**Dr. May Young, Purposes of Biblical Lament, Working Through an Example – Ps. 42-43, Session 3**

This is Dr. May Young in her teaching on the purposes of biblical lament, working through an example, session three. So welcome back. And in this lecture, I'm going to talk about the purposes of biblical lament, as well as walk through an example of a practice of how we can see within scripture and deal with lament for a specific situation in that sense.

So as we think about this and get into this topic, I want to first start us off, as you know, when we're talking about the purposes of biblical lament, I want to sort of here provide the context of how we live in a fallen world. And even as Christians, as believers, we know that through the cross, Jesus has given us hope beyond the grave. So here our hope doesn't necessarily fall in this world.

But at the same time, we do live in this present world. And so, we experience life with God in the imperfect nature of the world, with suffering and the things and the fallen nature of the world. And so sometimes, if we're honest, we can see that even our future hope of faith doesn't always bring us the comfort that we want at this particular time.

And so, what we're going through something in terms of suffering, you know, we read the scripture and we know that joy comes in the morning. But sometimes that ache in our soul is not satisfied. And so, how do we think about that? And so I think this is where the role of lament comes and helps us, and so helps us to engage God now.

And so here, instead of waiting for this future hope, we can actually move towards hope as we lament here and now. So, practically speaking, lamenting is a multifaceted means which God has graciously provided to help us process the brokenness and the fallen state of the world in which we reside. So, whether experienced through pain or loss or injustice, however that is, is that God has provided us this tool and this means of us to engage him as we are living in a difficult world and a world that's fallen and full of suffering in this way.

And so I think that the lament has various functions. And so that will help us to move towards wholeness and greater hope. And more specifically, at this time, I'd like to talk about three general categories in terms of the purposes of lament that I want to walk us through at this time.

And so the first one here is to give voice to our pain. And I'll talk about that in just a moment. And then to provide an avenue to engage God, and then ultimately to lead us into greater hope.

And so here this is what I think, as I kind of think about lament here, some of the purposes that we can look to in this way. So, the first one here is to give voice to our pain. And so this is, again, an acknowledgement of our pain.

And so, we can't deal with what we don't acknowledge. And so, again, I would liken this to, you know, the first step towards healing. So, a lot of times, you know, we can't find the healing unless we kind of expose our wound or kind of show what exactly we're dealing with.

And a lot of times, if you think about that from a physical standpoint, you go to a doctor, you know, sometimes you have to actually take that step, that first step, to actually see a doctor to figure out what's going on. And sometimes if we left something festering for a while, it could get pretty ugly. But we have to go ahead and make ourselves vulnerable, show the doctor what's happening here to acknowledge our pain, to acknowledge that there's something wrong, so that we can actually get on the right course of how to deal with that pain.

And so, a lot of times we think of, you know, God as the great physician here. He's our healer in that sense. And so, coming towards him in the sense of kind of acknowledging the pain that we have here.

And so for some reason, Christians have equated spirituality with being happy or fine so that we believe that being happy actually sometimes honors God more. That could be something that, you know, we don't even realize that we think that, but sometimes is that something that's underlying here that we think that being happy is what would bring greater honor to God instead of actually really being real and acknowledging in this way. What we don't realize that is, ironically, when we silence our pain and doubts, we actually weaken rather than strengthen our faith.

And so here, instead of kind of, you know, dealing with it, we're weakening our faith in here. So, this is a quote that's, you know, faith is not displayed in a soul that doesn't struggle. In fact, biblical faith is one that is strengthened more through trials than through well-being.

Suffering is often a process of refinement that purifies us and brings to the surface our true emotions, sins, fears, doubts. Instead of suppressing or covering these emotions, we need to learn to be honest. And so here, you know, it's not about a faith that doesn't struggle, but here kind of it's strengthened in this way.

So, we have to be people to say that we're OK to live authentically before God and ourselves and others. And so we have to be willing to grieve the losses and the pain. And so it's very biblical.

And so here, even in this example in Acts 8, it talks, there are lots of examples in scripture where it says, you know, here a devout man buried Stephen and made great lamentation over them. So, there's a real sense of displaying emotions. It's not about, you know, kind of, you know, taking it in and sucking it up, but actually displaying emotions here and grieving loss and dealing with those things as well.

And so, scripture gives us even examples of that. And so when we acknowledge our pain, even if it's temporary, we create a space for God and others to enter in to the healing with us. So here, you know, kind of when we are acknowledging these things, we're actually opening ourselves to engaging with God as well as engaging with others.

And so, part of giving voice to our suffering is to give ourselves this permission to feel. So, however, we tend to silence our pain and stuff our emotions for various reasons. So here, kind of learning here to give our sense of emotion, this permission to heal.

And so, this is Kathleen O'Connor in her work here on Lamentations and the Tears of World says the first condition for healing is to bring the pain and suffering into view. Only then can they be examined, allowed, and given their due. Demand their due, they will.

They will neither diminish nor disappear until they are met face to face. Pain kept from speech, pushed underground and denied, will turn and twist and tunnel like a ferret until it grows in those lightless spaces into a violent, unrecognizable monster. And so here, kind of, you know, dealing with pain here instead of letting it grow and fester, just as we would want to do that from a physical standpoint, we also don't want to deal with that in an emotional standpoint as well.

So, kind of you, also when you're giving voice to your pain, you're no longer letting yourself sit in this like an echo chamber in your own mind. So, a lot of times when you're kind of dealing with emotions or pain, you're also kind of alienating yourself, and you have within your own mind or echo chamber, these emotions or things that you're dealing with. And so, when you're giving voice to your pain, you're allowing the Lord to speak into that echo chamber in that way and allowing him to speak into the depths of our hearts as well.

And so that's important as we think about that, too. So, it's, it's, it's not a coincidence that cognitive psychotherapy has linked healing from trauma with verbal and written narrative retelling. So that's kind of interesting, too.

