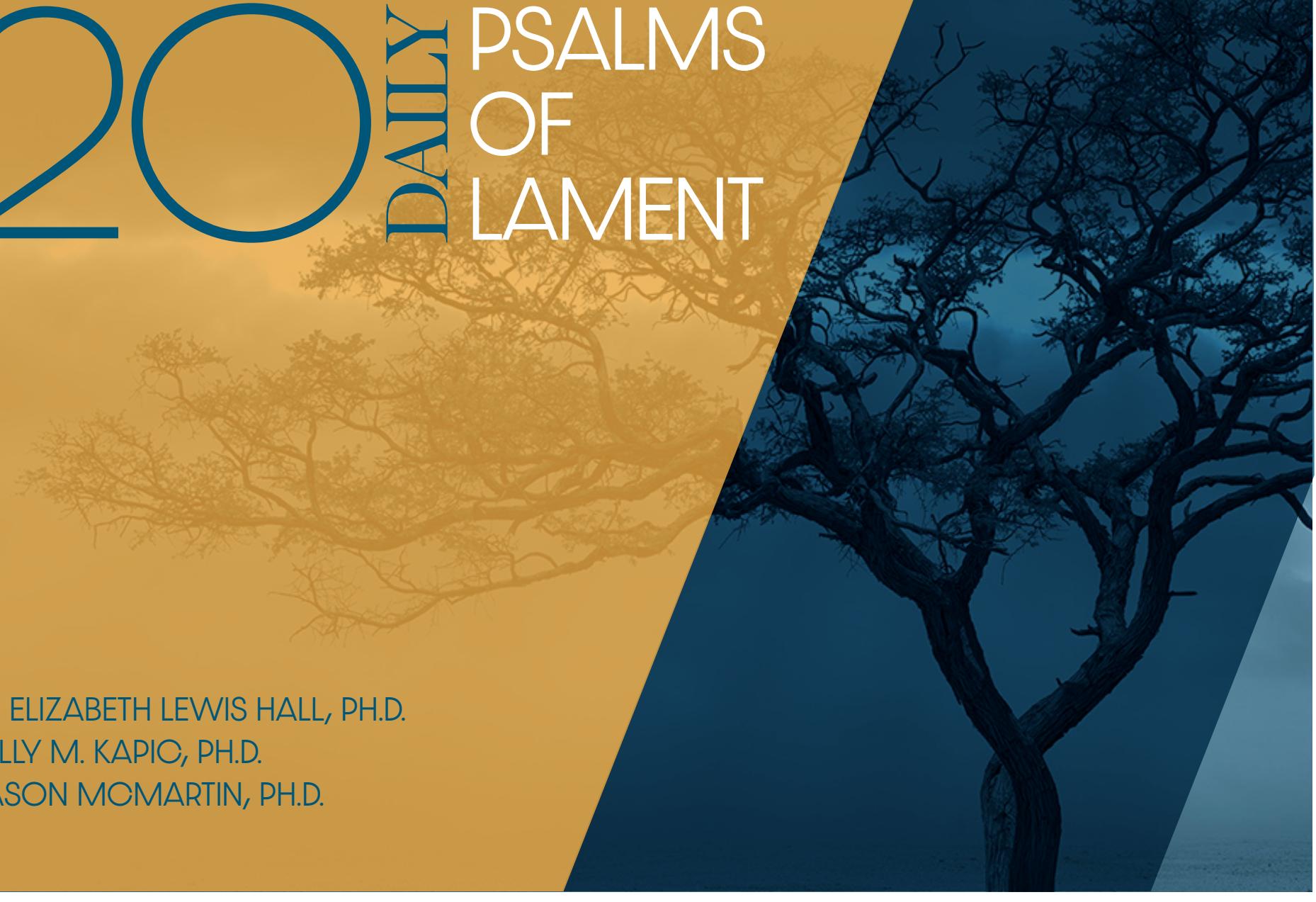


20 DAILY PSALMS OF LAMENT



M. ELIZABETH LEWIS HALL, PH.D.

KELLY M. KAPIC, PH.D.

JASON MCMARTIN, PH.D.

INTRODUCTION

Lament is a form of prayer and worship that cries out to God in the midst of distress, asking hard questions, expressing painful realities, and looking to God for relief. As many as 40% of the Psalms have strong elements of lament within them, and lament is also present in several other places throughout the Old and New Testaments. The psalms of lament cover many kinds of suffering: being attacked by enemies, verbally or physically; sorrow, fear, and other kinds of emotional distress; sin and guilt; the perceived absence or indifference of God; and so on.

The lament psalms have a typical pattern:

| | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|---|
| 1 Calling out to God: addressing God and directing one's prayer to God. | 2 A lament or complaint about difficult circumstances. | 3 A review of God's past help or expression of confidence in God's ability to help. | 4 A request for God to help. | 5 An expression of praise or a promise to praise God for God's intervention. |
|--|---|--|---|---|

As with all the psalms, lament psalms are written using poetic language and word pictures. They are poems, prayers, and songs that have been used in worship for centuries. Often the exact circumstances causing the lament are not known and the language is often more general. This makes the lament psalms relevant to many situations in our lives. We hope you will benefit from praying through these psalms over the next month.

