

Recognizing Our Need to Lament

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The past year, when a pandemic descended on the globe and dramatically impacted day-to-day life for the general population, we nurses experienced this event in a deeper, heavier way. Our work became about survival: for our patients, our families, and ourselves. Social upheaval exposed injustice and inequity, adding more layers of anguish and disquiet. As a result of strenuous work situations, longer hours, and loss of some we have cared for and worked with, many nurses are now confronting long-term consequences.

Grief, loss, sorrow, and distress are more common among nurses than they have ever been. But work schedules, family needs, and daily demands tug us onward. Many of us have not given ourselves opportunity to express the pain, despair, and loss we have accumulated.

We must not just pause, but stop: Stop and recognize how the pandemic and social calamities have strafed our spirits and torn at our souls. God is so very aware of the degree and breadth of our sorrow and anguish. He's awaiting the time when we begin to cry out, to lament.

God has a care plan for you and me, a spiritual balm for the wounds that still ache and the loss that is a big black hole.

Many--more than one-third--of the psalms express lament. The writers ask God why? When? How? Let this psalm of lament sink in slowly and fully.

Hearing the Word

Read aloud Psalm 13 (ESV), written by David as an expression of pain and despair.

- ¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- ²How long must I take counsel in my soul
and have sorrow in my heart all the day?
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?
- ³Consider and answer me, O LORD my God;
light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death,
- ⁴lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him,"
lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken.

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⁵ But I have trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶ I will sing to the LORD,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Responding to the Word

- How would you describe David's emotional state?
- What does he cry out to God about?
- After his piercing, honest questions, what responses—specifically--does David want from God?
- How does David end this psalm?
- What do you believe has changed: his problem/need or his perspective about his circumstance?

Application

David was clearly hurting and feeling distanced from God. He's direct and honest about what he feels—that God has forgotten him, even intentionally turned away from him. David, operating on his feelings, is miserable and expresses his despair at being left alone by God. He realizes his own counsel—wisdom and ability to cope--is inadequate for the sorrow that encompasses him.

Each of us who knows God and is in a time of darkness, suffering, and loss can feel just like David. Alone. Deserted. Forgotten. Bereft. What hope can there possibly be if God has abandoned us?

Our crying and moans to God are okay! He wants us to pour out our hearts to him. He is the best listener and can handle all our emotions. Imagine a child sobbing in a mom or dad's lap, unashamedly letting out sadness, the sense of lostness, fear, anguish. We can release our sorrows and hurts to God in that way.

What would you tell God in your own lament right now?

After releasing pent-up feelings that have not had anywhere else to go, we can ask God to help us. "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God," whispers David.

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What do you want to ask God for? He's bending toward you, fully attentive. He wants us to ask for his intervention and care.

"Enlighten my eyes." What a wise request! When the darkness is so thick and we're so tired of trying to make our way along day and night, over and over, light from God gives clarity and the ability to see spiritual realities. His light heals, guides, warms us, and instructs us in what to do, how to move forward.

What specific request do you have for God that might lift you when you're flattened by fatigue, emotionally and/or spiritually?

An enemy may be a person or group. It may be a life situation: the death of someone loved, a loss of a position or relationship, a values-eroding cultural situation. We can be certain that no enemy of any kind can win over God and his purposes. 1 John 4:4 (ESV) explains that God, who is in us, "is greater than he who is in the world."

The psalms of lament give voice to honest and agonizing emotions and circumstances. Yet they don't end in grief; they turn back to speak praise and honor to God. Because our God is mighty, merciful, and tenderhearted, he comes to our aid. We are not alone or unloved.

Knowing that God wants to hear you, listens fully, understands, and deeply cares for you, what will you say to him in praise and gratitude?

If you like to express your feelings and thoughts in writing, write your own psalms of lament. Read more of these potent songs in Psalm 3, 5, 22, 25, 31, 42, and 77. There are many others throughout the 150 in the book of Psalms.

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