So even when we think about, you know, trauma, people dealing with trauma, when we think about psychotherapy, you know, there's something powerful about verbal and written retelling or narrative. So, kind of in a lament, kind of an extended version here. So, June F. Dickey notes that the cognitive therapist helps their patients reconstruct their trauma memory through retelling, whether through written or verbal means, and then removes the associated negative emotions while integrating it into the person's personal biography.

And so here, kind of thinking about that, there's some power of retelling and things that we retell ourselves, kind of the instead of just echoing in our echo chambers in this way. And so in this way, this helps the trauma victim reclaim their narrative. There's something about a sense of agency in this.

And so, giving them a voice. So instead of keeping the memories buried and subconsciously wreaking havoc, the victim actually can face the pain and grieve and move towards transformation. And so instead of stuffing it and not knowing how to move on when you're retelling, when you're giving voice to this pain, you're actually having agency and actually allowing yourself to be able to process and to move forward in this way.

So, creating the trauma account not only serves to restore agency to the victim, but it reduces the sense of isolation, providing opportunity to be heard by someone. And so there's something powerful here as you have someone to witness your pain and recognizing this as well. So this process allows us to regain control or agency.

So viewed in this way, lament is also an act of resistance. And so here when we think about lament here and giving voice, it's also an act of resistance. So, when people are suffering, they often feel powerless.

So, a lot of times people feel powerless when they're suffering. They feel voiceless. And so through lament, you're actually giving voice to that pain so that it's taking away that that voicelessness or that powerlessness that that one feels.

But so, lament, you're reclaiming our emotions rather than giving our pain and suffering the final word. And that's important for us here as we think about great moving towards greater hope and kind of kind of reclaiming that in that sense as well. So, this quote here, here is just Judith Herman observes that in her work on trauma victims here, that reclaiming the ability to feel the full range of emotions, including grief, must be understood as an act of resistance rather than submission to the perpetrator's intent.

And so here this is important, too. In her work, she found that when victims of trauma, whether through abuse or other forms of violence, were able to lament and feel their emotions, they were able to move forward even without closure from their perpetrators, which is amazing here. She notes that as grieving process progresses, the patient comes to envision more social, general, abstract processes of restitution, which permits her pursue to her just claims without ceding any power over to her present life to the perpetrator.

So, the restitution is in no way exonerating the perpetrator of his crimes. Rather, it reaffirms the survivor's claim to moral choice in the present. So instead of staying stuck in the cycle of self-harm, resentment, shame and depression, the survivors are able to heal and make progress without being resigned to a continual subjection under all that they had to endure.

I think that's really important, too, because sometimes when we're not dealing with this, you know, that the suffering and the abuse and all the things has the final word over us in this way. And so instead of giving that power to that, as you lament and you restate that, it's sort of an act of resistance, a way of extricating yourself and not giving the final word to the suffering that you had to endure in that way as well. So another way here is that lament gives voice to a people in pain.

So not only does it give a voice to the individual who's suffering and dealing with these situations and pains and in some ways, act of resistance in some ways, finding healing and moving forward, you can also see that on a more corporate level. So giving voice to a people in pain. So, laments help communities to understand those who are in pain and to stand alongside them as well.

So here, kind of as we've seen before here, even though we may not have endured or been touched by that situation, we can see and acknowledge the people who are in pain because pain can be very isolating. So, when people are going through that, it could be isolating whether they feel isolated or they isolate themselves here. So those who are going through pain can feel isolated in a sense.

So when we're in community and we're recognizing and seeing others and they're standing with them and solidarity with them, it actually brings comfort to the sufferer in this way. And this is where in the Book of Lamentations, I think this is instructive as we think about this, is that in the Book of Lamentations, in the first chapter here, you have this suffering Lady Zion or Jerusalem. And what you find in that first chapter is she is calling out to someone to witness her pain.

So, there's actually this kind of precedence of someone who would see the pain that she's doing. So in Lamentations 112 is calling out there, you know, is there any pain like my pain? She's asking for those who are passing by to see. And so additionally, there's this refrain in this first chapter that's repeated five times.

It says there is no comforter. So here, kind of four times here in the chapter here, further depicting the isolation that Lady Zion is feeling. So she does.

She feels like there's no comforter. There's nobody who's seeing her pain in this way. And so we recognize when we recognize the pain of other people and we see them in their pain, it actually helps us to stand with them.

And it could actually broaden our perspective of others as well as of the world as well. So, we can see that. So here again, Kathleen O'Connor says the voices of Lamentations urges the readers to face suffering, to speak of it, to be dangerous proclaimers of the truth that nations, families and individuals prefer to repress.

Then they invite us to honor the pain muffled in our hearts, overlooked in our society and crying out for our intention, attention in other parts of the world. So corporate lament then reminds us that we live in a world full of suffering here, but we're not alone. So, we can suffer alongside those here and helps us to kind of realize how to be there for people during times of suffering and to suffer collectively in this way.

So instead of normalizing systemic injustice by turning a blind eye, acknowledging them through lament helps the community to give greater voice to pains that have been suffered. And so here it's important for us because I think sometimes when we hear the news or we're going through difficult things, you know, or we hear all the things that are happening, we can be so overwhelmed. We don't even know what to do.

And we just think, you know, I'm just one person. How do I like, you know, deal with all the injustice that's happening out here? And so, this is I feel like this is where, you know, when we lament together corporately, we're not normalizing. We're not saying it's OK.

We're not saying this, you know, systemic injustice is OK and that we're turning a blind eye or we're just too we have to numb ourselves because it's too overwhelming for us. But we're acknowledging through lament. But it's not just acknowledging here.

So here it doesn't end with acknowledgement alone. This act of communal lament is also an invitation to make a change. And so when we lament corporately, we're not just saying that these things are evil, but we're also inviting change.

We're saying that there's something wrong and that we want to have a change. And so when the community comes together to acknowledge the pain collectively, it speaks truth to the injustice and evil and pain. So you have you know, you're standing with brothers and sisters.

You're saying that this is not right. You're inviting a change. You're speaking truth to injustice, to, you know, evil, to pain.

