

# HOW TO WRITE YOUR OWN PSALM OF LAMENT

Lamentation, a prayer for help coming out of pain, is very common in the Bible. When we hurt physically, we cry out in pain; when we hurt religiously, we cry out in lament. A Psalm of Lament is an address to God: a complaint, a request, and usually an expression of trust. Types of complaints include: concerns with the psalmists own thoughts and actions, concerns with the actions of an enemy or prevailing attitude, and concerns with God's action or inaction. They are cries of despair, anger, protest and doubt. They are the largest class of psalms and were a normal part of Israel's praise and worship. There are communal psalms of lament and individual ones.

They follow this general structure:

1. Address and introductory cry: Identify the Lord as the person to whom the Psalm is addressed.
2. Complaint or Lament : Articulate the problem and ask the Lord for help.
3. Confession of Trust: Verbalize your trust in the Lord.
4. Prayer for Deliverance: Request deliverance, or God's intervention in the problem.
5. Praise: Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's many blessings.

## **Psalm 4**

### **Address and introductory cry**

*1 Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer.*

### **Complaint or Lament**

*2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods?*

### **Confession of Trust**

*3 Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord hears when I call to him.*

### **Prayer for Deliverance**

*4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.*

*5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.*

*6 Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us.*

*7 Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound.*

### **Praise**

*8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

Individual psalms of Lament include: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142.

Corporate psalms of Lament include: 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129.

### **Application**

Take some time and reflect on how the last week (or a time frame of your choice) has been for you. Make note of the predominant emotions you have been feeling during this time, in particular the more negative ones. Reflect on a particular situation or recurring theme that you know has been causing you distress, pain or anxiety and that you feel is beyond your control. Imagine that God is with you and that He has given you complete freedom to lay it all out, to complain fearlessly without judgment, in order to get it all off your chest.

With a piece of paper and pen, invite God's presence and follow the steps outlined below.

1. Address and introductory cry: Identify the Lord as the person to whom you are addressing your complaint.

Request for His presence as you express what is on your heart.

2. Complaint or Lament: Articulate the problem you are wrestling with. Detail how it is affecting you, the pain it is causing, and ask the Lord for His help.

3. Confession of Trust: Verbalize your trust in the Lord. Share your hopes that He will come to your aid, that He will be present with you in your situation.

4. Prayer for Deliverance: Request deliverance, or God's intervention in the problem.

5. Praise: Offer praise and thanksgiving to God for God's many blessings and faithfulness.

There are many different definitions of spiritual formation. A definition that describes our approach comes from Dallas Willard, who describes spiritual formation in the tradition of Jesus Christ as "the process of transformation of the inmost dimension of the human being, the heart, which is the same as the spirit or will. It is being formed (really, transformed) in such a way that its natural expression comes to be the deeds of Christ done in the power of Christ."

Spiritual formation is not something that we do to ourselves for ourselves, but something we allow God to do in us and for us as we yield ourselves to the work of God's transforming grace in us, and also in the world around us.