DAY 1

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 142

¹ *I cry aloud to the LORD;
I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.*
² *I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.*
³ *When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.*
⁴ *Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.*

⁵ *I cry to you, LORD;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."*
⁶ *Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.*
⁷ *Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.*

- This lament begins as the Psalmist, in a very personal way, declares: “I cry aloud to the Lord, I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy” (1). Then, that voice and cry is manifested in a “complaint” during the trouble faced (2). Do you feel like it is okay for you to voice your concerns to God by telling him about your frustrations and fears? If not, why? Try to speak whatever is lamentable and bringing sorrow to you in your suffering.
- In your difficulties, do you ever feel that there is no one around to help you, that no one really seems to care? (4). If so, does crying out to the Lord as your “refuge” make you feel less trapped or more free (5, 7)?
- How do you think feeling listened to by God (5-7) might relate to receiving God’s comfort and summoning up some hope amid the hardship? Could it be that even in suffering and your complaint, there might be a way to experience God’s “goodness to me” (7)?
- Slowly pray Psalm 142 again. Allow yourself to really voice your complaints, fears and frustrations. As you do, try to remember God actually hears you and wants to be your refuge amid the storm you currently face.

DAY 2

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 4

¹ Answer me when I call to you,
my righteous God.
Give me relief from my distress;
have mercy on me and hear my prayer.
² How long will you people turn my glory into
shame?
How long will you love delusions and seek
false gods?
³ Know that the LORD has set apart his faithful
servant for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.
⁴ Tremble and do not sin;
when you are on your beds,
search your hearts and be silent.

⁵ Offer the sacrifices of the righteous
and trust in the LORD.
⁶ Many, LORD, are asking, "Who will bring us
prosperity?"
Let the light of your face shine on us.
⁷ Fill my heart with joy
when their grain and new wine abound.
⁸ In peace I will lie down and sleep,
for you alone, LORD,
make me dwell in safety.

- ▶ How does the directness of this prayer (e.g., "Answer me... Give me..." v. 1) make you feel? Does that seem like an appropriate way to pray to God? How might directness be helpful to your relationship with God?
- ▶ Sometimes in our suffering other people's words and actions can hurt us or our reputations (2-3). Has anything like that happened to you? If so, allow yourself to voice your frustrations to God. Tell God if you feel misrepresented or misunderstood as you quietly search your own heart (4).
- ▶ The Psalmist longs for God's presence (8) and joy (7) more than material prosperity. If you are suffering, what might longing for God's presence look like for you?
- ▶ Slowly pray Psalm 4 again. Allow yourself to be direct with God, to be honest about ways others have hurt you in your suffering, and ask for fresh waves of joy and rest. Try to imagine yourself like a small child falling asleep in the arms of God (8).

DAY 3

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 5

¹ Listen to my words, Lord,
consider my lament.
² Hear my cry for help, my King and my God,
for to you I pray.
³ In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.
⁴ For you are not a God who is pleased with
wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.
⁵ The arrogant cannot stand
in your presence.
You hate all who do wrong;
⁶ you destroy those who tell lies.
The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest.
⁷ But I, by your great love,
I can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down toward your
holy temple.

⁸ Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies—make your way
straight before me.
⁹ Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.
Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they tell lies.
¹⁰ Declare them guilty, O God!
Let their intrigues be their downfall.
Banish them for their many sins,
for they have rebelled against you.
¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them, that those
who love your name may rejoice in you.
¹² Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as with a
shield.

- In the midst of your troubles today, do you find you have words, laments, or cries (1-2)? Ask God to listen to your innermost thoughts and heart today, even if you don't feel like you can express them clearly.
- Evil cannot dwell with God (4-6), but God welcomes us (7-8). Do you have people in your life who can't be trusted and are filled with deceit (9)? Ask for God to deliver you and bring you into his presence (10).
- How do you find yourself surrounded by God's protection today (11-12)? Thank God for being a refuge and protection.
- Conclude your time by praying through the entire Psalm.

DAY 4

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 42

¹ As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.
² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?
³ My tears have been my food day and night,
while people say to me all day long,
“Where is your God?”
⁴ These things I remember as I pour out my soul:
how I used to go to the house of God
under the protection of the Mighty One
with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.
⁵ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.
⁶ My soul is downcast within me;

therefore I will remember you
from the land of the Jordan,
the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.
⁷ Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls;
all your waves and breakers have swept over me.
⁸ By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is
with me—a prayer to the God of my life.
⁹ I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I go about mourning,
oppressed by the enemy?”
¹⁰ My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me,
saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”
¹¹ Why, my soul, are you downcast?
Why so disturbed within me?
Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him,
my Savior and my God.

