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PRACTICING LAMENT

A PRAYER TOOL FOR MINISTRY LEADERS

Bring God your real pain ... He can handle it.

Overview

Many church leaders help other people through seasons of pain, but are left having no idea what to do with their own pain. We rush past it. We spiritualize it. We slap a Romans 8:28 on it and keep moving. Or we stuff it down and pretend it isn't there, because somewhere along the way we picked up the idea that faith and leadership means always being fine.

But the Bible doesn't work that way. Nearly a third of the Psalms are laments. The entire book of Lamentations exists because God's people needed a place to grieve. Jesus himself cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Lament is not a sign of faith breaking down, it is one of faith's most honest expressions.

Lament is the prayer you pray when life doesn't match what you believe about God. It's the sacred space between pain and praise where you refuse to look the other way, and you refuse to let go of God. You hold both at the same time: the reality of your suffering and the reality of His character.

This tool gives you a simple, repeatable pattern for bringing your real pain to God. It's drawn from the structure of the lament Psalms themselves, organized around **four movements**, each beginning with the letter **C**. You can write it, pray it aloud, or walk through it with a trusted friend.

THE FOUR MOVEMENTS OF LAMENT

CALL → COMPLAIN → CRY OUT → CONTEMPLATE

Movement 1: CALL

Address God directly. Start with who He is.

Lament begins by looking at God. Before you name what's wrong, name who you're talking to. Choose a specific aspect of God's character that feels most important right now. Are you reaching for the God who is near? The God who is strong? The Father who sees? Starting here is an act of faith. You're choosing to direct your pain toward the only One who can actually do something about it.

Guiding prompts:

- Which name or attribute of God do I need most right now?
- What aspect of his character do I want to fall into?
- If I could ask God to be one thing for me in this moment, what would it be?

Example: "God, you are the one who said you would never leave me. You are my refuge. I'm coming to you because I have nowhere else to go."



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Movement 2: COMPLAIN

Tell God exactly what's wrong. Don't edit yourself.

This is the part most of us skip. We've been trained to be polite with God, to keep our prayers clean and grateful. But the Psalms give us permission to be brutally honest. David told God he felt abandoned. Jeremiah accused God of deceiving him. Job demanded answers. These aren't failures of faith recorded as warnings. They're models of prayer held up for us to follow.

Name the root of your grief, sorrow, or anger. Say it out loud or write it without editing. God is not fragile. He is not offended by your honesty. He's offended by your distance.

Guiding prompts:

- What is the source of my pain right now? Be specific.
- What feels broken, unfair, or unbearable?
- What am I feeling that I haven't said out loud yet?
- If I'm being completely honest with God, what would I say?

Example: "God, I'm angry. I prayed and nothing changed. My marriage feels like it's falling apart and I don't know how to fix it. I feel invisible to you right now, and I hate that I feel that way."

Movement 3: CRY OUT

Ask God for what you need. Be direct.

After you've poured out what's wrong, ask God to move. This isn't a wish list. This is a cry from the deep. What do you need from God? Healing? Clarity? Relief? Courage? Justice? The Psalms are full of bold, specific requests. "Vindicate me." "Heal me." "Don't hide your face." "Rise up." Lament gives you permission to ask boldly.

Guiding prompts:

- What specific action or intervention am I asking God for?
- What am I longing for most deeply?
- If God answered one prayer about this situation, what would I want it to be?

Example: "God, I need you to show up. Give me the wisdom I don't have. Soften the heart of my spouse. Give me the strength to stay in this when everything in me wants to run."

Movement 4: CONTEMPLATE

Remember who God has been. Let his track record steady you.

This is not toxic positivity. You're not pretending the pain doesn't exist. You're doing something harder and more faithful: you're choosing to remember. In the middle of what feels unresolved, you're collecting evidence of God's faithfulness. Has he come through before? Has he met you in dark places? The Psalms nearly always land here.



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Not because the problem is solved, but because the psalmist has chosen to anchor in something deeper than the present circumstance.

Guiding prompts:

- When has God been faithful to me in the past, especially in hard seasons?
- What do I know to be true about God's character, even when I can't feel it?
- What scripture or promise can I hold onto right now?

Example: "God, I don't feel your presence. But I remember the season when everything fell apart at work and you opened a door I never expected. You have been faithful before. I'm choosing to trust that you're faithful now, even when I can't see it."

Why This Matters

When we skip lament, we don't truly move past pain. We just bury it. And buried pain doesn't stay buried. It surfaces as cynicism, numbness, distance from God, or slow erosion of the faith we once held. Lament is how we keep our relationship with God honest when life gets brutal. It's the prayer that says, "I'm not okay, but also... I'm not walking away."

Notice the direction of lament: it moves *toward* God, not away from him. That's what separates lament from despair. Despair turns inward or gives up entirely. Lament turns toward God with everything you've got, including the mess.

Psalms of Lament to Pray

If you struggle to find the words, let the psalmists give them to you.

Psalm 13: When God feels silent and you're losing patience

Psalm 22: When you feel utterly abandoned

Psalm 42: When you're spiritually dry and longing for God

Psalm 77: When you're wrestling with whether God has changed

Psalm 88: When there is no resolution and the darkness won't lift

Psalm 130: When you're crying out from the depths of guilt or despair

*The four movements of lament are adapted from the structure of biblical lament Psalms and informed by W. David O. Taylor's work in *Open and Unafraid: The Psalms as a Guide to Life*.*



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