

DARK
CLOUDS



DEEP
MERCY

LEARNING TO LAMENT

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SERIES INTRODUCTION

Mark Vroegop says,

"To cry is human, but to lament is Christian."

(Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy, p26)

And so that's what we are going to learn to do together - Lament.

"Lament?", I hear you asking. "Why would we start the year with this topic?" Well, why not? Lament is part of the Christian life, but it's part that we often avoid. As a society we generally avoid the hard and painful things of life and focus on the good and beautiful. But we regularly face hard and painful times in life, no matter how old we are. And if we aren't experiencing hard or difficult times personally, someone we know likely is.

The Psalms are prayers that cover all the emotions of life. They don't avoid the hard and painful but bring these emotions to God in a very real way. So we are going to spend these first 4 weeks of term looking at some psalms of lament to learn the pattern of lament. Our aim is that we might all deepen our relationship with God as we learn to come to him in the raw emotions of our life, as we question and wrestle with life.

Lament not only helps us to voice our pain and questions to God but teaches us to sit in the tension of this pain, while knowing that God is good. As Mark Vroegop says,

"Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust."

(Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy, p28)

When we lament, it helps us to remember our hope as we turn to God and are reminded of who he is.

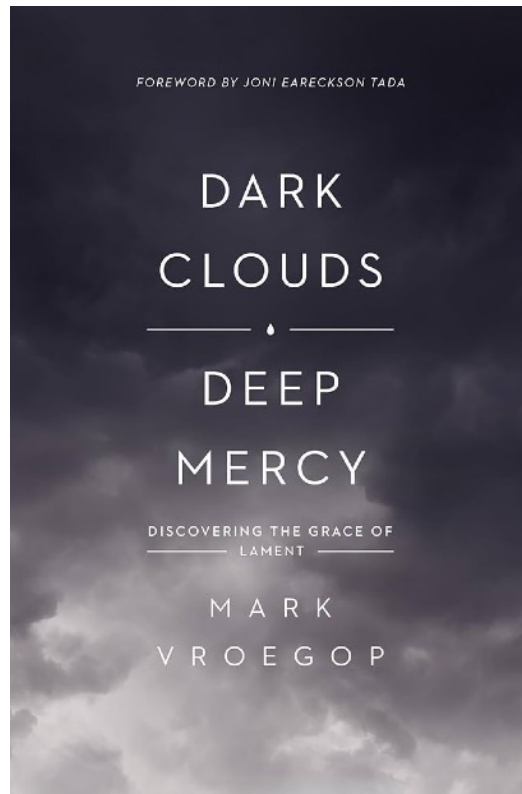
Lament psalms often follow a pattern:

- Turning to God
- A complaint
- A request or asking God for action
- An expression of trust in who God is

Over the next 4 weeks we will look at these 4 aspects of **Turn**, **Complain**, **Ask** and **Trust**. In each study there will be time to read the psalm and see how it teaches us to lament, as well as some time to write your own lament. There are also some digging deeper

questions that you can use as a group if you have time or individually throughout the week.

These studies are designed as a starting point in learning to lament that will hopefully be a life long journey for us all. If you want to read more on this topic we'd recommend the book ***Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy***, by Mark Vroegop.



WEEK 1 || FOLLOWING SUNDAY 28 JAN

KEEP TURNING TO PRAYER

(Psalm 77)

OPENING QUESTIONS

When was the last time you cried?

Who taught you how to cry?

READ PSALM 77

1. Can you identify the verses where the psalmist turns in prayer?
2. What sort of language is used in this turning? What mood do you think the psalmist is in?

APPLY IT

7. Can you think of a time when you were in pain, whether physical, emotional, relational or spiritual. How did you interact with God in that time?

8. What stops you from turning to God in prayer in the hard times of life?

PRAY IT

As we will see over these 4 weeks, laments have 4 key parts to them—**Turn** (which we looked at today), **Complain**, **Ask** and **Trust**. We want to learn to pray this way, no matter what is going on in our life at the moment, because there will be a day when we will be lamenting but also, we want to be able to pray with others in their pain. So today we are going to focus on turning to God in prayer.

Take some time now to start writing a prayer of lament by turning to God. You could use some of the words of a psalm. It could be just one or two lines or it could be longer. But take time to make it personal.

Now pray it with your group.

NOTES/SPACE TO WRITE YOUR LAMENT....