- ▶ A deer pants and is thirsty when it is worn out and needs refreshment. In what ways have difficult circumstances in your life made you thirst “for the living God” (1-2)?
- ▶ When life is hard and tears are present (3) we naturally feel discouraged and “downcast” (4, 11). Such difficult “things I remember, as I pour out my soul” (4). Freely name your concerns and frustrations to God.
- ▶ The Psalmist finds comfort in repeated questions and then expecting a future positive response from God. Listen in to this internal dialogue, and consider if it resonates with you.
 - Question Asked: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” (5, 11). Have you ever asked those kinds of questions?
 - Encouragement Given: Engaged in a form of self-talk, the Psalmist declares: “Put your hope in God” for “I will yet praise him.” Have you experienced defiant hope, where you claim hope even when current circumstances make that incredibly hard?
- ▶ How does it feel to hear that “by day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me”? (8). How might this bring you courage when you suffer or feel downcast?
- ▶ Slowly pray Psalm 42 again. How might your own exhaustion, pain, or suffering make you long for God? What words of hope about God in scripture or memories of past experiences of God’s love might encourage you in the midst of suffering?

DAY 5

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 31

¹ *In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.*
² *Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.*
³ *Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*
⁴ *Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.*
⁵ *Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, Lord, my faithful God...*
⁹ *Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.*
¹⁰ *My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.*
¹¹ *Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me...*
¹⁴ *But I trust in you, Lord; I say, "You are my God."*

¹⁵ *My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.*
¹⁶ *Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love...*
¹⁹ *How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you.*
²⁰ *In the shelter of your presence you hide them from all human intrigues; you keep them safe in your dwelling from accusing tongues.*
²¹ *Praise be to the Lord, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.*
²² *In my alarm I said, "I am cut off from your sight!" Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.*
²³ *Love the Lord, all his faithful people! The Lord preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full.*
²⁴ *Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the Lord.*

This psalm has several expressions of trust:

“In you, LORD, I have taken refuge” (1)
“Into your hands I commit my spirit” (5)
“But I trust in you, LORD; I say, ‘You are my God.’” (14)

- ▶ The second of these is quoted by Jesus from the cross. Choose one of these to pray to God as you begin your time in prayer.
- ▶ The beginning of this psalm describes characteristics and actions of God that form the basis of the Psalmist’s trust in God. Why do you trust God? Tell God about this.
- ▶ The Psalmist takes a long-term perspective in contrast with the shorter time of his suffering (10). One of the Psalmist’s reactions to his suffering had been a momentary panic (22), but he returns to a recognition of God’s provision. Have you panicked in the midst of hardship? What did that look like? Were you able to regain perspective? If so, how? Which portions of this psalm draw you into a broader perspective of God’s activity? Thank God for what he has done during your suffering.
- ▶ Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 6

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 120

¹ *I call on the Lord in my distress,
and he answers me.*

² *Save me, Lord,
from lying lips
and from deceitful tongues.*

³ *What will he do to you,
and what more besides,
you deceitful tongue?*

⁴ *He will punish you with a warrior's sharp arrows,
with burning coals of the broom bush.*

⁵ *Woe to me that I dwell in Meshek,
that I live among the tents of Kedar!*

⁶ *Too long have I lived
among those who hate peace.*

⁷ *I am for peace;
but when I speak, they are for war.*

- The Psalmist describes being very far from Jerusalem in a foreign land (Meshek and Kedar). This distance isn't just geographic, but also spiritual. He lives among people who do not worship God. In what ways have you felt far from God during your suffering? From this distant place, the Psalmist cries out to God (1). Address God and describe the ways you have felt distant in your relationship with God.
- In the distant land, the Psalmist asks God to be delivered from lies and liars (2). What lies surround you right now? Ask God to deliver you from them.
- The Psalmist describes what God will do to liars (3-4). In other words, God can set things right again. In your own circumstances, review with God how God is able to set things right.
- Finally, the Psalmist expresses sadness about his circumstances (5-6). Yet, even in distant places, God hears him, which means the journey to worship has begun. No matter how far we feel from God, God still hears our prayers, sees our pain, and welcomes our expression of these things in prayer. God meets us where we are. Thank God that he has heard you. Pray that God will bring peace into your life (6).
- Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 7

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 22

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?*

² *My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.*

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.*

⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.*

⁵ *To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame....*

⁹ *Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's
breast.*

¹⁰ *From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have
been my God.*

¹¹ *Do not be far from me, for trouble is near
and there is no one to help....*

¹⁴ *I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.*

¹⁵ *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death....*

¹⁹ *But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*

²⁰ *Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.*

²¹ *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*

²² *I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you....*

²⁴ *For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.*

²⁵ *From you comes the theme of my praise in the
great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.*

²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!*

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him....*

³⁰ *Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.*

³¹ *They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!*

DAY 7 (CONTINUED)

