

was learning to repent of his demands that God act a certain way. He was learning to love God for using these hardships for gracious purposes.

## It Is Right to Express Your Questions to God with a Heart of Faith

If anger against God is sin, how do we deal with our doubts and questions about his providential dealings, especially amid our sufferings? Must we stoically, silently “stuff” our struggles? Thankfully, our Lord presents another option, the path laid out for us through the lament portions of Scripture.

Christians are sometimes baffled by God’s ways and confused by his apparent inconsistencies. Yet Scripture teaches us the art of holy lamenting—learning how to complain in faith—to God about the calamities he sends.

For example, the careful reader of Job 1 and 2 cannot avoid the conclusion that God himself is the ultimate cause of Job’s misfortune. In the chapters that follow we hear Job’s bitter complaints and heart-wrenching questions. Yet he never crossed over into a settled state of blaming God for his suffering. While Job’s questions were never answered, he remained at heart faithful to God. The Lord he came to

know in bolder, overwhelming ways in Job 42 was the same Lord he had trusted from the beginning.

We see the same thing in Jeremiah's book of Lamentations. He winces when he recalls God's hand of judgment on his own nation. He attributes the devastation to God's decrees, yet he never denies God's covenant loyalty or essential goodness to his people. He does not impugn God's motives or accuse him of malice or capriciousness. He wrestles, he wonders, and he questions, but he ultimately rests in God's promises of restoration and blessing.

Consider also the prophet, Habakkuk, on the eve of the Babylonian invasion (c. 600 B.C.). His honest complaints (Hab. 1:1–3, 12–2:1) arise not from anger against God but from the conviction that God was indeed a powerful Judge and a loving Savior (3:18–19). His questions reflect his fundamental faith.

Of course, the richest deposit of biblical lament lies in the Psalms. Listen to David's cries in Psalm 13:

How long, O LORD? Will you forget  
me forever?  
How long will you hide your face  
from me?

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

Look on me and answer, O LORD my  
 God.  
 Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep  
 in death;  
 my enemy will say, "I have overcome  
 him,"  
 and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

But I trust in your unfailing love;  
 my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
 I will sing to the LORD,  
 for he has been good to me.

David grapples with God's apparent distance from him in the midst of enemy attacks. He questions the Lord's seeming neglect and complains about God's felt absence. Yet notice that David speaks *to* his God. He has dealings *with* God. He addresses God *directly*. And instead of accusing God of wrongdoing, David's fourfold "how long" lamentation (vv. 1–2) leads to petition (vv. 3–4),

which yields confession of trust (v. 5) and commitment to praise (v. 6). He resolves to trust in God's loyal love, salvation, and goodness.

### Laments of Faith

What common elements can we glean from these biblical laments?

1. Suffering. Each of these believers was experiencing intense confusion and bewilderment over apparent inconsistencies between God's revealed character and his current, providential dealings. Carolyn's divorce was no less tragic than the sufferings these believers faced. Don's work and back problems were comparable to the trials recorded in Scripture. The Bible puts words to our suffering by recording the words of other sufferers.

2. Prayer. Each lamenter voiced his questions directly to God himself. They moved *toward* God, not *away* from him. They sought his face in prayer and settled for nothing less than conversational contact with their Savior. Job, Jeremiah, David, and Habakkuk all had direct dealings *with* God. One of Carolyn's problems was that she was asking questions *about* God but not bringing those questions *to* him.

3. Faith. Their laments arose from fundamental faith (albeit imperfect). In the trenches