So lamenting as a community functions not only as a call out of evil and speaking truth, but advocating for those who are suffering. It also opens the way towards healing. And so this is a very powerful example here.

And he write in his book Evil and Justice of God speaks about this commission for truth and reconciliation that happened in South Africa in the following way. So this is what he says. He says, though most Western journalists have taken little notice of it, the fact of white security forces and black guerrillas, both confessing in public to their violent crimes is itself an awesome phenomenon.

And with those confessions, the families of tortured and murdered have been able for the first time to begin the process of true grieving and thereby at least to contemplate the possibility of being able to forgive and so pick up the threads of their lives instead of being themselves overwhelmed and continuing anger and hatred. And so here kind of coming together, lamenting together actually brings about hope, actually recognizing here that we can actually move forward instead of being stuck in all of these things that, you know, the evil and injustice that have occurred in that sense. So, individuals and communities must stand together here to acknowledge the brokenness of our world and so that we can make steps towards healing and bring about change.

And so here giving voice to a community to bring about that kind of change that people of pain in that way. Then this brings us to the second purpose that I think is is to provide an avenue to engage God. And so here, not only giving a voice to our pain individually and collectively, but also to provide us an avenue to engage God.

So here, suffering, pain and anger and other emotions can cause us to retreat. And so we've talked about that here a lot of times when we're going through pain. The one thing that we want to do is disengage instead of engaging.

And so here it can be very subtle. Sometimes it could be even, you know, doom scrolling or, you know, looking at, you know, kind of binge watching Netflix or doing just different things because we don't want to face, you know, some of the things of the issues that we're dealing with. And so that can actually result in apathy, you know.

So as we're doing these things, instead of moving forward, we're kind of disengaging and becoming more apathetic. And so, again, this is where James Gross, this study found that when we suppress our emotions, it closes down our relationships and further disengages the individual. So, people who suppress their emotion often are reluctant to share their emotions and usually avoid close relationships.

And so that's important for us. So, recognizing that within yourself, you know, are you kind of closing down? You know, are you kind of spending more time on your Internet phone or phone or scrolling or binge watching and kind of disengaging with people instead of really engaging God or engaging others in this way? And so that's why biblical lament is important for us. So, we have so many examples of laments in the book of Psalms that the Psalmists are not too afraid to cry out to God here with their emotions.

And we see kind of a variety of emotions that the Psalmist is willing to bring. So instead of dealing with it in a more apathetic way, they're actually engaging God, whether it be through, you know, about regret or anger or, you know, depression. They're actually displayed in their prayers and how we can see that.

So, some people would actually argue, you know, if God knows us so well, you know, why do we need to lament? You know, if he knows everything about us, why do we even have to express this? And so I think this is a misunderstanding about lament. So lament is more than just pouring out our feelings and emotions before God. It's an act of faith where we're turning to God instead of away from him.

And so, lament demonstrates that we're not alienating ourselves from God, which can often be this tendency when we're going through difficult times. And so that's why it's important. So, you know, lamenting here is sort of saying that we're engaging God and we're kind of dealing with God even in the midst of our pain and wanting to deal with God.

So here providing this avenue to engage God in the midst of our pain as well. And so how it helps us to turn to God rather than turning away from him. And so this act of faith is inviting God into our struggle.

And so here, whether it's pain or doubt, this is exactly kind of what we see even in scripture. So even the example of Job here. So, he's recognizing his pain and instead of heeding to what his wife is saying, you know, curse God and die.

He actually engages God in his kind of distress and kind of his emotions and here and vulnerability before God. So even though we're sinners, we can approach God. And so this is kind of important for us as we think about giving it an avenue to engage God.

So here we can come as we are. So even though we are sinners, we don't have to put a mask on or to pretend or come in any way here. But we can actually approach God in a very vulnerable way, recognizing our weaknesses, pouring out our needs before him.

And Jesus, who is our high priest, has been tempted in every way, assures us and reassures us that we can come and that we have an invitation to come before God and that we don't have to, you know, carry our burdens alone in this way. And so we don't have to be afraid to engage God. And so here, most importantly, lament is an act of faith because we're approaching God, believing that he can make a change in the situation that we're facing.

So, this is important, too, because we're engaging God, an avenue to engage God here. We're expressing these emotions on who with him, but not only that he walks us through the process, but he can actually make things right. So that's so it's more than just kind of, you know, expression here, but realizing that lament is predicated on the fact that God is who he is, that he's powerful, that he's loving, that he's just we're engaging God in this way and realizing who he is as we come in lamenting before him.

So because of he is who he is, we can approach him in this way. So, this aspect of faith through lament is especially highlighted in situations of evil, injustice, and injustice. And so here recognizing when we're engaging God, who we're engaging, especially when we feel powerless, especially when we feel like the evil and injustice, that we are powerless to do it, that God is actually able to.

And so biblical lament trusts God enough to cry out. So, we're not just numbing ourselves, but we're actually realizing that something can be done, and the person who can do it is God. And so we're going to engage him in this way.

And so this is where, you know, in my book, I say sometimes lament is the only and most appropriate response to the horrors that take place because some evils are so appalling that only the infinite goodness and power of God can bring about their ultimate defeat. The cry of a lament is a cry for change. It's naming the evil and the pain that has befallen us in this world.

It's hopeful and honest engagement with God in faith. And so here, we recognize who God is and that he is able to do so. So even in the midst of the horrors and the evils and injustice that we face in this world, we don't have to numb ourselves or close a blind eye, we can actually engage God in this way.

So when we engage him in this way, we experience deep communion that participates in his ultimate plan. So here as we're praying, as we're engaging God in lament, we can pray along with the Lord's prayer, your kingdom come and your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. So, we're engaging God in a deep way as we think about here some of the things and injustice that is plaguing our world as well.

So then here it leads us into this third thing that lament, one of the purposes is to lead us into greater hope. And so, the goal of lament is not to wallow in our pain. So here it's not about navel gazing.