- ▶ Can you believe these words are prayed in the Bible: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (1). Jesus himself prays these words on the cross (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). Jesus enters into our suffering and even our feelings of being abandoned by God. How does this make you feel? If he can pray these words, will you allow yourself to be as honest when you are feeling isolated and hurting? How might such open expressions foster a closeness with God?
- ▶ “In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.” (4). The Psalmist moves between his significant challenges and complicated emotions to reflections on God’s faithfulness. Do you feel like it is okay to express deep frustrations even as you also try to find reasons to hope?
- ▶ Meditate on these two parts of the prayer, and see how it feels to pray them yourself: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me” (14). “Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help” (11).
- ▶ This psalm begins with feelings of forsakenness, but ends with a future promise that “He has done it” (31). Jesus cries out these opening words of forsakenness from the cross, and John 19 tells us Jesus’ last words before his death are “It is finished” (John 19:30). How might praying the lament of Psalm 22, in light of Jesus’ cross and resurrection, inform your own suffering? Meditate on how Jesus seems reflected in this psalm, and then see how this might speak into your suffering. What does it tell you about God? And about how God views you?
- ▶ Slowly pray the above selections from Psalm 22 again. What do you find harder to express: feelings of forsakenness or confidence in future deliverance? Talk to God about whatever you are feeling.

DAY 8

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 69

¹ Save me, O God,
for the waters have come up to my neck.

² I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold.
I have come into the deep waters;
the floods engulf me.

³ I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched.
My eyes fail, looking for my God.

⁴ Those who hate me without reason
outnumber the hairs of my head;
many are my enemies without cause,
those who seek to destroy me.
I am forced to restore what I did not steal...

¹³ But I pray to you, Lord, in the time of your favor;
in your great love, O God,
answer me with your sure salvation.

¹⁴ Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink;
deliver me from those who hate me,
from the deep waters.

¹⁵ Do not let the floodwaters engulf me
or the depths swallow me up
or the pit close its mouth over me.

¹⁶ Answer me, Lord, out of the goodness of your love;
in your great mercy turn to me.

¹⁷ Do not hide your face from your servant;
answer me quickly, for I am in trouble.

¹⁸ Come near and rescue me;
deliver me because of my foes...

²⁰ Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless;
I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
for comforters, but I found none.

²¹ They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst...

²⁹ But as for me, afflicted and in pain—
may your salvation, God, protect me.

³⁰ I will praise God's name in song
and glorify him with thanksgiving.

³¹ This will please the Lord more than an ox,
more than a bull with its horns and hooves.

³² The poor will see and be glad—
you who seek God, may your hearts live!

³³ The Lord hears the needy
and does not despise his captive people.

³⁴ Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and all that move in them,

³⁵ for God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah.
Then people will settle there and possess it;

³⁶ the children of his servants will inherit it,
and those who love his name will dwell there.

- In what ways do you find yourself sinking into the mire with the water closing over your head (1-3)? Does God feel distant (3)? Tell God about this.
- Ask the Lord to save you from your predicament (13-18) in his timing (13).
- In your suffering, have you felt abandoned and scorned by others (20-21)? Verse 21 reminds us that Jesus had the same experiences. Think of Jesus being with you in your feelings of abandonment.
- Ask God for protection (29). Praise God for all he has done for you (30-36). If that is too difficult, express your intention to praise God in the future (30-31).
- Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 9

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 77

¹ *I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.*

² *When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.*

³ *I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.*

⁴ *You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.*

⁵ *I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;*

⁶ *I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:*

⁷ *"Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?*

⁸ *Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?*

⁹ *Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"*

¹⁰ *Then I thought, "To this I will appeal: the years when
the Most High stretched out his right hand.*

¹¹ *I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.*

¹² *I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds."*

¹³ *Your ways, God, are holy.
What god is as great as our God?*

¹⁴ *You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.*

¹⁵ *With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.*

¹⁶ *The waters saw you, God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.*

¹⁷ *The clouds poured down water,
the heavens resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.*

¹⁸ *Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.*

¹⁹ *Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.*

²⁰ *You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.*

- ▶ Have your troubles kept you from sleeping at night (1-4)? Has it seemed that God has forgotten you (7-9)? Talk to God about these things.
- ▶ The Psalmist remembers God's actions in leading Israel out of Egypt through the sea (13-20). Where have you seen God at work in your own life (10-12)? Thank God for the times he has acted in your life and in the lives of others.
- ▶ Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 10

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 38

¹ *Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*

² *Your arrows have pierced me,
and your hand has come down on me.*

³ *Because of your wrath there is no health in my body;
there is no soundness in my bones
because of my sin.*

⁴ *My guilt has overwhelmed me
like a burden too heavy to bear.*

⁵ *My wounds fester and are loathsome
because of my sinful folly.*

⁶ *I am bowed down and brought very low;
all day long I go about mourning.*

⁷ *My back is filled with searing pain;
there is no health in my body.*

⁸ *I am feeble and utterly crushed;
I groan in anguish of heart.*

⁹ *All my longings lie open before you, Lord;
my sighing is not hidden from you.*

¹⁰ *My heart pounds, my strength fails me;
even the light has gone from my eyes.*

¹¹ *My friends and companions avoid me
because of my wounds;
my neighbors stay far away.*

¹² *Those who want to kill me set their traps,
those who would harm me talk of my ruin;
all day long they scheme and lie.*

¹³ *I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,
like the mute, who cannot speak;*

