

An Introduction to Lament

By Dr. Justus Ghormley

What is lament?

Lament is a form of prayer found throughout the Bible, especially in the book of Psalms. It is a strange, surprising gift from Jesus. He gave us this gift so that we could give voice to our deepest suffering, pain, and despair. Jesus wants us to express these emotions to him in faith. The language of lament is often distressing, sorrowful, and angry. These emotions can seem antithetical to the hope we have in Jesus. Yet, biblical lament shows us that even these emotions are pathways to God. Jesus himself models lament. Dying on the cross, he cries out lamenting words from Psalm 22: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Lament is an Act of Faith

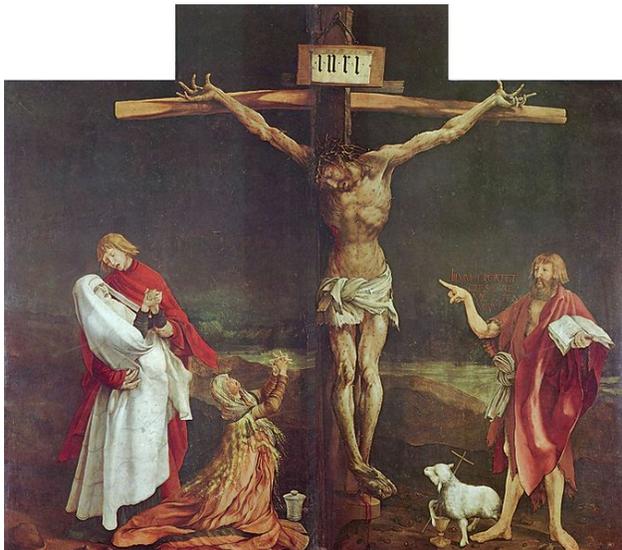
Lament is prayer to God—and as such it is an act of faith and an act of hope. When we suffer greatly, we could turn away from Jesus; lament allows us to turn to Jesus in the midst of suffering, long before we see a way through. And turning to God is only possible through faith: we must first believe that God is good, that He loves us, and that he can work all things for good.

“...in the midst of suffering, hope takes the form of arguing and wrestling with God.”

- Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Katongole (Kampala, Uganda),

Lament is the Place Where Hope Emerges

In the psalms of lament, the singer often oscillates from deep agony to radiant hope back to sorrow and despair. This teaches us that lament and hope go together. Hope emerges as we bring our suffering and despair to Jesus; and hope comes and goes as we work through our pain. Traumatic suffering leaves people speechless. Lament gives them words when words cannot be found. The very act of lament prayer is thus a sign of hope and a beginning of healing.



Mathis Gothart Grünewald – Crucifixion
1512-1516