It's not about, you know, thinking about how just sad the world is and just going sinking deeper into depression. But on the contrary, actually, it's to lead us into greater hope. And so as we lament, we're putting ourselves in the posture of waiting and anticipating God's response and work.

So we're acknowledging our emotions and asking God to step in and take action. And so that's important here as we think about this, especially as we think about biblical lament. And so many times the things that cause us pain and griefs are something that we can't do by ourselves.

You know, we don't have the strength to kind of deal with these situations here. And so, our suffering can stem from actions of other people, our own sins, things that are outside of our control. And this is exactly why we have to come before God in lamentation here, because it's beyond us in this sense.

And so, it's not surprising to hear that, you know, countless testimonies from those who suffer deeply that they found their deepest joy during times of suffering. For most, these were moments that they felt closest to God. And so here, like, you know, even as I've taught on lament and heard from different people on that, you know, sometimes it's like in the deepest pain.

And even for myself, when I've experienced that, when you experience the deepest pain, you know, there's a real sense of closeness that you can have with the Lord as you express that with him. And so sometimes I've talked to, you know, over and over again, people who, after, you know, finding some relief, they actually miss that intimacy that they felt with God during that time. I had a student in my class when I was teaching one time who shared an illness that resulted in isolation due to pain and some other things that were embarrassing in terms of side issues dealing with this illness.

And so, they were kind of isolated in some ways and they were kind of dealing with it. So, they spent a lot of time alone with God. And when she was sharing her journey with me, she spoke of deep joy that she found with the Lord through this experience.

So, it's sort of like as she pressed in in her pain and in her loneliness, she actually found deeper joy. And so the way that I liken it for myself is I think, you know, when, you know, you feel like you hit rock bottom, you're actually standing on the rock, which is the Lord. And so here finding that, you know, hope.

And so God's presence becomes real. And it came with intimacy and joy that filled her heart. And so as we lament and we come through these situations, we're engaging God and we're finding deeper hope in that way, too.

And so, kind of pressing into him as we kind of deal with these pains that we have as well. So, this waiting is not passive. So, as we're waiting, sometimes we think of waiting as being passive here, but it's actually a waiting and expectation.

So based on God's character, who he is, and what he's done, it's hopeful even in the midst of suffering. And so here, kind of, you know, it's a hopeful kind of waiting here. And so rather than displaying passive resignation or belly gazing, when we lament, we're exhibiting faith in God's character and it's his previous action.

So, this is leads to a hopeful willingness to surrender ourselves and our circumstances to him. And so this is sort of where, you know, recognizing what God has done in the past as we press in, as we're waiting here. So we live an active expectation, not cynicism.

So, it's kind of bringing greater hope to us instead of bringing greater cynicism into our situation. And so, as we're pouring out, as we're lamenting these things, you know, it leads us to renew this willingness to let God's will be done in our lives and the lives of those around us. And so, kind of a resignation and surrender that brings greater hope as we trust and wait on God in this way.

One way that Henry Nouwen writes, he says, hope is not dependent on peace in the land, justice in the world and success in the business. Hope is willing to leave unanswered questions, unanswered and unknown futures, unknown. Hope makes you see God's guiding hand, not only in the gentle and pleasant moments, but also in the shadows of disappointment and darkness.

And so, you know, this is important for us, even as we think about that, like what we think about hope. Is it just really in our circumstances or is this really a sense of surrender and bringing that before God? And so, as I think about these purposes of lament in my book, I actually, you know, walk through, you know, as I said, different ways and different examples of lament that deal with different situations. So, in doing that, I wanted to make it clear that lament is not just, you know, a flat, one dimensional kind of understanding when we think about situations in our lives.

It's not just about sadness or pain in that sense. But there's actually, you know, different ways that we can see it applied to dealing with loneliness, dealing with anger, dealing with sin. So those are some of the things that are addressed in those later chapters and kind of practical examples.

And so, at this time, I just really want to walk through one particular example that I have in my book, which is lament, loneliness, and abandonment. And so, walking through an example in the Psalms that kind of deal with this and kind of seeing the different elements, seeing how we can recognize those elements, seeing how they can actually help us and be instructive in our prayers as well. One thing that I do a lot of times, too, when I'm teaching on this is I actually have people write their own laments.

And so dealing about, you know, recognizing these kind of individual elements that are present, they write their own laments and how they see it. I'll walk through this particular one with you. You can write it.

Sometimes, you know, I've had even, you know, students who would if they're not a good writer, would actually draw out those specific elements and, you know, kind of articulate it in that way and share it in that sense. And so kind of dealing with these laments or these situations or these emotions in a different way. And there's times that I felt was very powerful was where people actually wrote these laments and they shared it with others within the community.

And then being able to pray for one another for that. And it's been very powerful in kind of seeing that. So, it's like as they share, because sometimes it's really hard to articulate, you know, some of the things that we're going through with others.

And so here, allowing yourself to be vulnerable, to share, and then also to cover one another in prayer as well, after that sharing has taken place. And so if that's something that is encouraging for you, maybe when you're walking through the elements of these, thinking about them, you know, thinking about ways that you could even write your own laments, be able to share it with someone close and be able to pray for one another in that way is a way to do it. So here, as I said, in that second section of my book, I do explore some specifics, so mainly chapters five through 10.

So, what I see is here, scripture provides us, you know, a range of examples of different laments. And so many of them kind of mention, you know, the prayers and the psalmist. There's prophets I talk about, you know, even in Book of Lamentations or different things here.

So, the topics touch on some relevant circumstances that require like practical guidance. So, this is a little bit more on, you know, we're touching on scripture, but we're also looking at some of the practical guidance in this way. And so this is to begin the conversation to show that lament is deeply rooted, a biblical concept.

And so here this is something, even though we don't necessarily hear as much in the church, that lament is very deeply rooted in terms of a concept in the Bible, and that we can actually learn from that in this way. And so in this lesson, I just want to walk through the example of lament, loneliness and abandonment, as we can see that here. So this one here is I want to begin here is that in a study in 2021 from Harvard, it reports that over one third of Americans, so 36 percent, feel serious loneliness, which means they frequently feel lonely or feel lonely almost all the time or all the time.