¹⁴ *I have become like one who does not hear,
whose mouth can offer no reply.*

¹⁵ *Lord, I wait for you; you will answer, Lord my God.*

¹⁶ *For I said, "Do not let them gloat
or exalt themselves over me when my feet slip."*

²¹ *Lord, do not forsake me;
do not be far from me, my God.*

²² *Come quickly to help me,
my Lord and my Savior.*

- ▶ As in other lament psalms, the Psalmist describes several types of hardship: sin (1-4), physical suffering (5-10), abandonment by friends (11), and challenge of enemies (12-16). He returns to these in verses 17-20. Which of these hardships seems most relevant to your life right now? Or, is there a combination of different kinds of suffering in your life? Tell God about your suffering and how it is affecting you.
- ▶ The Psalmist declares his trust in God and willingness to wait for God to act on his behalf (15). Ask God to give you strength to wait for his action and to enable you to continue looking for it. Ask God to meet you in the midst of your waiting.
- ▶ Verses 21-22 cry out to God to intervene quickly. Conclude your prayer by asking God to act on your behalf.
- ▶ Finally, return to pray through the entire psalm.

DAY 11

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 13

¹ *How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?*

² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

³ *Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,*

⁴ *and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.*

⁶ *I will sing the Lord’s praise,
for he has been good to me.*

- In the first two verses, the Psalmist repeats his question of “how long?” four times. Have your troubles extended over a long period of time without relief? Begin your prayer by telling God about these experiences of ongoing suffering.
- The Psalmist mentions three sources of his distress: relationship with God, relationship with himself, and relationship with his enemy. Into which of these three categories do your hardships fall?
- In verses three and four, the Psalmist seeks God’s help for his circumstances. Express your own plea to God for the suffering you’re experiencing.
- In verse 5, the Psalmist expresses trust in God because God’s love has been unfailing. What reasons do you have for trusting God? Tell God about the reasons God has given you to trust him.
- What do you see in your past that encourages you regarding what God will do in your future (6)? Praise God for these things.
- Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 12

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 137

1 By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

2 There on the poplars we hung our harps,

3 for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?

5 If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill.

6 May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you,

if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.

7 Remember, Lord, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!"

8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us.

9 Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

- ▶ Babylon (1) is a foreign place: far from home, and filled with opposition to God. It is power that oppresses. Have you experienced feeling homeless or displaced, like there isn't anywhere for you to be in the world? Have you felt oppressed by powers much larger than you? You may have been forced to act in one way while you were feeling a very different way (2-4). In what ways do you feel that way right now? Tell God about these experiences.
- ▶ Does loyalty to God and God's promises feel challenging today (5-6)? Recommit to remembering God's promises and ask for courage to believe them.
- ▶ Have you experienced others being joyful over bad things that happen to you (7)? Have you ever been so angry or hurt that you wished for something horrible to happen to someone for the evil things they did (8-9)? Since God can handle our honest anger and frustration, tell God about these things.
- ▶ Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 13

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 6

¹ *LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.*
² *Have mercy on me, LORD, for I am faint;
heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony.*
³ *My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, LORD, how long?*
⁴ *Turn, LORD, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.*
⁵ *Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?*
⁶ *I am worn out from my groaning.*

*All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.*
⁷ *My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.*
⁸ *Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the LORD has heard my weeping.*
⁹ *The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;
the LORD accepts my prayer.*
¹⁰ *All my enemies will be overwhelmed with
shame and anguish;
they will turn back and suddenly be put
to shame.*

- ▶ Reading about God's "anger" and "wrath" in the psalms can be confusing and disorienting, especially in light of Jesus' mercy. We know God lovingly disciplines his children (Heb 12: 4-11), but never out of cruelty or abusively. And, our suffering is not always a form of discipline from the Lord. Nevertheless, like the Psalmist, we can feel like we are under God's wrath.
- ▶ As Christians we know that God's love in Christ means we are not under his wrath, but instead secure in God's redeeming love. When you have experienced suffering, have you ever felt like it was God disciplining you? How did that make you feel? Like the Psalmist, have you ever told God how it felt? (1-2). Even now, allow yourself to tell God how you really feel about these things.
- ▶ What hurts? The Psalmist moves between physical and emotional images of pain (2-7). In what ways, do you think your suffering is expressed in physical ways? How might your suffering manifest in psychological or emotional ways? Do you find one type of pain more difficult to face than the other? In what ways do you think they are interrelated?
- ▶ Do you ever feel like you have been sad for too long? The Psalmist says "all night long I flood my bed with weeping...my eyes grow weak with sorrow" (6). Yet the Psalmist remembers that God hears the "cry" of his children and "accepts my prayer" (9), even when "enemies" (10) tempt him away from God's comfort and care. Like the Psalmist, have you ever been deeply sad, yet hopeful at the same time? How does the fact that God hears, knows, and is merciful a source of hope in hard times? Try to talk to God about these mixed feelings without trying to solve the tension.
- ▶ Slowly pray the above selections from Psalm 6 again. As you do, allow yourself to tell God whatever is hurting you, whether it is physical, psychological, relational, or whatever. Open up your whole self to God in your lament.

