

Lament

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[0:00] All right, so if you got a Bible, go ahead and turn to Psalm 13. We are doing a short little series before Easter looking into the Psalms. We call it Window into the Psalms. And what we want to do is we want to sprinkle our preaching series and going through books of the Bible along with some Psalms because Psalms are beautiful.

They help us be raw, real, and reverent with God. And that's really important. God wants all of us. He doesn't want a really, you know, a really well-presented, polished version of ourselves.

Man, He wants the real us and all of our faux pas, our snot, our tears, our laughter, all of those things. Okay? And so today Psalm 13 is looking at this thing called lament.

And what is lament? And it answers the question, what do we do when life doesn't match with what we know of God's character? Right? Right? Maybe it's your life. Maybe it's just looking around. The news gives us plenteous reason to wonder like, man, God, are you even around?

We see evil men prospering. We see good people suffering. And we think to ourselves, man, Lord, I am, there's things going on in my life that I really need you to come through and to put an end to, to fix.

[1:13] And, you know, as Christians, we hope that God cares about those things. Wouldn't it be nice if He fixed our problems swiftly and answered us according to our prayers? We care for things in our lives like safety and deliverance and justice and blessing and goodness.

Because when we understand and see this God of love and goodness, He's righteous, He's just, He's all those things. That makes sense for His nature. So it's confusing when He allows us to flounder in our suffering.

Because we also look throughout the Bible and we see like, man, God, there are some people in the Bible that were some tough things. You see like Daniel in the lion's den, David and Goliath. Seems like you came through in some pretty amazing ways for those people.

What about me? I'm waiting and I'm waiting and I'm waiting. When's my turn? Right? And it's in that waiting that doubt and despair and cynicism can start to grow in our hearts if we don't deal with those things correctly.

And the temptation is in our suffering is to not turn towards God, but actually to turn away from Him. But this psalm, what it does, it teaches us a very different way. And here's the thing we're going to learn.

[2:17] It's an invitation for us to get honest and even a little bit cheeky and feisty with God. And it encourages us to bring really what we're feeling, really what we're thinking to include our frustrations and fears and doubts and anger.

But we bring it to Him. And lament isn't giving in to doubt and cynicism. Actually, lament is faith and action. So let's jump into Psalm 13. It says, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Lift up my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him. Lest my foes rejoice because I'm shaken.

But I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord because He has dealt bountifully with me.

[3:24] This is God's Word. This Psalm is a great example of lament, this practice of lament, which is a form of prayer. And it's a great example,

one, because it's nice and short, right?

You read it, you get through it. And even in that nice short part of it, it's easy to see the structure of lament and what lamenting is. And so where we're going today is the first part of my teaching is actually just looking at the structure of lament and why that's important.

And I just want to give honor to where honor is due. This was deeply informed by a book called *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy* by a guy named Mark Vukrop, which is a very Dutch name, Mark Vukrop. I think I'm saying that right. So *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy*. I would commend that book to you if you're a reader and you want to dive more into this subject of lament. And lamenting is important. We need to learn it and the Psalms teach us how to do it.

And so we're going to look at that. Now the final part of the sermon is really more of an apologetic for lamenting and why we should be doing that on the regular. And how it helps us find ourselves in God's story and seeing his hand in our lives, even when we have a hard time seeing it.

[4:33] So that's where we're going. First, let's look at the structure of lament. Well, lament begins by turning to God. We see that in verse 1. And the psalmist begins by crying out, *How long, O Lord?*

And that is not him declaring his atheism. It is turning to God. He is turning to God and declaring his doubts and confusion. And we get to do the same thing. We are acknowledging in lament.

We are acknowledging that God is there with us, even when it doesn't seem to be that way at all.

And lament is very different than what Israel did in the wilderness.

Lament is coming to God with your complaints. But it's different to what Israel did, right? Because they got in trouble for grumbling about God to each other. They didn't go to God with their complaints. They went to each other with their complaints.

Right? They said, maybe Egypt was better. Like this thing that God pulled us out into what he's doing. This is worthless. Maybe we should go back. Or maybe other gods would be doing a better job.

[5:31] Maybe if we started worshiping them, our lot would turn out better than it is right now. Things aren't how we want them to be. And so you look at that, and God's issue there is he's saying that's not good.

It's easy to find people that have problems with God and turn away together with them. You know, one of the easier answers to our God problems is that we all start to talk and believe, that gossip about him, and say, man, he must not be who he claims to be.

