

## Grief That Goes Somewhere

### Psalms of Personal Lament: Psalm 13 and 38/39

#### I. Basic components of the personal Lament Psalm<sup>1</sup>

1. Threefold lament: “they,” “I,” and “you.”
2. They “are trying to destroy me”
3. I “am suffering pain and humiliation”
4. You – What are You going to do about this, and why is it taking so long!?  
Complaints against God include:
  - Negligence – God hides himself, God has forgotten, God has forsaken
  - Hostility – God is angry because of sin, God is hostile for unknown reasons, God has rejected me/us
5. Bold Prayer
  - Urgent
  - Direct (honest)

#### II. Psalm 13 – a model of a personal lament<sup>2</sup> (and a guide for us in our laments and grief)

1. Introductory Petition (13:1 “O Yahweh” “Be gracious to me...”)
2. The Lament
  - “I” (13:2a How long must I...”)
  - You – God (13:1a-2b “How long... will you forget...”)

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<sup>1</sup> Allen P. Ross, “The ‘Thou’ Sections of Laments: The Bold and Earnest Prayers of the Psalmists,” *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, gen eds. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 135, 147.

<sup>2</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “The Laments of Lamentations: Compared to the Psalter,” *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, gen eds. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 128.

- They – the enemy (13:2b “How long will my enemy ...”)
3. Confession of Trust (13:5a “But I... have trusted ...”)
  4. Petition:
    - For Favor (13:3a “Look, answer me...”)
    - For Intervention (13:3b “Give light to my eyes...”)
  5. Motive (13:4a “Lest my enemy say, I have ...”)
  6. Vow of Praise (13:6 “I will sing to Yahweh...”)
  7. Anticipated Thanksgiving (13:6b “For he has acted on my...”)

### **Psalm 13**

**For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

- <sup>1</sup>How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?  
 How long will you hide your face from me?
- <sup>2</sup>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?
- <sup>3</sup>Look on me and answer, LORD my God.  
 Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,  
<sup>4</sup>and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”  
 and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
- <sup>5</sup>But I trust in your unfailing love;  
 my heart rejoices in your salvation.
- <sup>6</sup>I will sing the LORD’s praise,  
 for he has been good to me.

### **III. Psalm 38: another example of a personal lament**

1. Introductory Petition (38:1-2 “O Yahweh” “rebuke me not in Your wrath...”)
2. The Lament
  - “I” (38:3-8, 10 “... I am bent over and greatly bowed down; I go mourning all day long...” v. 6)

- You – God (38:9 “Lord, all my desire is before You; and my sighing is not hidden from You...”)
  - They – the enemy, the problem (38:11-12 “... Those who seek my life lay snares for me ...”)
3. Confession of Trust (38:15a “For I hope in You, O LORD: ...”)
  4. Petition:
    - For Favor (38:21 “Do not forsake me, O LORD; O my God, do not be far from me ...”)
    - For Intervention (38:22a “Make haste to help me, ...”)
  5. Motive (38:19-20 “... those who repay evil for good, They oppose me, because I follow what is good.”)
  6. Vow of Praise (38:22b “...O Lord, my salvation”)
  7. Anticipated Thanksgiving (38:15b “... You will answer, O Lord my God”)

### **Psalm 38**

**A psalm of David. A petition.**

- <sup>1</sup>LORD, do not rebuke me in your anger  
or discipline me in your wrath.
- <sup>2</sup>Your arrows have pierced me,  
and your hand has come down on me.
- <sup>3</sup>Because of your wrath there is no health in my body;  
there is no soundness in my bones because of my sin.
- <sup>4</sup>My guilt has overwhelmed me  
like a burden too heavy to bear.
- <sup>5</sup>My wounds fester and are loathsome  
because of my sinful folly.
- <sup>6</sup>I am bowed down and brought very low;  
all day long I go about mourning.
- <sup>7</sup>My back is filled with searing pain;  
there is no health in my body.
- <sup>8</sup>I am feeble and utterly crushed;  
I groan in anguish of heart.

<sup>9</sup> All my longings lie open before you, Lord;  
my sighing is not hidden from you.

<sup>10</sup> My heart pounds, my strength fails me;  
even the light has gone from my eyes.

<sup>11</sup> My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds;  
my neighbors stay far away.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> I am like the deaf, who cannot hear,  
like the mute, who cannot speak;

<sup>14</sup> I have become like one who does not hear,  
whose mouth can offer no reply.

<sup>15</sup> LORD, I wait for you;  
you will answer, Lord my God.

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

<sup>17</sup> For I am about to fall,  
and my pain is ever with me.

<sup>18</sup> I confess my iniquity;  
I am troubled by my sin.

<sup>19</sup> Many have become my enemies without cause<sup>19a</sup>;  
those who hate me without reason are numerous.

<sup>20</sup> Those who repay my good with evil  
lodge accusations against me,  
though I seek only to do what is good.

<sup>21</sup> LORD, do not forsake me;  
do not be far from me, my God.

<sup>22</sup> Come quickly to help me,  
my Lord and my Savior.

#### **IV. Main components in the personal biblical laments**

1. Introductory Petition (13:1 “O Yahweh” “Be gracious to me...”)
2. The Lament
3. Confession of Trust in the midst of sorrow/wrongs/grief/pain
4. Petition to God for help (favor and intervention)
  - For Favor (13:3a “Look, answer me...”)
  - For Intervention (13:3b “Give light to my eyes...”)
5. Motive for God to help me/us
6. Vow of Praise
7. Anticipated Thanksgiving

#### **V. Write your own prayer/psalm of lament**

#### **VI. For further reflection –**

#### **Psalm 39: Turning from anger to personal lament to repentance**

**Can you identify the main components of lament?**

**For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.**

<sup>1</sup>I said, “I will watch my ways  
and keep my tongue from sin;  
I will put a muzzle on my mouth  
while in the presence of the wicked.”

<sup>2</sup>So I remained utterly silent,  
not even saying anything good.

But my anguish increased;

<sup>3</sup> my heart grew hot within me.

While I meditated, the fire burned;  
then I spoke with my tongue:

<sup>4</sup>“Show me, LORD, my life’s end  
and the number of my days;

let me know how fleeting my life is.

<sup>5</sup> You have made my days a mere handbreadth;  
the span of my years is as nothing before you.  
Everyone is but a breath,  
even those who seem secure.<sup>(b)</sup>

<sup>6</sup> “Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom;  
in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth  
without knowing whose it will finally be.

<sup>7</sup> **“But now, Lord, what do I look for?  
My hope is in you.**

<sup>8</sup> **Save me from all my transgressions;**  
do not make me the scorn of fools.

<sup>9</sup> I was silent; I would not open my mouth,  
for you are the one who has done this.

<sup>10</sup> Remove your scourge from me;  
I am overcome by the blow of your hand.

<sup>11</sup> When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin,  
you consume their wealth like a moth—  
surely everyone is but a breath.

<sup>12</sup> “Hear my prayer, LORD,  
listen to my cry for help;  
do not be deaf to my weeping.  
I dwell with you as a foreigner,  
a stranger, as all my ancestors were.

<sup>13</sup> Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again  
before I depart and am no more.”