DAY 14

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 130

*1 Out of the depths I cry to you, LORD;
2 Lord, hear my voice.
Let your ears be attentive
to my cry for mercy.
3 If you, LORD, kept a record of sins,
Lord, who could stand?
4 But with you there is forgiveness,
so that we can, with reverence, serve you.
5 I wait for the LORD, my whole being waits,
and in his word I put my hope.*

*6 I wait for the Lord
more than watchmen wait for the morning,
more than watchmen wait for the morning.
7 Israel, put your hope in the LORD,
for with the LORD is unfailing love
and with him is full redemption.
8 He himself will redeem Israel
from all their sins.*

- As you read the psalm, what do you feel in your “depths” (1)? What do you wish God knew? Freely express yourself as you plead for mercy (2).
- Why do you think this psalm encourages honesty with God about our struggles, but then turns to speak of “sins” and “forgiveness” (3-4)? While not all or even most suffering is the result of a person’s sins, many people who suffer become more aware of the sin and brokenness in this world, and even in their own lives. Do you feel like you have become more aware of the sin, pain, and hurts in this world or even in your own life during your own suffering? How might concentrating on God’s forgiveness comfort you even if your own suffering is not related to personal sin?
- The Psalmist is like someone on night duty (5) eagerly awaiting the sunrise so they can be free. If you are in some form of darkness related to suffering, how might cultivating a sense of expectation and hope in God’s “unfailing love” bring fresh courage and strength?
- Does considering Jesus as the embodiment of God’s “unfailing love” and the promise of our “redemption” bring you comfort?
- Slowly pray Psalm 130 again. As you do, see if you can be both honest with God about your feelings and also hopeful about God’s promises. Don’t force yourself to choose between those two if you are conflicted.

DAY 15

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 44

¹ We have heard it with our ears, O God;
our ancestors have told us
what you did in their days,
in days long ago....

³ It was not by their sword that they won the land,
nor did their arm bring them victory;
it was your right hand, your arm,
and the light of your face,
for you loved them.

⁴ You are my King and my God,
who decrees victories for Jacob....

⁸ In God we make our boast all day long,
and we will praise your name forever.

⁹ But now you have rejected and humbled us;
you no longer go out with our armies.

¹⁰ You made us retreat before the enemy,
and our adversaries have plundered us.

¹¹ You gave us up to be devoured like sheep
and have scattered us among the nations.

¹² You sold your people for a pittance,
gaining nothing from their sale.

¹³ You have made us a reproach to our neighbors,
the scorn and derision of those around us.

¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations;
the peoples shake their heads at us.

¹⁵ I live in disgrace all day long,
and my face is covered with shame

¹⁶ at the taunts of those who reproach and
revile me,
because of the enemy, who is bent
on revenge.

¹⁷ All this came upon us,
though we had not forgotten you;
we had not been false to your covenant.

¹⁸ Our hearts had not turned back;
our feet had not strayed from your path.

¹⁹ But you crushed us and made us a haunt
for jackals;
you covered us over with deep darkness....

²² Yet for your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be
slaughtered.

²³ Awake, Lord! Why do you sleep?
Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.

²⁴ Why do you hide your face
and forget our misery and oppression?

²⁵ We are brought down to the dust;
our bodies cling to the ground.

²⁶ Rise up and help us;
rescue us because of your unfailing love.

DAY 15 (CONTINUED)

- ▶ It is one thing to “hear with our ears” about God’s faithfulness to past generations (1), but that doesn’t always mean we feel like he is being faithful to us. The Psalmist laments: “But now you have rejected and humbled us...” (9). Have you ever sensed a tension between knowing stories or experiences of God’s past care, but not feeling like it is currently true for you? Try to be honest with God about such feelings.
- ▶ Notice how often the Psalmist repeatedly lays the hard things at God’s feet: “You made us retreat...” (10), “you gave us up...” (11), “you sold your people...” (12), “you made us a reproach to our neighbors...” (13), etc. It can be uncomfortable for us to blame or accuse God, or to lay responsibility at his feet. Yet the Psalmist does just that. Do you feel like some of your hardships are God’s fault, but you haven’t allowed yourself to express that? If so, try to voice these concerns to God.
- ▶ In Romans 8:36, the Apostle Paul quotes from Psalm 44:22 after asking the question “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31b). Jesus himself “faced death” and was like a “sheep to be slaughtered.” Jesus’ suffering shows God’s solidarity with us in our suffering and can transform how we view our present difficulties. Because of this, confidence in God’s care and provision is not found in our circumstances (which might include terrible things such as tribulation, distress, and famine). Instead, no matter how hard things are, nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37-39) — the love of God found in the Jesus who suffered for and with us. Paul concludes “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us,” so no matter how hard things can be, nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37-39).
- ▶ How might meditating on Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection shape your view of God when facing your own suffering? Consider that since he lived a human life, Christ can truly relate to us and our sufferings. In his death, consider that he loved us enough to sacrifice his innocent life for us. In his resurrection, consider that he overcame death so we might also rise to new life.
- ▶ Slowly pray the above selections from Psalm 44 again. As you do, honestly express your views about God’s role in your suffering, but also try to meditate on Christ and his cross.