So that's huge. Thirty-six percent of people feel that. This study also indicates that there is an additional 37 percent of respondents who reported feeling lonely occasionally.

So, we're talking about 75 percent of people who either feel it all the time or here occasionally, feeling the sense of loneliness in this way. And so here, loneliness was pervasive across all major demographic groups. So here there is no significant difference in terms of rate of loneliness based on race or ethnicity, or gender, or levels of education, income, religion, or where they reside.

And so here kind of, you know, thinking about this lament and loneliness, loneliness is something that we all face at some point, if not always something that we feel here. And so, if we live long enough, most of us will experience at least one or more seasons of loneliness even in our own lives as well. So, scripture even tells us that Jesus experienced this when his disciples, whom he poured his life into for three whole years, fled and left him during his time of greatest need.

And so here you can see here at the cross here that he was abandoned here by his own disciples. He's poured into here. He's left to face the road to the cross on his own as well.

And so here even Jesus had times of experiences in this way. So, how can we walk through seasons of loneliness with the Lord, and how can the process of lament be instructive for us as we think about this? And so that's kind of what we want to cover here. So here I want to look and turn to Psalm 42 and 43 as we think about that.

So, there were, while there are several, you know, individual lament Psalms that speak about loneliness and struggle, I found these two to be especially helpful. And so here they're usually seen as a unit in this way because they share a lot of similar themes and both Psalms repeat this refrain that's almost word for word. So, you can find that here in those verses here.

And several ancient manuscripts actually present these two Psalms as one as well. So here, even though there are two listed in our Bible here, we can see them as a unit here. And so, both are Psalms of individual lament that give voice to the struggle of feelings of loneliness and abandonment.

And so not only from others, but also even from God. And so often our struggle with loneliness includes distance from God and we wonder if he even sees us. And so, kind of, you know, thinking about not just loneliness from other people, but even from God himself and seeing, you know, are we alone in this whole situation in that sense? And so, at times like these here, we find that the psalmist, we have questions here.

The psalmist kind of brings in this question of the existence of the nearness of God's presence. And so here we see him kind of bringing in this, you know, where is God? In the midst of this. And some commentators believe that these two Psalms might have been written in the context of Jerusalem's destruction and Judah's exile.

But we don't know enough to know the background of that. But we do know that the psalmist is just struggling with abandonment from feelings of abandonment from God and that it's not providing specific enough details to prove that that was the context of what it is. So, what is clear is that it's dealing with loneliness, abandonment.

Instead of looking for specifics surrounding this, the psalmist kind of situation and highlighting more of the general nature. So, this is where it makes it more applicable for us in any circumstances. So clearly there's a struggle within his heart that he desires to come before God, but also more in his current situation.

And so here this is kind of where we can find relevance here, even in the midst of, you know, trying to think about what is the background for that as well. So here these are the two from the NIV kind of translation here. I won't be reading it right now, but as I point out the different elements, I'll be reading certain verses from these two Psalms as well.

So, Psalm 42 and 43, if you want to take a look at that on your own as well, too, you could bring that out with your Bible. But what I want to do here is just walk through the following five elements that are characteristic of laments. And so again, I mentioned not all of the elements is going to be present in every lament and may not always follow in this order.

But here we're going to see what's present here in these two Psalms, how they differ, how they are situated, how they are presented here in these Psalms. So the address or invocation, the lamentation, petition or complaint, the motivations, confession of trust, assurance of being heard and the vow of praise. And so let's walk through these together here.

So here when we think about the address or invocation. And so the psalmist begins by addressing God through the vocative calling out to God, Elohim rather than Yahweh. So, this is characteristic of Book two of the Book of Psalms or in the Psalter.

So, the Psalms contain more Psalms that that use the word Elohim to address God. And so here just kind of thinking about the five books that are found in the Book of Psalms here, this is typical in terms of what we see in Book two here. And what stands out about this is this use of imagery of the poetic device of a simile to express his desire to be with God.

So, this compares the psalmist's desire for God as thirst. And so more specifically, his thirst to that of a deer who pants for a flowing stream. So coming back, we'll just take a look at that verse here.

So, where it says, as the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul points a pants for you, my God. And so, my soul thirst for God, the living God, where can I go and meet with God? And so here kind of this kind of coming and addressing God and addressing him in this way. And so what's interesting here, a lot of times we think of this imagery as like this, this deer quietly amongst the stream, you know, kind of drinking water.

And it's a very peaceful thing. But actually, in reality, this is a picture of desperation. It's a picture that is pretty more it's not it's actually pretty ugly.

It's not so serene and beautiful as we think about it. So it's the deer is not quietly and gracefully looking for water. It's actually about a hot day panting deer with his tongue out to cool down.

So here it's kind of like, you know, unlike humans who sweat, they're overheating. So, a deer has to pant to excrete body heat. So, if you ever felt symptoms of overheating, you recognize that it's accompanied by exhaustion, faintness, fatigue and dehydration.

So in extreme cases, it can result in the shutting down of vital organs that can even result in death. So it's sort of a place of desperation. It's not just this quiet, serene, you know, my heart pants for, you know, my soul pants for the Lord.

It's actually here, desperation, a life and death situation. You know, this person is, you know, feeling this debt. This deer is, you know, dealing with, you know, overheating, exhaustion, faintness, fatigue.

So, the psalmist is showing how he desires to turn to God in times of desperation. So, this is sort of painting a picture that this is not just a serene time. This is a desperate time for him.

So, he knows that God is the only one who can help him. And as we see later in the psalm, this is a desperate cry is expressing loneliness, pain, abandonment, weakness and despair in his soul. And so here it starts out with this picture here that we can find in here.

And then it moves into the lamentation, petition, and complaint. And so, what I want to highlight is that this psalm actually exhibits this alternation between despair and hope. So, it's not just an upward trajectory.

