**Growing What God Has Given**

**Overcoming Bitterness**

**The Power of Biblical Lament**

**Psalm 13**

**Romans 15:14 -** *And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.*

**Ephesians 4:31-32 -** *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

**Proverbs 14:10 -** *The heart knows its own bitterness…*

**Proverbs 4:23 -** *Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.*

**Genesis 49:23 -** *The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him…*

**Exodus 1:13-14 -** *The Egyptians compelled the sons of Israel to labor rigorously; and they made their lives bitter with hard labor in mortar and bricks and at all kinds of labor in the field, all their labors which they rigorously imposed on them.*

**1 Samuel 1:6 -** *Her rival, however, would provoke her bitterly to irritate her, because the Lord had closed her womb.*

4 characteristics of lament that honors the Lord

**I. Addressed to Our God as an Expression of Truth**

A. A very helpful resource

B. Starting definitions

“Bitter (OT – Marah, NT – pikros) – sour, brackish taste, the opposite of sweet. The poisonous, putrid bile from the gall bladder. An inner emotional feeling of deep sorrow, or an outwardly directed anger that cries out to the power that seems to be causing the problem.” Theological Wordbook of the OT – p. 528-529

“Lament – The honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God’s goodness.” Vroegop, p. 26

C. Not just “how long”, but “how long O LORD?”

“It is precisely out of trust that God is sovereign that the psalmist repeatedly brings laments and petitions to the Lord…if the psalmists had already decided the verdict--that God is indeed unfaithful—they would not continue to offer their complaint”

D. Because we believe in God’s power and control

**Psalm 10:1 -** *Why do You stand afar off, O Lord? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble?*

**Psalm 77:1-2 -** *My voice rises to God, and I will cry aloud; My voice rises to God, and He will hear me. In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord; In the night my hand was stretched out without weariness; My soul refused to be comforted.*

**Habakkuk 1:1-4 -** *The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. How long, O Lord, will I call for help, and You will not hear? I cry out to You, “Violence!” Yet You do not save. Why do You make me see iniquity, and cause me to look on wickedness? Yes, destruction and violence are before me; strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore justice comes out perverted.*

“God is the friend of the honest doubter who dares to talk to God rather than about him. Prayer that includes an element of questioning God may be a means of increasing one’s faith. Expressing doubts and crying out about unfair situations in the universe show one’s trust in God and one’s confidence that God should and does have an answer to humanity’s insoluble problems.” Barker and Bailey – The New American Commentary, Vol. 20

“It takes faith to pray a lament.” Vroegop, p. 31

“He is very much bowed down under the stroke—still he murmurs not, the language of his heart seems to be, ‘I was dumb. I opened not my mouth, because thou God dids’t it.’ Occasionally we hear a suppressed groan as he walks his room with clasped hands.’” David McCollough, The Pioneers

**II. Characterized by Heartfelt Concerns and Questions**

A. By avoiding both the cliff and the cave

B. Be honest about what is troubling you

How long O lord? (13:1a)

Will you forget me forever? (13:1b)

How long will you hide your face from me? (13:1c)

How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart all the day? (13:2a)

How long will my enemy be exalted over me? (13:2b)

“Once you start to see these questions in the Psalms, they jump off the page. These heartfelt questions have been in your Bible all along, but somehow they’ve been easy to miss. It is almost as if we don’t understand the value of bringing our questions to God. Perhaps we think they’re not allowed. Michael Jinkins, in his book *In the House of the Lord*, reminds us that God can handle our struggles: ‘The psalms of lament open us to the greatness of a God who not only can hear, but also can handle our pain, our self-pity, our blame, and our fear, who can respond to our anger, our disillusionment in the midst of oppression and persecution, under the boot of tyranny and our sense of God-forsakenness in the face of life’s most profound alienations and exiles.’ These psalms give us permission—even encouragement—to lay out our struggles, even if they are with God himself.” Vroegop

C. And in so doing, be more like our Savior

**Acts 2:29-31 -** *Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. And so, because he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath to seat one of his descendants on his throne, he looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay.*

**III. Filled with Bold Requests and Petitions**

**Hebrews 4:14-16 -** *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

A. To arise and address the injustice

**Psalm 13:3a -** *Consider and answer me, O Lord my God*

**Psalm 10:12 -** *Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Your hand. Do not forget the afflicted.*

**Psalm 3:7 -** *Arise, O Lord; save me, O my God!*

B. To help you understand what is occurring

**Psalm 13:3b -** *Enlighten my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death…*

C. To keep His promises

**Psalm 25:6 -** *Remember, O Lord, Your compassion and Your lovingkindnesses, for they have been from of old.*

D. To perform justice

**Psalm 83:16-18 -** *Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O Lord. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, and let them be humiliated and perish, That they may know that You alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth.*

E. To forgive your sins

**Psalm 79:9 -** *Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name’s sake.*

F. To teach you as you wait

“I shall look at the word through tears. Perhaps I shall see things that dry-eyed I could not see.” Nicholas Wolterstorff, Lament for a Son, p. 127 – Kindle

**Psalm 86:11 -** *Teach me Your way, O Lord; I will walk in Your truth; unite my heart to fear Your name.*

G. To vindicate you in His time

**Psalm 35:23-24 -** *Stir up Yourself, and awake to my right and to my cause, my God and my Lord. Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me.*

**IV. Concluded with a Commitment to Trust and Praise**

**Psalm 13:5-6 -** *But I have trusted in Your lovingkindness; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because He has dealt bountifully with me.*