



2.18.24 Honestly Facing Our Humanity | Psalm 13

How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

**²How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?**

These first two verses of Psalm 13 are expressing deep pain, longing, and hurt. He is feeling abandoned by God and overwhelmed by his sorrow. And defeated.

Such gut wrenching honesty. We may not know what this poet is wrestling with but he is expressing it honestly.

Taking his emotional pain and rawness, pouring out all his sorrow and confusion...

...and dumping it all right at the feet of God.

But he isn't done. Then he continues to push and demand in the next verse,

³Look on me and answer, Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
He pressures God to answer him, to do something or he will die! He demands God to no longer remain silent, distant, or aloof to his pain.

The pain is too great. He can no longer remain silent. And he must bring it to the only One who can do anything about it.

This gives us a perfect example of biblical lament.

Lamenting and exploring what that means to us as Christians will be part of our Sunday morning Lenten journey.

If you are feeling some heavy emotions like anger, fear, or grief to name just a few; this Lenten series might be a great source of comfort and encouragement in your walk with God.

If you are not currently struggling with heavy emotions, we are grateful. And yet this Lent might still be a great source of insight and wisdom for when the next storm hits your life or the life of a loved one.

Biblical lament. “Lament” may be a new word for many of us. What does it mean?

Do you have to wear sackcloth and ashes to lament properly? Is it just an ugly gripe session? A time to vent and complain loudly in prayer?

Lament is prayer expressing our sorrow, grief, pain, suffering or confusion to God. And trusting God will listen, comfort and encourage.

But how can we know if our prayers were okay or out of bounds? Does anything go?

Life often gives us teachable moments. Recently, I found an interaction to out of bounds during the Super Bowl.

I don’t know if you were watching the game when Travis Kelsey raged against Coach Reid on the sidelines. I was absolutely stunned at his behavior!

And I like Kelsey and Taylor Swift and all that. But at that moment, when he let fly, it wasn’t right. And you could tell it caught the coach off guard too.

And after a day or two, Kelsey has admitted he was rude and we seemed ready to move on.

But one sports writer mentioned maybe we shouldn’t be so quick to ‘Shake It Off’, notice the Taylor Swift reference? Maybe Kelsey could take some time to become more self-reflective and self-aware.

And I thought, we should invite Kelsey and Coach Reid, all the Chiefs to go on our Lenten journey together. They need Jesus too.

It just seemed like a fitting and timely example. When we express ourselves honestly to God in prayer, how can we see into our own hearts and behaviors to know if our interactions with God were okay or if they have crossed a line?

N.T. Wright’s teaching can help. He is a well-known English New Testament scholar and Anglican Bishop. He’s worth listening to.

Wright compares two examples of the Israelites in relating to God. One is through complaining and the other is through lamenting.

One is not acceptable and crosses a line and the other is an invitation to intimacy and honesty with God.

Let's see if we can catch the distinction.

When the Israelites first prayed to God in the wilderness, they had just entered the desert after fleeing Pharaoh and his army. They had just been quite dramatically rescued from certain death and miraculously brought through the Red Sea.

Big movements of God in their lives.

And in light of all that care and grace filled provision, they now worried and complained about the smaller concerns of lack of bread and meat and water.

Immediately they assumed the worst about God. Wishing God would have just left them to die in Egypt. They were testing God, putting Him on trial.

Listen to Exodus 16:3, **"The Israelites said, "Why didn't God let us die in comfort in Egypt where we had lamb stew and all the bread we could eat? You've brought us out into this wilderness to starve us to death, the whole company of Israel!"**

That's a bit ugly on their part. Only thinking of their bellies and their own comfort.

But now compare that with how the Israelites later interact with God in Psalm 13.

The poet, symbolizing Israel, still asks questions of God, bringing his pain to God, and even demands answers from God. But he did all of that based on who God is. We see this in the final two verses...

"But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me."

This person was mindful and acknowledging God's unfailing love, salvation and goodness. He could praise the Lord even in the midst of his pain.

Complaint maligns, tears down, and casts a shadow of doubt on God's character. But a lament is an appeal to God's character, a confidence in God's goodness and love.

Both are honest, raw, and emotional. One response is self-focused and entitled. And the other response honors God. Complaint versus lament.

Hopefully that equips us to discern a little better our own prayers. Better able to discern what is acceptable or crossing a line. Maybe?

I remember a time in my life that I didn't know if I was going to survive. I doubted I would come through it in any way whole and functioning. My mother had just passed away. My best friend and greatest cheerleader.

God hadn't answered any of my prayers for my mom. He certainly didn't heal her.

And so, when she passed, my world imploded...it collapsed violently inward. I entered maybe three years of deep and unrelenting darkness and grief. Three years pain and disillusionment with God.

And my relationship with God was severely tested.

And I don't think I was very respectful in my pain. I didn't hold the line. I wasn't looking for any line to hold. Honestly, I probably "enjoyed" bowling right over any lines real or imaginary.

Pain makes us messy. We lash out. In our pain we often hurt others. And I had God in my crosshairs. Mid-meltdown, in our pain and suffering; we can't think as clearly or rationally as N.T. Wright.

But I don't believe the Lord is looking for us to be rational. I believe the Lord understands our strong emotions. God has emotions. We were created with emotions.

Jesus, as a human, had a full range of emotions including intense pain and suffering. Jesus gets us in every way.

And I believe the Lord would rather we come to him venting our emotions, raw and loud, crossing lines, instead of waiting until we figured it all out.

Because if we waited until we had it all figured out...we might not ever come to God at all.

Looking back on those three years and being emotionally honest. God didn't destroy me or abandon me or say I had to clean up my act in prayer. God welcomed me in all my messiness.

Instead, I encountered God as God. Learned more about how God is extremely patient and perfectly gentle, His presence is a real comfort in pain and grief, extending peace that sustains.

I learned how God holds us together when we fall apart.

For a season, all I could pray was, "**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me!?**" Those words of Christ on the cross gave me permission to pray in all honesty and rawness. To get out all the ugly grief and sorrow.

Learned the Holy Spirit is a very real balm to our souls.

I think it's safer to direct our powerful emotions towards God, he can handle them. Than say...emotionally blow someone up!

I learned God wanted me to pour out my heart before him. And I found God there, waiting for me. Receiving my prayer, accepting it, accepting me fully.

Where in your life are you waiting for God to deliver, rescue, or heal? Have you lost a loved one? Are there test results you are waiting for?

What happens in your heart and soul when the war continues to rage in the Ukraine and the Gaza strip?

When we see so much need, so much pain, and suffering all around?

How do you manage those strong emotions in your relationship with God?

As we begin our Lenten journey, how might lament guide us? How might we engage in lament and pray our hurts back to God?

Lament could deepen our relationship with God, even proving we have a relationship. Lament could become for us a pathway to greater intimacy with God.

In the next 40 days, we might find God good. We might find God will lead us faithfully through our valleys of difficulty.

May this Lenten season and our prayerful honest lamenting...be the good gifts that God intends them to be. May we receive their blessing. Amen.

Time of Reflection: Taking a few moments to reflect on Lent and our opportunity to lament.

Are you open to walking with God during Lent? Are you open to being emotionally honest in your prayers? Share that with God.

We also have another way for you to respond to God, after the service. Notice this wonderful cross the Worship Design Team created.

Its a place we invite you to write down some strong emotions, a difficult situation, or even a sin. Just a word or two.

We have slips of paper, in the shape of nails, "nail" it on the cross. Give it to God...asking God to help you face it emotionally honest and help you come through it.