So that's something about lament. It's not just like sometimes that, you know, it's this process that's just going to be up and up, and you're going to be okay. Sometimes it's going to kind of display where there's alternation.

So, you could have some better days, some more hopeful days, and then you're going to come back and you're going to be feeling a little bit more hopeless in this way as well. And so this is actually a very realistic picture that we find in the psalms of those who are dealing with kind of feelings of loneliness and abandonment, because it's almost like, you know, this alternation that you feel good one second, and then the next moment you are, you know, struggling again. And so, after all, lament is a process here.

So, it's not just upward trajectory as we think about it. It's not always this consistent, you know, movement forward in this way. So there's moments when we feel more hopeful, moments when we feel a little bit more despair.

And so the psalm actually reflects this in this shift of emotions as well. So then you have here in verses two through four, it says, My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, Where is your God? These things I remember as I pour out my soul, how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the mighty one with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throngs.

And so here, here kind of presents a man who's wrestling with his desire to come before God, but feeling alone and abandoned. And so here he's kind of wrestling with his thoughts. The Hebrew literally means to appear before the face of God.

So, this imagery refers to coming before God in his temple, which is more explicitly stated in chapter 43. Coming before God in his temple also points to the psalmist's presence within the community and enjoying God's presence with others. So, you kind of see here, it's not just about coming before God, but also within the community and how he contrasts his past with how he is now alone and away from his community as well as from the Lord.

So here you see him kind of mourning his past, dealing with his kind of reflection and thinking about where he is right now in this way. And then it says, tears have been his food day and night. So, this, this literary expression paints a picture of mourning that is all encompassing.

So, the psalmist is expressing how his whole being has been swallowed up by grief and those who experience such deep grief do not eat because they are consumed by sorrow. And so here kind of talking about how, you know, he's, you know, you've been swallowed up by grief here. And so, the psalmist then proceeds to recall better days in the past as he pours out his soul in prayer.

He recalls times that he led the people of God in shouts of rejoicing and shouts of praise in the festival celebrations in verse four. So, this remembrance prompts him to speak to his own soul in verse five, which is the refrain that is repeated several more times in these two verses. And so here, even in the midst of his kind of reflection and struggle here, he comes then to bring about this refrain.

So, this refrain is what's going to be repeated in this way. And so, in verse five, it says, why my soul are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God. So, this is again in a more hopeful moments as he's seeing that as he's kind of reflecting and speaking to his kind of soul in that sense.

So, suffering can cause us to long for past times that were more pleasant. So you saw that a little bit earlier. So, kind of thing, you know, there were better days in the past.

You know, people look fast in that sense. However, instead of sinking into, you know, this depression, and when he remembers the past, he actually is kind of prompted to speak to his soul. So, this is the first time that we see this alternation between despair and this desire to move forward.

And so here, this kind of recognizing it in this way. And so, after the refrain and a brief exhortation, the psalmist returns to his lamentation. So, he presents another imagery that deals with water.

So again, this is an alternation. So, he's talking about his desperation. He's talking about some of the things that he's experienced, how things were in the past were.

And then he comes back to another imagery that expresses his, you know, his pain here. And so this time, instead of thirst or endless tears, so again, those dealing with water here, he's presenting another image that describes his feelings of being overwhelmed by sorrow. So, it's very picturesque as he's thinking and describing what he's going through.

So while the imagery of the deep sea in the psalm often points to their primordial images of chaos, which is present here as well, the phrase deep calling out to deep could also be metaphorically expressing the feelings of chaos by the psalmist calling out to the only one who understands the depth of his pain. And so loneliness can cause us to long for depth of understanding from others. And so here, when deep calls to deep.

So, when we experience the abyss of pain in our hearts, God is the only one who can fill that. So, our hearts reach out to the only one who is deep enough to fill that chasm of loneliness. And so here, verse seven says, deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls, all your waves and breakers have swept over me.

And so here, kind of this imagery here. And so here, the psalmist continues to describe this imagery of floodwaters, surging waves here. So these are practically interpreted as feelings of waves and breakers sweeping over the psalmist.

So he's describing how surging waters continue like waves that keep him under the waters in this way. So if you've ever experienced kind of being caught under the waves here, you know, a lot of times here, it's hard to even break through the surface, like to get a breath and so to catch your breath. So you feel like you have no footing.

You feel like you've kind of just lost all footing. You can't even catch your breath. All these waves are.

So, this is kind of the imagery that he's kind of picturing here for us to recognize the kind of loneliness, the way that he's feeling overwhelmed, even in his own heart. So having no footing, the waves keep coming and passing over your head. And so likewise, deep emotional pain and sorrow can manifest in physical feelings of breathlessness or palpitation, leaving us as longing to catch our breath as well.

And so here, kind of this kind of description of kind of the overwhelming pain that we can feel sometimes as well. And so here, other times, intense crying can also leave us breathless as well. These images paint a picture of one who's acknowledging real feelings.

And so, he's not trying to avoid them, but facing them head on, even though it's not easy. And so, the hardest thing about lament is working through these painful feelings instead of quickly moving past them. And so what you find here is that the psalmist is, you know, coming back with different imagery.

He's not just moving forward and saying, well, I'm just sad or I'm just lonely. He's actually kind of working through some of these emotions and thinking about them, even in different ways and different pictures, word pictures here and acknowledging how he's going through this. And so, so after a brief affirmation of God's love, he continues to question why God has forgotten him.

And so here, describing this. And then, so you kind of see this again, this alternation as he mourns under the oppression of the enemies. And so, this is the first time that the psalm speaks of enemies.

So similar phrasing and questions is repeated in chapter 43 too. So these verses actually form a frame around the experience of the psalmist with his enemies. And so it's significant because God's absence and our loneliness is felt more acutely sometimes when we see the presence of our haters or our enemies.

So, when we don't have someone in our side, we even feel more isolated and there's no advocate. So, we feel like, you know, there's no one who has our back. And so this is kind of where, you know, this forms a frame around it.

