

The Laments of Women in the Bible

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Day One

Biblical lament is the honest and often raw expression of our pain and sorrow before God, and a striking example of this is Hannah. In 1 Samuel 1, we read that Hannah longed for a child but was barren. If that pain weren't enough, she was constantly reminded of this and ridiculed by another woman.

Maybe you have also experienced the intensified suffering of being mocked in your troubles. And it wasn't just one time; verse 3 says this happened year after year. Hannah found herself in a cycle of suffering she couldn't get out of. Finally, she went in bitterness of soul to the tabernacle to weep and pray. In verse 15, she described it as *pouring out her soul to the Lord*.

I love that phrase. Often when I am hurting, the pain wells up within me, and I can feel so heavy and burdened. But just like a glass that is full and ready to spill over, when we come to the Lord in our grief in prayer, we have the opportunity to pour out our souls to him, to bring our burdens to his feet, to share everything we are feeling and thinking.

Now, this is not always a pretty process. It wasn't for Hannah. I bet we would describe this as "ugly crying," not just a sweet dab of the eye when teary, but she held nothing back. The priest Eli was so repulsed he thought Hannah was drunk. But the Lord is not repulsed by our messy expression of need! He delighted in Hannah's prayer.

Psalm 62:8 instructs us to pour out our hearts to the Lord. Friend, what are you holding today that is heavy and burdensome? Do you feel like you are about to crack or burst? The Lord bids you to cast your cares on him because he cares for you.

Pour out all your pain and brokenness before the Lord today. Tell him how you feel, your fears, your disappointments. The Lord draws near to those who humbly come and seek him. He invites you to spill out your suffering and let him carry your burdens.

Day Two

Do you ever wonder if God sees your pain or hears your misery? We are looking at glimpses of the laments of women in the Bible. In Genesis 16, we read the story of Hagar. We find her running away from her mistress after being mistreated.

Hagar experienced the loss of her homeland, Egypt, when she was given as a servant to Abraham and Sarai. Here, she is newly pregnant, and what was first joyous, now seems treacherous as the relationship with her mistress dissolves in bitterness and jealousy. She has been mistreated and runs away into the desert.

I imagine Hagar felt so alone and afraid. But in verse 7, the Angel of the Lord, a figure representing God, comes to her. In verse 11, the Lord tells her she will have a son, and his name will be Ishmael which means "the Lord hears." What did the Lord hear? He said he had heard Hagar's misery. It is

unlikely that Hagar had a relationship with the Lord before this point, but God says all the groans of misery Hagar faced, he heard. God entered into her pain and reassured her he knew, he understood, he heard.

When you are mistreated or are facing circumstances that seem perilous and out of control, know God hears you. He understands the back story and all you face, and he draws near.

Interestingly, after God names Hagar's child, she turns and gives God a name. She says, 'You are the God who sees me.' She names him "The God who Sees." Isn't that comforting?

Hagar goes on to say, "I have now seen the One who sees me." God hears our pain and he sees. He cares and enters our pain. For Hagar, knowing God was near her in her misery was the turning point in her relationship with God.

The Lord sees you today too, sister. He hears and is ready to meet you in your lament. Draw near to the Living God who sees and hears you.

Day Three

Have you ever experienced such bitter circumstances that it feels like the Lord is against you? Naomi did.

In the book of Ruth, we read Naomi and her family were forced to move to a different country and culture because of a famine in their homeland. Just imagine packing up two children with your husband and leaving everything you ever knew to start again in a new culture. But shortly after arriving, Naomi's husband died. After being there 10 years, her sons married, which probably seemed hopeful and joyous. However, any joy was short-lived as both of her sons passed away too.

At this time in history, a woman with no husband, no sons, and no extended male family members had little chance of survival. Not only did Naomi face abject poverty, but all her hopes and expectations for what her life would look like fell to pieces. After coming back to Israel, she quickly tells those who once knew her to not call her Naomi (meaning pleasant) but Mara (meaning bitter). In Ruth 1:20-21 we get a glimpse into how Naomi viewed God in her suffering. She says,

Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me (Ruth 1:20-21).

