



**ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN**

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

***Are you there God?, Pt 1
Why God, Why!?***

Lamentations 1-3

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47.2—Rock Bottom

Well, yesterday it finally happened. I hit Rock bottom. I've seen it coming for some time, but yesterday it hit—and on a leap day no less! I don't want you to be too concerned because we've all hit—or will hit—this bottom. I'm talking of course about the dreaded age of 47.2 years.

According to a study from the US Bureau of Economic Research 47.2 is the unhappiest age of your life. And so I did that math and precisely yesterday was that day for me. The reasons for this social scientists say, are many: it's the time when you are likely sandwiched between aging parents while still raising your own children; you realize that you may be at the apex of your career; may never achieve lofty goals you may have set for yourself while at the same time your job responsibilities and demands may be higher than ever; and your body is beginning to let you down. Interestingly, this trend is basically the same across the nationality, and economic status.

The good news is that we start to become happier and happier. But until that time, the bottom is lousy. **We all know that the lows in life can really get us down.** It is worth lamenting. We're actually going to write a lament in a little bit, so I gave this a shot for my Rock Bottom.

Lament of Rock Bottom

Look God! How my stomach churns because Father time is fast on my heels.

How my heart aches within me because I yearn for younger years. Speaking of ache God, my knees and shoulders are aching too, and my back is stiff. How my hair grows thinner and my waist grows thicker. And sleep, ach!

And...How other people have done wrong things such as look at me differently, underestimating my strength and mental acumen: ["That old guy knows nothing about today's real world" they say] And you let them off the hook!

2 God, I have turned from you and your ways by thinking I could do it all myself. Pretending I'm not tired, I don't ache, and that reoccurring fib: "oh sure, I have heard of that new social media app the tok tik and the snap face, and that computer program, and latest pop star. Oh sure"

I am so tired and weary because I don't want to have to adapt to yet another way of doing things.

I lack courage because I can feel pessimistic.

My other complaints are too many aches and pains to list here.

But, God, this is not the whole story, I recall these things that give me hope: so many shining lights who have walked this path before me so well. Teaching me that each season of life can be rich. That I have adapted before, and that I can again.

This reminds me of your love for me: that every age can be a great age. That the sun will rise again tomorrow on a bright new day. That your divine spark lives in all of us.

God, your steadfast love never ceases,
Your mercies never come to an end,
they are new every morning.
Great is your faithfulness;
may my faithfulness also be great.

But there are some real things worth lamenting...

I half-joke here, but we all know there are the very real things in life to lament. (Nigerian Churches burned, Coronavirus, Nursing homes, Gangbangers, Opioid death, Decrepit living conditions.)

Why God, why?! Why is this happening?

These are the newspaper headlines that make big news. There are also those things that are big in our lives. The stuff that keeps us up at night. The worries about a loved one's physical or mental health; our fears of what others may do to us. What may happen in the future, if not for us, then our

children or grandchildren. Job concerns, fractured relationships, the list goes on and on.

And we lie awake at night, or drift off during the day in worry. Worry, the misuse of imagination.

But there is another way. A spiritual practice that we can put to work for us and draw us closer to God; Lament. If we want to connect with God—really connect with God—we have to share all of ourselves and our lives with God. Everything—not just the gratitude and the good stuff (though we will talk about that in two weeks).

Lament is uncomfortable

There is a lot that is worth lamenting. But we hold back. I think there are some reasons why we hold back:

Maybe we're uncomfortable with the raw emotion. That this is how we may feel. And we just don't want to go there.

We don't want to be complainers. We don't want to wallow in grief or sadness or bad luck.

One important distinction between complaining and lamenting. *Lament* is meant to release deep emotion, memorialize it, and move on. Lament is a pathway to healing. *Complaining* can become a crippling habit; lament trusts in God and sets us free.

Even though we may be hesitant to lament, the Biblical tradition reflects its value. There is an entire book of the Bible called the Book of Lamentations. In this book, the writer weeps over the many miseries of the city, mourns the city's role in bringing about these miseries, but ends with hope for a brighter day and the return of God's people to the right ways of God.

Lamentations 1 & 3, excerpts

*¹¹How deserted lies the city, once so full of people!
How like a widow is she, who once was great among the
nations!*

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*She who was queen among the provinces
has now become a slave.*

¹¹⁰*How The enemy laid hands on all her treasures;
she saw pagan nations enter her sanctuary..*

¹¹*All her people groan as they search for bread;
they barter their treasures for food to keep themselves alive.
"Look, Lord, and consider, for I am despised."*

¹⁶*"This is why I weep
and my eyes overflow with tears.*

*No one is near to comfort me,
no one to restore my spirit.*

*My children are destitute
because the enemy has prevailed."*

³²²*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.*

²³*They are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

²⁴*I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him."*

²⁵*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,
to the one who seeks him..*

Lament is not limited to one book of the Bible, it's found throughout. It's written of in the histories, the Prophets, in Wisdom literature (Job anyone?). Some scholars say that up to 70% of Psalms are lament Psalms, both communal and individual.

Laments cry out to God for help. Beckon God to come to the rescue from sadness, emptiness, and enemies. They confess to God that they we have turned from God's ways. And they express hope that there will be a brighter day with God.

Even Jesus turned to God in lament on the cross, echoing Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Exclaiming "Where are you God!?" may feel irreverent or disrespectful or a show of unfaithfulness. But even Jesus, shared his true feelings with God.

Real faith is just that—Real. Real faith trusts God with our whole selves, even our doubts, fears and angers about the ugly parts of life.

Lament is an act of faith.

Write your own lament

In your bulletins are some worksheets for writing your own lament. It's also going to show on the screen for those of you at home.

Benediction

To lament is to be human and live the human experience.

It can be an expression of doubt; doubt that refuses to give in to hopelessness.

It is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of faith.

