

# **Dr. May Young, Recovering Biblical Laments**

## **The Purposes of Biblical Lament, Working Through an Example, Psalms 42-43**

### **Session 3 – 6-min. Video Overview**

Sponsored by [Biblicalelearning.org](http://Biblicalelearning.org) by Ted Hildebrandt

Welcome to The Explainer. So today, we're diving into a really powerful ancient tool for dealing with pain in our modern world. It's called biblical lament.

The whole idea is that we don't ignore our suffering, but instead we learn how to turn it into a direct path toward hope. You know the feeling, right? We hold on to this hope that, yeah, things will get better, that joy is just around the corner. But what about right now? In the present moment, there's often this deep, nagging ache in our soul that isn't really satisfied by just promises of a better future.

So the real question is, how do we connect with God now, in the middle of all the pain? And this, this gets right to the heart of the problem. There's this unspoken pressure, especially in faith communities, to always be fine, to put on a happy face. But here's the crazy part.

When we push down our real pain and our honest doubts, we're not strengthening our faith. We're actually making it weaker. Okay, so that brings us to our first section.

Let's really dig into why we so desperately need a better way to handle that very ache in our soul. Because this unspoken rule to always be positive creates this hidden crisis, you know? It leaves us feeling totally alone, precisely when we need connection the most. Think about it like this.

If you got a nasty cut on your arm, you wouldn't just slap a sticker on it and pretend it's not there, right? No. You'd clean it, you'd treat it, you'd get help. Well, our emotional and spiritual pain works the exact same way.

If we just cover it up, pretending we're fine, it doesn't just go away. It festers. So if just ignoring our pain is the problem, what's the solution? Well, this brings us to this incredible practice of biblical lament.

Now, it's really important to get this straight. Lament is not just complaining into the air. It's actually a structured, faith-filled tool.

And the most crucial point is this. It's a way to process all the brokenness we see by turning toward God with our honest pain, not turning away from Him in silence or anger. So how does this actually work? What does it do? Well, it can really be broken down into three core purposes that together create a pathway that leads us from pain all the way to hope.

Alright, so here's the path. First, it gives a voice to our pain. Then from there, it opens up a direct line to actually engage with God.

And finally, it leads us toward a greater, more resilient kind of hope. Let's break down each one of these steps. So the very first purpose is just to acknowledge what hurts.

It's that simple. We can't heal what we won't face. And you know, the theologian Kathleen O'Connor just nails it right here.

Pain that's ignored doesn't vanish. It grows. It mutates into something much scarier.

Lament is how we finally meet it face to face. And this brings up something that's kind of counterintuitive. When we're suffering, it's so easy to feel powerless, right? But giving voice to that pain, well, that's not submission.

It's an act of resistance. It's you taking your story back from the pain and refusing to let suffering have the last word. And you know what? This isn't just some ancient spiritual idea.

It shows up in modern psychotherapy too. As the trauma expert Dr. Judith Herman points out, for survivors, just reclaiming the ability to feel is a huge act of resistance. It's the first real step toward healing and moving forward.

This act of resistance leads us right into the second purpose. It gives us a way to engage with God. See, when we're hurting, our natural tendency is to disengage, to pull back, numb out, become apathetic.

Lament is the complete opposite. It's a conscious choice to turn toward God with everything. All the pain, the anger, the doubt- that is a profound act of faith.

And this all leads to the third and honestly the most crucial purpose. Lament has a destination. It's not about getting stuck in our sadness or just wallowing in pain.

The entire process is designed to move us through the darkness and out into a genuine, hard-won hope. So that's the theory. But what does this actually look like in practice? Let's take a look at a really concrete example from the Bible.

This incredible journey through loneliness that we find in Psalms 42 and 43. And man, is this topic relevant today. A 2021 Harvard study found that a staggering 36% of Americans feel serious loneliness.

And if you add in the people who feel lonely just occasionally, you're looking at almost three-quarters of the population. This isn't some ancient problem. It's a pain that so many of us are feeling right now.

The real power of this psalm is in its raw honesty. It's not this clean, neat, upward journey. The writer is constantly swinging back and forth between this crushing despair and these powerful declarations of hope.

This messy, honest conversation is the heart of lament. This line shows up three times in the psalm, and it's the absolute key. Notice what's happening here.

The writer isn't just expressing a feeling. He's actively talking to his own soul. The phrase put your hope is a command.

He's telling his emotions where to go, reminding himself of what's true, even when he doesn't feel it for a second. All right, so let's pull all these threads together. Let's recap this incredible journey from pain to hope.

So here are the key things to remember. First off, lament isn't a quick fix or a silver bullet. It's a process.

Second, its goal is always hope, not getting stuck in despair. It's an act of faith that actually deepens our intimacy with God. And maybe most importantly, it gives us a way to be totally honest about our pain without letting that pain have the final word.

You know, if you take just one thing away from this whole explainer, I hope it's this. When our emotions are running wild, when the darkness and the loneliness feel totally overwhelming, lament is the practice of remembering what we know is true. It's speaking truth to our own souls, remembering in the dark what we've already seen and known in the light.

So that leaves us with one last really challenging thought. We spend so much time and energy trying to go around our pain, right? We avoid it, we numb it, we deny it. But what if this whole practice of lament shows us that the path that goes directly through our deepest pain is the very same path that leads to our greatest hope?