

Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament by Mark Vroegop

Week 1 - Tuesday, June 3, 2025

Intro: Life in a Minor Key

- Vroegop shares his own personal history with grief, especially the loss of his stillborn daughter Sylvia. He explains how he came to see the importance of lament as well as the lack of lament in our Christian circles.
- *“Lament is how you live between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God’s sovereignty. Lament is how we bring our sorrow to God. Without lament we won’t know how to process pain. Silence, bitterness, and even anger can dominate our spiritual lives instead. Without lament we won’t know how to help people walking through sorrow. Instead, we’ll offer trite solutions, unhelpful comments, or impatient responses. What’s more, without this sacred song of sorrow, we’ll miss the lessons historic laments are intended to teach us. Lament is how Christians grieve.”* (p. 21)
 - What are some of the reasons you think Christians in our contexts don’t have a regular practice of lament?
 - How would you define lament, and what is your perspective on it?
 - What are some of the questions and struggles you frequently have to fight when you are dealing with pain?
 - When you’ve had to help a friend or a loved one through the pain of suffering, what are some things you’ve found helpful or unhelpful?

Chapter 1: Keep Turning to Prayer (Psalm 77)

- Vroegop goes through Psalm 77 and draws out truths about lament. He gives us a pattern of lament in the psalms (turn, complain, ask, trust). He explains we must keep praying and cry out to God with our struggles and questions so that we can also be turned around to see what is true even in our suffering.
- *“Lament is the honest cry of a hurting heart wrestling with the paradox of pain and the promise of God’s goodness. Belief in God’s mercy, redemption, and sovereignty create lament... Christians affirm that the world is broken, God is powerful, and he will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise.”* (p. 26)
- *“Lament is a path to praise as we are led through our brokenness and disappointment.”* (p. 28)

- Lament generally has: an address to God (turn), a complaint (complain), a request (ask), and an expression of trust and/or praise (trust). (p. 29)
 - In your own words, what makes lament Christian? Why does it take faith to lament?
 - What are some of the hard and painful questions that you've asked God over the years?
 - As you think back on God's faithfulness, where has he proven himself to be trustworthy?
 - How does the cross become the ultimate anchor and resolution for our suffering and pain?

Chapter 2: Bring Your Complaints (Psalm 10)

- Vroegop explains that a godly complaint asks God to keep his promises by expressing our disappointment honestly. We should bring our questions, frustrations by coming humbly, praying the Bible, being honest, and not just complaining but moving towards God.
- *"I'm not giving you permission to vent self-centered rage at God when life has not turned out like you planned. I'm not suggesting for a second you have a right to be angry with God. I think that is always wrong. But I do think there's a place for a kind of complaining that is biblical"* (p. 43)
- *"Biblical lament offers an alternative [to anger and denial]. Through godly complaint we are able to express our disappointment and move towards a resolution."* (p. 44)
- *"As you read other psalms, you'll see God often addressed in complaint language. Frequently it is connected to questions, including plenty of why questions...Looking further, you find a number of other complaints connected to how questions."* (p. 47)
- *"Some days I would list in a journal everything that was troubling me. My practice was to write out a list of complaints and then to talk to God about them...Left unchecked, this could create a self-focused emotional spiral. But as I wrote out my complaints and talked to the Lord about them, it was surprising how they lost their hold on me. Sometimes I even found myself laughing at the silly things I listed. Complaint helped me see myself and my situation more clearly."* (p. 53)
- How to do godly complaint: come humbly, pray the Bible, be honest, and don't just complain (pp. 52-53)

- Before reading this chapter, what was your perspective on complaining to God?
- Why is complaint a central element of lament?
- How is complaining the right way spiritually helpful?
- When is complaint sinful and wrong?
- Is there a complaint that you need to humbly offer to the Lord today?

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Week 2 - Tuesday, June 10, 2025

Chapter 3: Step 3: Ask Boldly (Psalm 22)

“Psalm 22 is unique because it combines the first two steps of lament (turn to prayer; and give voice to our complaints) in the first 2 verses.”

“Yet”...marks the place in the journey where pain and belief co-exist.” (p. 59).

David makes “bold requests” in Psalm 22: 11-21. What are the requests?

We pray differently when we are hurting and desperate. These petitions are “prayers of faith anchored in what we believe about God.” (p. 60) “A survey of unique petitions shows at least nine different prayers: (p. 61ff)

- 1.) “Arise, O, Lord!” as in Psalm 10:12:2.)
- 2.) “Grant us help!” as in Psalm 60:11; 3.)
- 3.) “Remember your covenant” as in Psalm 25:6; 4.)
- 4.) “Let them perish in disgrace...” as in Psalm 83:16-18;
- 5.) “Don’t remember our sins..”
- 6.) “Restore us...that we may be saved,” in Psalm 80:3; 7.)
- 7.) “Be not deaf...listen to me...” as in Psalm 86;
- 8.) “Teach me” as in Psalm 143:10; and
- 9.) “Vindicate me...according to your righteousness,” as in Psalm 35:23-24

“We can ask boldly because He understands deeply.” Heb. 4:25

God invites us to call out to him in times of sorrow and grief, to ask him the hard questions, and to call on him to act!

“Boldness begets boldness” You can pray for your hurting friend...

“Let the boldness of the lament psalms fuel your confidence in God!”

- What if we stopped the lament process with complaint?
- Why is the word “yet” so important in lament?
- How does this chapter help you to pray more boldly, or to minister to a fellow believer who is hurting?