And the danger there is that it leads us to put God on trial. It's a bit like us entering into a class action lawsuit of sorts. Right? We get enough people around us, and we'll be like, oh yeah, we got all the same problems.

Let's just, let's complain about God. Let's put him on trial. We think that strength in numbers makes us right about what we think about God's deficiencies. That we might know better than what the Bible says about him, how God has revealed himself in there.

And God, he's not gonna stand behind that. His judgment against grumbling Israel was that they put his character and his nature on trial. It says this in Numbers 14.

[6:36] Truly, this is God speaking, truly as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord, none of the men who have seen my glory and my signs, that I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and yet have put me to the test, or put me on trial these 10 times, and have not obeyed my voice, they shall not see the land that I swore to give to their fathers, and none of those who despise me shall see it.

10 times these people put God to the test. 10 times. And these are the people that saw him do amazing things in Egypt, decimate Egypt, bring them out of slavery in Egypt, part the Red Sea, go through that.

They saw him supply manna every single day in a barren and dry land and water from the rocks so they could eat and they could drink and not die. 10 times these people, what they did was, in essence, believe the same lie as Adam and Eve.

God isn't who you think he is, is the temptation in our suffering. He's holding out on you. He is keeping you from your full potential and happiness. He's got you under his thumb for a reason.

He doesn't want you to really flourish. And that is grumbling against God. But the lament is not that. Lament isn't grumbling about God as we turn from him. It's actually the decision we make to turn to

him in our troubles.

[7:52] And when we do that, we just don't turn to him. We get really honest with him. Lament complains to God with your raw emotions and your real situations, right? Lament needs to keep, it's okay to be feisty.

It's okay to be full of raw emotion. Lament, you see in this psalm and you see in other psalms throughout that are laments. It's a bit in God's face, but it's not in an irreverent way. In fact, it's because of the psalmist's reverence of God and belief and trust in him that he can get in God's face. What he's doing, he's holding the tension of his unresolved problems that don't seem to fit with God's promises and purposes for those he loves. And living in that tension, he's holding those things to be true and it gives him room to do some holy complaining.

Verse one, will you forget me forever? Remember, right? When's the last time you said that to God? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Like this psalmist is not a milquetoast British society person coming and saying like, well, Lord, you know, things aren't really going well.

[9:08] Can you perchance, you know, help me out a little bit here if you don't? No big deal, you know, I just, you know, just wanted to lay it there, okay. Now he is, you see passion, you feel the tears, perhaps a bit of anger behind the words that he is speaking, right?

And that is important because when things aren't going well, it is easy for us to get frustrated at people and oftentimes it's projecting on people what really we have a problem with God, but we just feel like we're not allowed to be frustrated and angry with God.

So let me just like, let me just place it to the wrong people here. And what lamenting does is it allows us to feel that anger, but when we will lament to God, when we bring it to the right person, it keeps that anger from becoming bitterness.

It turns into something else entirely as we're gonna see. And that isn't irreverence toward God, coming to God with your, a bit of anger and frustration and be like, dude, what the heck is going on? You know, and not dude maybe, but like father in heaven, what is going on? These are just, it's not irreverence. These are reverent, raw questions caused by a confused believer in God's lack of help in his present situation.

[10:20] Right, verse one, he gets real with God. It feels like you don't care about me is what he's saying there. It feels like you've forsaken me. He's saying, God, you hid your face, which means I am not experiencing your favor in my life.

All those good things, where are they at? Where are they at? And then he goes on to say to God and confess to him, because you are not stepping in, because you are allowing me to languish in this trouble and this trial, he says, I've now got these inward wrestles with my thoughts and my emotions.

It is not going well inside here. And what the psalmist offers to you and me right here is a very different religious experience to what many of us grew up in, which is, hey, you gotta trust God. Don't ask questions. Don't raise problems. Everything can be explained away with a God has a plan. Don't worry, he's gonna work it all out. And you can live that way.

And you know, those are partly true, but it's like, man, that's not a really good, honest relationship with the person. It's not a good, honest relationship with God. And what you end up doing if you live that way, you end up with a very heady religion that lacks heart and soul, where it says like, you know, don't get emotional with God.

[11:37] That's like, eh, a little taboo. That's not cool. The only thing that you can really trust is logic. Unfortunately, God's gonna lead you into places that human logic just can't resolve.

Why? Because I'm gonna say this. Logic is, I'm a logical guy. Love logic. Like, without logic, a lot of them are just like, I like things to make sense, okay? God made logic.

