

Grief that Goes Somewhere

A Guide to Writing Personal Lament Psalms

- Be honest about your thoughts and emotions, even the ones you don't like.
- Talk to God without worrying if you're being "right." Imagine God is right in front of you and has given you permission to get everything off your chest.
- Write as *you*. If images or metaphors speak to you, use them. If you are more concrete, write concretely.
- Utilize "I" (expressing your own experience), "You" (addressing God), and when appropriate, "he/she/they" (e.g. those who've betrayed you, those attacking you, wicked people, etc.).
- Utilize honest questions: "How long?" "Why?" "Where are you?"
- Allow your Psalm to take you on a journey if possible, but don't force it. For example, some Psalms move from doubt to praise, but not all of them. Let praise and trust be authentic.

Here is one basic framework for a personal lament psalm, based on Psalm 13. The order of elements can vary, and not all lament psalms contain all elements:¹

1. Introductory petition/appeal to the Lord (13:1 "O Yahweh" "Be gracious to me...")
2. The Lament
 - a. "I" (13:2a "How long must I...")
 - b. You – God (13:1a-2b "How long... will you forget...")
 - c. They – the enemy (13:2b "How long will my enemy ...")
3. Confession of Trust (13:5a "But I... have trusted ...")
4. Petition (the "ask"):
 - a. For Favor (13:3a "Look, answer me...")
 - b. For Intervention (13:3b "Give light to my eyes...")
5. Motive -- telling God why he should answer or help (13:4a "Lest my enemy say...")
6. Vow of Praise (13:6 "I will sing to Yahweh...")
7. Anticipated Thanksgiving (13:6b "For he has acted on my...")

¹ Based on 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. Schmutzter and David M. Howard, Jr. (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 128.