DAY 16

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 88

¹ *LORD, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.*
² *May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.*
³ *I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.*
⁴ *I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.*
⁵ *I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.*
⁶ *You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.*
⁷ *Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.*
⁸ *You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;*
⁹ *my eyes are dim with grief.*

*I call to you, LORD, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.*
¹⁰ *Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do their spirits rise up and praise you?*
¹¹ *Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?*
¹² *Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?*
¹³ *But I cry to you for help, LORD;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.*
¹⁴ *Why, LORD, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?*
¹⁵ *From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.*
¹⁶ *Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.*
¹⁷ *All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.*
¹⁸ *You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.*

- ▶ Do you feel “overwhelmed with troubles” (3) and like you keep begging God to give his attention to you in your need (2, 9, 13)? If you feel frustrated, like God isn’t noticing your prayers, allow yourself to freely express that in prayer.
- ▶ This psalm is a fairly unique lament because unlike every other one, it never makes a turn toward hope or renewal. It ends with “darkness” (18) rather than promise and light. It speaks of feeling “rejected” by God (14), about suffering and “despair” (15), and feeling like God himself put the Psalmist “in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths” (6). Does that make you feel uncomfortable?
- ▶ If the Bible includes a lament that never turns to the light or claims a divine promise, can you allow yourself to ever pray like this to God? If your suffering has you only feeling darkness, allow yourself to express that to God without throwing in positive clichés you might not find truly comforting.
- ▶ There are dozens of laments, yet this is the only one that never has any explicit comfort break through. What might this psalm’s presence in the Bible tell us about God’s willingness to receive our honest struggles even when we have nothing positive to say?
- ▶ Slowly pray the above selections from Psalm 88 again. Whether the darkness of this psalm makes you uncomfortable or is a comfort to you, allow yourself to pray its words. Consider how the presence of Psalm 88 in the prayerbook of Ancient Israel might inform your own prayers in times of suffering.

DAY 17

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 90

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
³ You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."
⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.
⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning:
⁶ In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered...

⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.

¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away....
¹² Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.
¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.
¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.
¹⁷ May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.

- Before the mountains were formed and long after a human has come and gone, "you are God" (2). How does the contrast between God's "everlasting" presence and the passing temporal existence of creation make you feel? (1-5).
- Do you ever feel like the Psalmist when he groans: "all our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan"? (9). Does your suffering ever make you feel as if life is futile and meaningless? Have you ever articulated that feeling to God?
- This same prayer also speaks of God's "unfailing love" and encourages the worshiper's delight that "we may sing for joy and be glad all our days" (14). In your suffering, have there been times that you felt two seemingly contradictory things at the same time, like despair and hope? Have you felt such tensions in your view of God during this season of pain and struggle? If so, tell God how you feel, both about the hard and about the hopeful.
- The psalm ends with requests of renewed perspective and hope: "Make us glad," show "your deeds" and "your splendor" not just to me, but to those who came later (16). Ask God to help you see things you might miss and to bring gladness in the midst of whatever else you feel.
- "Return, O Lord! How long?" (13). How might the coming of Jesus the Messiah inform your feelings of longing? Does his life, death, and resurrection make this psalm feel any different?
- Slowly pray the above selections from Psalm 90 again. Observe how its focus on the transitory nature of life makes you feel, and see if it might bring some fresh perspective. And consider how you might be able to continue recognizing God's unfailing love even amid the sufferings of this life.

DAY 18

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 102

¹ Hear my prayer, Lord;
let my cry for help come to you.

² Do not hide your face from me
when I am in distress.
Turn your ear to me;
when I call, answer me quickly.

³ For my days vanish like smoke;
my bones burn like glowing embers.

⁴ My heart is blighted and withered like grass;
I forget to eat my food.

⁵ In my distress I groan aloud
and am reduced to skin and bones.

⁶ I am like a desert owl,
like an owl among the ruins.

⁷ I lie awake; I have become
like a bird alone on a roof.

¹¹ My days are like the evening shadow;
I wither away like grass.

²³ In the course of my life he broke my strength;
he cut short my days.

²⁴ So I said: "Do not take me away, my God, in the
midst of my days;
your years go on through all generations.

²⁵ In the beginning you laid the foundations of
the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.
Like clothing you will change them
and they will be discarded.

²⁷ But you remain the same,
and your years will never end.

²⁸ The children of your servants will live in
your presence;
their descendants will be established
before you."