WEEK 2 || FOLLOWING SUNDAY 4 FEB

BRING YOUR COMPLAINTS

(Psalm 10)

OPENING QUESTION

Do you complain much? What do you often complain about?

"Life is filled with a variety of suffering. Pain comes in many forms. Lament speaks into all the sorrows of life - no matter how small or big... The longer we live, the more pain we see. God could intervene, but there are times - many times - when he chooses not to. That's the tension of complaint."

Mark Vroegop, "Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy", p47

READ PSALM 10

1. This psalm is full of pain and emotion, what hard questions does the psalmist ask of God?

2. What frustrations does the psalmist bring to God about others around him?

NOTES/SPACE TO WRITE YOUR LAMENT....

3. What are the changes that happen during the psalm, particularly at those points?

DIGGING DEEPER

4. What is the path that this lament takes? How does it start, where does it take us, and where does it lead us to?

5. How do you feel the people would have sung this psalm?

APPLY IT

The thought of lament is something that doesn't come naturally to us. Even the word is pretty foreign to us, and sometimes, we have difficulty approaching God in this way. David in this psalm, is approaching God boldly. He's bold in all he states and asks for.

6. What are the feelings that go through your heart and mind when you think about bringing your problems to God? Are you bold, or are you reluctant?

7. Why do you think it might be important to be bold in your laments?

PRAY IT

We've been asking you to have a go at writing a lament. This week as we look at asking boldly, we are going to add to our prayer of lament with any requests we have. Again, you could use some of the words of a psalm. It could be just one or two lines or it could be longer. But take time to make it personal.

Now pray it with your group.

NOTES/SPACE TO WRITE YOUR LAMENT....

WEEK 4 || FOLLOWING SUNDAY 18 FEB

CHOOSING TO TRUST

(Psalm 13)

We've come to the last of our lament studies, and we've learned to

- Keep turning to prayer
- Bring our complaints
- Ask boldly

And now, we need to ***choose to trust***.

OPENING QUESTION

When have you recently felt you couldn't control the situation and you had to trust? How'd you feel about that situation?

READ PSALM 13

1. Looking at this psalm as a lament, what are the 3 main parts of the psalm?

2. Where is the transformation into choosing to trust?

3. How does this transformation come about by the use of a simple word?

4. What is the psalmist's lament?

5. Where do they end up with the psalm?

DIGGING DEEPER

6. What happens if someone never moves to this final step of choosing to trust?

NOTES/SPACE TO WRITE YOUR LAMENT....

Appendix 1 from “*Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy.*”

TWENTY COMPLAINTS

Laments contain various complaints expressing struggle, questions, outrage, and frustration. The following passages are examples of the unique complaints found in the psalms of lament:

WHY?

1. Why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? *(Ps. 10:1)*
2. Why does the wicked renounce God and say in his heart, “You will not call to account”? *(Ps. 10:13)*
3. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? *(Ps. 22:1)*
4. I say to God, my rock:
“Why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?” *(Ps. 42:9)*
5. For you are the God in whom I take refuge; why have you rejected me? Why do I go about mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? *(Ps. 43:2)*
6. Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! *(Ps. 44:23)*
7. O God, why do you cast us off forever?
Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? *(Ps. 74:1)*
8. Why do you hold back your hand, your right hand? Take it from the fold of your garment and destroy them! *(Ps. 74:11)*
9. Why then have you broken down its walls, so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit? *(Ps. 80:12)*
10. O Lord, why do you cast my soul away?
Why do you hide your face from me? *(Ps. 88:14)*

HOW?

11. O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me. *(Ps. 3:1)*

12. How long, O Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their destruction, my precious life from the lions! *(Ps. 35:17)*
13. How long, O God, is the foe to scoff?
Is the enemy to revile your name forever? *(Ps. 74:10)*
14. Remember this, O Lord, how the enemy scoffs, and a foolish people reviles your name. *(Ps. 74:18)*
15. Arise, O God, defend your cause; remember how the foolish scoff at you all the day! *(Ps. 74:22)*
16. O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? *(Ps. 80:4)*
17. How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? How long will your wrath burn like fire? *(Ps. 89:46)*
18. Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants! *(Ps. 90:13)*
19. O Lord, how long shall the wicked, how long shall the wicked exult? *(Ps. 94:3)*
20. How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? *(Ps. 137:4)*



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