So, in 42.9, I say to God, my rock, why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? And then in 43.2, it's very similar. You are my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? And so here, kind of feeling like there's no advocate.

I feel very alone. Where's God? Where is the people, people in the past? And so kind of expressing all of that too. So he gives a description of suffering that depicts his pain.

And it's felt down to his very bones. And so it's very kind of graphic here. That is an image coupled with a verbal taunts given as even more graphic picture of agony that he feels in verse 10.

And it's here that he again repeats the earlier refrain of his soul. As mentioned earlier, these Psalms vacillate between mourning and desire for hope. And so here he's longing to be in God's presence, including his community.

But he's also feeling abandoned and rejected by God in the midst of an enemy. So here, this is kind of where he says, my bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all the day long, where's your God? Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why are you disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my savior and my God. And so you kind of see, again, this alternation, the kind of this dealing here, kind of talking about what he's dealing with in this way as well.

So as the prayer continues then in chapter 43, the Psalmist now makes known his desire for an advocate. So he's asking for an advocate. He longs for God to vindicate and pleads his case against the ungodly.

So, he asks for deliverance from deceitfulness and wicked ones while acknowledging God has his stronghold. And he again vacillates as he did. So here, he uses very similar wording to question God's abandonment from him and mourns under the oppression of his enemies.

However, instead of wallowing in his pain, he continues to petition God to send light and truth and faithfulness to lead him to a holy mountain. So, this petition is important because it shows that the Psalmist knows that it's only in God's presence that he's going to find peace that he truly desires. So, it's interesting here as we think about that and how we can see it.

So here, vindicate me, oh my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wickedness. And so here, asking for an advocate here as he's seeing that here as well.

And so those are some of that's kind of that description of the lamentation, kind of the complaint, kind of things that he's experiencing. So, you can see that element in the Psalm and all those word pictures and the ways that he's expressing himself, the ways that he's feeling loneliness. It's very honest in his depictions and things that he's experiencing.

He's laying that before God and actually also asking and requesting for God to do something. Then you have the motivation here. So here, the reasons given for God to act or move are primarily rooted in God's character as shown in his request for vindication.

So, he asked God to act because his enemies are deceitful and unjust. And so here, motivations we talked about here. Why is the Psalmist asking God to make this? He's here kind of saying this here.

He also appeals to his intimate relationship with God. So in the midst of his struggle and doubts, he continues to call God his God, his stronghold, his salvation, his rock, his exceeding joy. And so here, there is also this kind of appealing here to this relationship that he has with God.

So, this kind of motivation as he thinks about this. He also appeals to God who is one who saves and protects him because he recognizes his own helplessness before his enemies. And he calls on the one that he trusts in.

So here, even in his doubts and feeling of distance from God's presence, he's still acknowledging the reality of the relationship that he has with the Lord. And so that's important here. So even though, you know, he's asking, you know, where is God in the midst of this? You know, what's happening here? He's also at the same time recognizing that there is still a relationship.

So, he's remembering the way that I characterize this. He's remembering in the dark what he's seen in the light. And so here, it's an important aspect of lament because we can easily lose sight of our reality when our emotions get the better of us.

So sometimes we kind of, you know, don't really recognize here. So, the darkness and the loneliness can sometimes, you know, color our vision so that we can't really see clearly in this way. So, what we have is that we see the psalmist here looking beyond.

So, it's at these times that, you know, recognizing that he can look beyond and we could pray and still know that God is still our God. And that even though we feel like he's forgotten us, he exemplifies here well that, you know, that he recognized who God is and the relationship that he has with God, even in that as well. So he doesn't forsake what he knows to be true about God and his relationship with him.

So even though he feels that, he also reminds himself in this way. And so this is where, you know, this confession of trust and assurance of being heard here. So unlike, you know, other psalms, this is where it's different.

This transition from despair to assurance of being heard or confession, you know, it vacillates. So again, it's not just a straightforward trajectory, but between depression and confession of trust, you know, so the most obvious confession is seen in that refrain that we see over and over again. You know, why my soul are you downcast? Why disturb within me? Put your hope in God and I will praise him.

So again, this refrain is instructive here for us in terms of confession of trust or assurance of being heard is that it exemplifies how we can actually speak to our own souls, even in the midst of lamenting. And so here we can speak to ourselves. And so there's here, even when there's no one around.

So even when you're struggling with loneliness, even when you feel abandoned by people or by God, we can still speak to our own souls as the psalmist has kind of shown us. You can speak words of encouragement or hope. So, it's these times that we need to speak to our own souls when we feel like there's no one around and we need to encourage ourselves with what we know to be true about God.

So again, what we know in the light here, we can speak in the darkness as well. So being alone doesn't mean that you have to give way to despair or desolation. We can still speak hope in contrast to the voices that we hear as well.

So, it's easy to give way to a downward spiral of hopelessness because the voice of self-pity is reinforced when we feel like we have no one who cares for us. But this is where we need to speak our own souls here, where we have to use the word of God. And so whether it's through the psalm or speaking the word of God to our own souls, I think that's very powerful for us to actually bring us hope in this way.

And so God is a God who still saves. God is a God who still delivers. Things that we can think about even in the book of Romans here that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

And so here, speaking words of truth and hope from scripture, even in the midst of our loneliness, is important as we think about that. And so what's interesting too is that this refrain is not Mary speaking to his own soul. He actually commands his soul to hope and wait on God.

So that's important too because the Hebrew verb for hoping or waiting here is commanded. It's in the imperative form. It's not just a statement here.

It's not just, okay, you know, do this in encouragement. It's actually commanding. And so here, it's not a suggestion among several options or even a wish or a statement.

It's a command. So, it's an important reminder that we need to speak truth. So it's not just a suggestive kind of way that we think about it.

It's a command for us to trust and hope in God even when, you know, we don't feel like it. And so here, even in the midst of wrestling with our emotions and our pains, that we can speak truth to it in that sense as well. So the process of lament then is exactly that.

