for himself, of course.

But for you.

Reflect: What toll have your troubles taken on your body (changes to your health, appetite, sleep, energy, mobility, concentration)? On your soul (changes to your desire to pray, fight sin, pursue faithfulness, read Scripture, attend church, serve others)? What weakness most needs God's mercy today?

Act: Find a quiet place today and pray through Psalm 31:9–10 slowly. Name the specific pressures weighing on your body and soul, then ask the Lord for fresh mercy—to grant you either relief from the burden or strength to bear it a little longer. End by thanking Christ that his throne is one of grace, not condemnation (see Heb. 4:16).