Chapter 4: Choose to Trust (Psalm 13)

Michael Card reminds us: ““All true songs of worship are born in the wilderness of suffering...without the rocky terrain of his lonely life” we would not have many of the psalms of David...” “Suffering refines what we trust in and how we talk about it.”

Vroegop states that we have reached our destination (envisioning where lament leads) in this chapter, but that we will have to make the choice to take the final step:

“You will need to choose to trust!” On p. 74, how does he define what trust looks like, as we have explored these psalms?

Quote from Rebekah Eklund: “The prayer of lament rejoices in God’s saving actions in the now and hopes urgently for God’s saving actions in the future,those who lament stand on the boundary between the old age and the new and hope for things unseen.” (p. 74)

What are the questions of the psalmist in Psalm 13:3-4?

We see the familiar pattern of turning to God, complaining and asking questions. What are his requests? Consider, answer...or I die!

Where do you see the turning point in this passage? In v. 5-6, What specifically is he trusting?

We are reminded that in spite of his suffering he is choosing to trust in the steadfast love of the Lord (*the “but” is similar to the “yet”--a statement of contrast to our suffering—it takes us from the cause of our suffering to trusting the God who hears us, and His promises*). He is confident of the steadfast love of God, He is also rehearsing that the Lord has dealt bountifully with him! Can we say the same? Can we say this in times of suffering?

- Trust is believing what you know to be true, even though the facts of suffering might call that belief into question” (p. 77). Vroegop states, “...being a follower of Jesus requires that we walk through life in continual trust.” (p. 78)

What is the 2nd point he makes about prayers of lament related to this psalm? (p.79) “My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.” “The long arc of God’s plan for salvation is always at work—even though we cannot fully see the trajectory” (p. 79)

What character qualities of God does the Psalmist list in Psalm 13?

(I love the statement that she makes on p. 79: “The ultimate lament cry, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?” led to the greatest moment of redemption!” p. 80, Darkness led to dawn; lament led to salvation and life!”)

What is the 3rd point he makes about lament? Entering lament leads to rejoicing! Job 42:2, 5: “I know that You can do all things, And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees You;”

“Lament calls us to point our hearts Godward by rejoicing in God’s grace.”(p. 81)

Psalm 56:2-11 Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplication.

Psalm 28:7: “The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart exults, And with my song I shall thank Him.”

Psalm 56:8-11: “You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call; This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, In the LORD, whose word I praise, In God I have put my trust, I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?”

Where will lament lead you? Will it lead you to despair, or will it lead to trust, to hope, and assurance?

He loves us “with an everlasting love,” (Jer. 31:3) and “His mercies are new every morning....” (Lamentations 3:23)

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Week 3 - Tuesday, June 17, 2025

Ch. 9: Making Lament Personal

- *“Lament rises from a firm belief in the character of God, an understanding of the brokenness of sin, and a heartfelt longing for the completion of God’s redemptive plan...Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust.”* (p. 157-158)
- Quote in the book from Esther Fleece in *No More Faking Fine*: *“Spiritual maturity does not mean living a lament-less life; rather, it means we grow into becoming good lamenters and thus grow in our need for God.”* (p. 158)
- *“The Christian life should be marked by personal lament because, through this discovery, we open ourselves to God’s grace and his ability to shape and change us. Since life is full of sorrows, opportunities abound to make lament a vital part of our spiritual journey.”* (p. 161)
- Ways to incorporate lament: 1) look for it as you read Scripture, 2) practice lament in *all* the griefs of life, big and small, 3) counsel someone in sorrow to practice lament, 4) overcome bitterness by talking to God about those who have hurt us, 5) express sorrow for our own sin, 6) privately lament in a world that keeps moving around us.
 - What do you think is lost for Christians if they fail to read the Bible with an eye to lament?
 - How has lament helped you deal with your own grief (big or small), or how do you anticipate it helping in the future?
 - What are some reasons that a language of lament could be helpful in confession of sin?
 - If you ever find yourself struggling with a bitter heart, how might lament start you on a path toward love and a willingness to forgive?

Chapter 10: Let Us Lament

- Funerals: *“Death is the Christian’s enemy (1 Cor. 15:26). It vividly displays the brokenness of the world. It surfaces critical questions. Lament can provide language to express the depth of sorrow while leading us to hope, praise, and trust. A funeral, or all places, could be—should be—a place to lament together.”* (p. 178)

- Congregational Prayer: *“My hope is for a resurgence of unique prayer times in the life of the church. The body of Christ needs to lament together...We need to weep with those who weep.”* (p. 179)
- Preaching & Teaching; Singing & Songwriting
- Small Groups: *“Imagine what would happen if the leader seized the moment, opened up a lament psalm, and invited the group to echo the words of the psalmist on behalf of their friends. Consider the kind of grace that could be applied as brothers and sisters in Christ entered into one another’s pain, while collectively carrying their sorrow to the Lord.”* (p. 183)
- Racial tension: *“I do think lament is a starting point—a place where people from majority and minority backgrounds can meet. The beauty of this biblical language of sorrow is its ability to provide a bridge robust enough to handle outrage and empathy, frustration and faith, fear and hope. Lament can be our first step toward one another when racial tension could drive a wedge.”* (p. 186)
 - Why do you think funerals are sometimes more about celebration than sorrow? How have you observed this balance or lack of balance?
 - How could your small group, Bible study, or Sunday school class practice lament more effectively?
 - What are some creative ways lament might be appropriately applied in your Sunday worship services? What challenges might stand in the way of this happening?
 - When considering racial tension [or other cultural tensions or issues], how has this chapter helped you see the role of lament in bringing differing opinions or backgrounds together? How could lament start a healing process or conversation?

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