It's a process. So we acknowledge our pain and our longings before God, but there also comes a time when we need to command our souls to heed the truth of scripture as well. And so we need to desire to move forward and put our gaze on what God has promised and continue to promise for his children.

So, we command our souls to actively wait and hope in the Lord as well. And so here, so again here, this is where the Hebrew term for waiting also means to hope. So we're not just passively sitting around waiting and wallowing around in our emotions.

No, we're actually hoping, actively hoping and trusting that God will come through. And so practically speaking, then this means that we're going to move forward in faith by putting one foot in front of the other. We're going to do what God has given us to do with faithfulness, trusting that God will bring about the change that we are hoping for.

So, we're going to wash our face, put on our clothes, go out for a walk, call that friend, serve in that ministry and put our eyes forward to engage others even in the midst of our own pain. And so here, this is sort of where, you know, when you're processing through these things, there also comes a time where, you know, we need to speak truth to ourselves. We need to be faithful.

We need to wait on God in a hopeful, active waiting to, and being faithful to do that instead of just sitting in where we're at. And so again, it's a process. It's not always on our timing, but it's something that we can recognize as we think about that as well.

So, let's move then us to this vow of praise. So kind of thinking about that acknowledgement of God being, hearing us or kind of speaking to ourselves, this vow of praise. So this is found mostly in 43.4, where the psalmist states that he will come before the altar of God, who is his joy and delight to praise him.

And so we can see this here. Send me your light and your faithful care. Let them lead me.

Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then I will go to the altar of God. God, my joy, my delight.

I'll praise you with a liar. Oh my, oh God, my God. And so here, recognizing here this vow of praise here.

So, it's predicated on God sending his light and truth to lead the psalmist. So, the psalmist not only vows to let God's light and faithfulness lead him, but also he's going to come and praise him too. And so here as God comes and brings his light, he's going to come forward in this way.

So, there's a future orientation to this and that's important. So he's looking forward in expectation that he's going to offer praises to God. So it's not just the final, even though, you know, there's a more hopeful element here.

There is also that these verses are not the final word. You actually have the final word, that repeated refrain in the psalm. So what it shows here is that it reinforces that our emotions are fickle.

So here, even though there's hopeful moments that we can be more future oriented, there's also moments that we can still have to speak, you know, words of truth to our own hearts. And so, we can be filled with hope in one moment, but we have to continue to speak to our own souls because we can easily give way to despair. And so here, when we lament through difficulties, we're facing them honestly.

In truth, we don't deal with our feelings alone, but we're also, you know, remaining kind of hopeful in the midst of our despair. And we don't have to stay in our despair as well. And so this is sort of an example here, looking at the different elements that we found here in the book of Psalms.

And so, especially in Psalm 42 and 43. So some concluding remarks that I have, you know, even after walking through with one particular example here, is that, you know, recovering biblical lament is more than just grasping the concept. It's not just about a concept of lament here.

It's learning from scripture and letting the genre of lament inform our practice. And so here, as we look into scripture, as we look at the genre of lament, you know, as we find ourselves dealing with uncertainty and suffering that's around us, let's remember, you know, that we can learn from scripture, that scripture does help us to engage with the things that are around us. So some of the important points that I wanted to kind of bring back here is, lament is a necessary part of the process of grieving and healing.

And so here, it's important for us not to just, you know, shove it aside, not to deal with things, you know, just kind of, you know, ignore them or kind of just things that we start off thinking about, how do we actually deal with the pain? But it's actually part, it's important for us to grieve, to bring about the healing process in this way. And then also recognizing, too, that while Israel's neighbors, the ancient Near East cultures, practice lament, we have biblical lament is different because it appeals to God who knows us, cares and acts on our behalf. It's very different from what we find in scripture than what we find in the ancient Near East world.

And so it's important for us to see those differences and recognize that and to appreciate that and to recognize, you know, that we should take this not for granted, but actually come before God that he's offered us this way and these examples for us to pray during difficult times. So lament is not something that we do alone. So we can do it alone, but we can also do it corporately as a body of Christ as well.

And so that's important for us as we think about this concept, as we think about this. And so lament is not just one emotion or a uniform response. And so here, there's a variety of things that we can lament, a variety of ways in which scripture has given us examples.

And so here, it's not just, you know, a one dimensional kind of concept here. I think it's multifaceted in many ways and very deep for us to kind of, you know, delve into scripture as we think about that. And so even when God doesn't act on this side of eternity, lament helps us to move through life with hope.

And so here, what I want to say is lament is not a silver bullet. It's not here to resolve all your problems or anything like that, but it's actually here to help to move us forward from our despair and our struggles and the difficulties of life to bring us actually to greater hope. It's actually to help us here, even as we live in this world and we struggle with these things, to come before God's presence, to engage him in faith, and to be able to move forward with greater resilience and hope.

And I hope that, you know, through this time together that you're able to kind of appreciate here and to even be able to write maybe even some of your own laments in this way. And so there are situations we face in life that are unalterable. So, like the loss of loved ones, you know, there are other times where the practice of lament doesn't resolve in God acting to bring about the change that we desired.

So in these situations, lament can draw us closer to God, as we're reminded that the ultimate hope is not necessarily found here and now, but God gives us the grace and strength that we need each day. And so, you know, even as we think about the New Testament and Paul's example of his thorn, you know, God didn't take that away, but he said that his grace was sufficient. And so, Paul learned to see God's strength in his own suffering, in his own weakness in that way as well.

And so even though God may not always respond in the way that we want, we can be sure that he's going to provide us the strength that we need as we kind of bring our request to him through lament in that sense as well. And so we know that our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us eternal glory that far outweighs them all. And God never promises to give us all that we want, but he promises to give all that we need in this life and even more in the next.

So, lament leaves us to realize that what we truly need is him. And so perhaps that's why so many have experienced greater intimacy and hope in the midst of pain and dire circumstances than they should have kind of rendered them hopeless. And so here, as we draw near to God, it's not going to defeat us, but actually to bring us to greater hope as well.

Great. Thank you.