- ▶ The first two verses address God in the midst of distress. Direct your prayer to God and ask for God to be responsive to your prayer.
- ▶ In verses 3 through 7, the Psalmist expresses a wide variety of physical ailments and isolation. This section concludes in verse 11 with a complaint that his days are short and disappear as quickly as grass withered by the hot sun. With which of these afflictions do you most identify personally? Describe this complaint in your own words to God, knowing God can handle your honesty.
- ▶ In verses 25-28 the shortness of life is contrasted with the eternality of God. Most of these verses are quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12 in praise of Jesus. Use these verses to praise and thank God that Jesus, who is God with us, is also the eternal, powerful God who always remains the same.
- ▶ Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

DAY 19

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 123

¹ *I lift up my eyes to you,
to you who sit enthroned in heaven.*
² *As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master,
as the eyes of a female slave look to the hand of her mistress,
so our eyes look to the LORD our God,
till he shows us his mercy.*
³ *Have mercy on us, LORD, have mercy on us,
for we have endured no end of contempt.*
⁴ *We have endured no end
of ridicule from the arrogant,
of contempt from the proud.*

- ▶ People going through suffering sometimes experience added grief as others seem to respond with contempt rather than compassion (3). Do you feel like others have made your suffering worse because of how they have treated you by their words or actions? Speak honestly with God about those disappointments and frustrations.
- ▶ Has your difficult situation been increased by people's clichés or neglect of you? Do you feel like people's advice or words come more from arrogance or ignorance than love (4)? Do you allow yourself to complain to God about any misunderstandings or mistreatments you have received from others? Tell God about ways you have been hurt.
- ▶ While this psalm ends by voicing frustrations, it began by acknowledging God "enthroned in heaven" as a Sovereign King (1). The prayer expectantly longs for the Lord to "show us his mercy" (2). Do you allow yourself to voice your complaints even as you acknowledge God's heavenly rule? If not, consider what makes that especially hard for you. Do you feel heard by God? Do you feel as if God can do anything to help? Freely express yourself to the Lord.
- ▶ Slowly pray Psalm 123 again. See if your heart might resonate with not being forced to pick between affirming God's kingly rule and acknowledging your genuine frustrations about others who are letting you down, or even hurting you.

DAY 20

Take a moment to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray:

PSALM 143

¹ Lord, hear my prayer,
listen to my cry for mercy;
in your faithfulness and righteousness
come to my relief.
² Do not bring your servant into judgment,
for no one living is righteous before you.
³ The enemy pursues me,
he crushes me to the ground;
he makes me dwell in the darkness
like those long dead.
⁴ So my spirit grows faint within me;
my heart within me is dismayed.
⁵ I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what your hands have done.
⁶ I spread out my hands to you;
I thirst for you like a parched land.
⁷ Answer me quickly, Lord;
my spirit fails.

*Do not hide your face from me
or I will be like those who go down to the pit.*
⁸ Let the morning bring me word of your
unfailing love,
for I have put my trust in you.
Show me the way I should go,
for to you I entrust my life.
⁹ Rescue me from my enemies, Lord,
for I hide myself in you.
¹⁰ Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God;
may your good Spirit
lead me on level ground.
¹¹ For your name's sake, Lord, preserve my life;
in your righteousness, bring me out of trouble.
¹² In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
destroy all my foes,
for I am your servant.

- Ask God to hear your prayer and spare you because he is faithful and righteous (1-2).
- Are your “enemies” crushing you to the ground (3) and causing your spirit to grow faint (4)?
- What has God done for you in the past (5)? Remind yourself of God’s history of faithfulness to you.
- How do you experience your need as thirst in a land without water (6)?
- Do you feel urgency in your distress (7-8)? Ask for God’s quick deliverance.
- In what parts of your life do you need God’s guidance (8-10)? Ask God to lead you.
- The Psalmist appeals to God’s character (e.g., reputation, righteousness, love). Ask God to intervene in your circumstances because of who he is.
- Conclude your time by praying through the entire psalm.

WHO ARE WE?

Elizabeth Lewis Hall (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology) is Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Liz has been writing on suffering using psychology and Christian theology for 20 years. She has published over 100 academic articles and book chapters. With her husband, Todd Hall, she is the co-author of *Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Transformation*. Her contributions to the integration of psychology and theology have been recognized in various ways, including the Christian Association for Psychological Studies 2016 Narramore Award for Excellence in the Integration of Theology and Psychology. She teaches regularly for her adult Sunday School class.



Kelly M. Kapic (Ph.D., Systematic and Historical Theology) is Professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College where he has taught since 2001. Kelly has written or edited over fifteen books, including *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*, which won the Christianity Today book of the year award in the area of Theology and Ethics and World Magazine's Short List award for Accessible Theology Book of the year. In 2014 Kapic received a Templeton Grant to be part of The Center for Christian Thought studying the topic of Psychology and Spiritual Formation. He also served as part of the Core Research Team for the Templeton funded Project Amazing Grace.



Jason McMartin (Ph.D., Religion) is Professor of Theology at Biola University, where he holds a joint appointment at Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology. Jason has co-authored several articles and a book chapter on the role of suffering within the flourishing life. He also writes on virtue, spiritual formation, and theological anthropology, and teaches courses on integrating psychology and theology. He has served as a pastor and urban missionary.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped us to refine this program. We're thankful for the input of our research team: Eric Silverman, Jamie Aten, and Sarah Lawson. We also want to thank Jason's Meaning-making and Suffering Course from Spring 2023.

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® NIV®
Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.
Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.