Interestingly, Naomi's lament isn't one directed to God—she doesn't come to him with her burdens, but she does attribute her troubles to him. I think this lack of coming to God is what allowed the bitterness to grow.

Have you been there? Have you experienced extreme loss and found yourself thinking, "Why would God allow such bitterness to come into my life?" If you are in this kind of suffering today, where it feels like the Lord has dealt you a lot that is more suffering than you can handle, keep reading the book of Ruth. In Naomi's suffering, all she could see was the loss, but throughout the book, God shows that he had not forgotten Naomi. He was actively working for her good. By the end of the story, the people around her are praising God because of how he redeemed Naomi's story and brought joy. Friend, in the depths of your pain, don't let bitterness grow. Bring your pain to Jesus. He will walk with you through it and is at work even now for your redemption.

Day Four

What do the women of the Bible teach us about lament? Often when I think of lament, I think of casting the burdens of life at the Lord's feet. But the Bible also instructs Christians to lament their sin.

In Luke 7, a woman does just that. We don't know much about her, not even her name. The main detail we are given is she had lived a sinful life in that town. In the verses that follow, she comes to Jesus weeping, her tears dripping onto his feet. She dries his feet with her hair and then anoints them with precious perfume. This was not only a display of worship, but a display of lament over sin.

Notice the most important part though—she does not hide from Jesus when he comes to town; she does not wallow in self-condemnation and pity; she doesn't turn to other things to dull the pain of conviction. No, she comes to Jesus with her sin. That is the difference between Satan's condemnation and the Spirit's conviction.

Condemnation focuses my eyes on my sin where conviction of the Spirit focuses my eyes on my great Savior's ability and willingness to forgive. Condemnation tells me to run from God and hide, but the conviction of the Spirit calls me to draw near to Christ. And Jesus graciously welcomed her saying, *your sins are forgiven* (Luke 7:48); *your faith has saved you. Go in peace* (Luke 7:50).

Dear sister, what do you do with your sin? Do you ignore it or try to hide it? Do you defend it or seek to justify yourself? Does shame overwhelm you? Christ is calling you to rightly mourn your sin and agree that it is wrong. But you are called to more than that.

Come lament your sin and worship the one who forgives it. Come and receive the truth of the Savior for all who come to him in faith, your sins are forgiven. Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.

Day Five

As we continue to look at glimpses of lament from women in the Bible, today we come to Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Shortly after Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph presented him at the temple. While there, a man named Simeon was led by the Holy Spirit to recognize baby Jesus as the long-awaited and promised Messiah. He prophesied Jesus would cause the rise and fall of many. But then Simeon turned to Mary and told her another prophecy: that a sword would one day pierce her own soul as well.

If you are a mother, you know how much feeling there is in motherhood. I remember having physical reactions to hearing my baby's cry. You feel the pain of your toddler's skinned knee. Mothers share the pain of a child's rejection on the playground, or the deep hurts adolescence can bring.

Mary was no different—Jesus was her Savior, but he was also her firstborn son. Can you imagine the agony she felt at the cross as she watched her child ridiculed and tortured? It was a piercing sword to her heart. And Jesus saw her pain from the cross.

When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved (John) standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son," and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home (John 19:26-27).

In Mary's deep lament, Jesus comforts her by sending her a person. This is a bit surprising because Mary had other sons and daughters who could care for her physical needs, but at this time, they did not believe in Jesus. Jesus gives Mary John as someone who can care for her soul.

Friend, one of the ways Jesus most often cares for his people in their lament is through his church. We are called to bear one another's burdens. Will you give a fellow believer the privilege of walking with

you in your pain? I pray today you and I will look for opportunities to care for others who are hurting as well as receive the care of the saints ourselves.