We have logic in this world because he's a God of order. I'm not saying logic is bad, but like anything else, like a good thing can become a God thing. And that can easily drift into that.

We can build a faith around logic where we trust in logic, actually more than we trust in God. What do you mean by that, Jesse? Well, I'm saying if logic is your God, then you won't be able to live well

in his mystery.

And there is a lot of mystery in how God works things out. In unhealthy faith and logic, what it is going to do, it is going to bring you to a faith crisis at some point.

[12:37] And God is okay with doing that. But your faith crisis isn't with the God of the Bible, it's with your system of faith you've created for God to live within. And spoiler alert, God isn't good at living within anybody's constraints.

So lament. Lament brings complaints, but it leaves the restraints. It leaves the constraints, sorry. And it's not just about leaving constraints on God and saying, God, you must act this way. But it also is leaving the constraints on what we're allowed to feel. Lament allows us to notice and to name our emotions and what is going on in our soul, but it does it in a very healthy way, right? It doesn't say to deny them, and it doesn't say to minimize them. But it also doesn't say, well, make them the most ultimate thing ever. Because the psalmist knows, and the Bible, God's wisdom tells you, emotions can't deliver you from anything, right?

You can be angry, and your anger isn't gonna get you out of your problems, right? And emotions, they're helpful, but they aren't the most trustworthy thing to tell us what is true either.

[13:43] But what they are is, they are helpful signals to say, hey, things aren't as they should be. Something is not going, something is not right here, right? Emotions are really helpful.

So leave constraints and get honest with your emotions. Bring those to God. Tell God what is going on in you. And also tell him what you need from him.

The psalmist goes on to say this in verse three. Consider and answer me, O Lord my God. Lift up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed over him.

Lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. The psalmist starts it like, he pivots with this interesting phrase, consider and answer me, O Lord my God.

And lament, what he's doing here, he's showing us in lament, there's a point you pivot to boldly asking God what you need him to do. The Bible tells us that our God sees us and hears us all the time.

[14:39] And probably many of us are like, yeah, I'm sure that's true. Yeah, we got a theology for that. But then our life experiences make us wonder, right? God, are you really seeing everything here?

Are you really noticing the things that are going on? My aunt Jody, we affectionately call her AJ. I think she's an absolute saint.

All her nephews and nieces do and her kids do. But she would be the first to tell you she's not. But AJ, her youngest son, let me tell you a bit about her youngest son, Mark, who's now I think about 40, was born with severe autism.

Like, still cannot speak to this day. He can say little sentences here and there. And just, he has, you know, just stuff where he just rocks and does all this stuff. And he's still alive.

He's living in assisted living because he's totally dependent on adult care. He can't live on his own. And that's gonna be the way for the rest of his life. My aunt loves her son, just as he is.

[15:44] But she was also a woman who believes that God is a God of healing. And from the time that he was diagnosed at four years old, she cried out to God so many times for his healing. I cannot imagine the number of hours she spent going to God for that, asking him to consider her and answer her prayers over her son's condition.

Because Mark's autism made life difficult in many ways. It limited her life in many ways. It's not the kind of thing that we would write into our own stories if we had the power to do that.

And I've often wondered if God hears and sees because of all the prayers for Mark that went unanswered. Our family's prayers, my aunt's prayers. These are the sort of scenarios that make us stop wanting to go to God and asking those kinds of questions altogether.

Or if we do, we ask for things with more likely outcomes. Or if God doesn't answer them, eh, not really that life-altering, right? It's like, Lord, help me find a parking space, right? We're good to pray for something like that.

Or, Lord, I have this headache, can you heal me? And, you know, eventually the headache goes away. And so we're like, well, maybe it was the Lord. Maybe it was just the headache just going

away. But I wanna say just, those things aren't bad requests to make to the Lord.

[16:59] He cares about those little things too. But if they don't get answered, probably not gonna put you in an existential crisis of faith, right? You're probably not going to God to lament about your parking spot.

But what about this? Lord, you gave me a beautiful but broken child. You need to heal him. Lord, my mom is in severe pain and suffering because of her cancer.

I prayed this. My mom died in 2010 from cancer. And I remember praying this months for months. Please have some mercy and heal her. Lord, please deliver me from this addiction to whatever it is you're addicted to.

Maybe it's food or overeating. Maybe it's shopping. Maybe it's getting into debt when you shouldn't be. Maybe it's pornography. Maybe it's alcohol. Maybe it's drugs.

Those are bold requests with a lot more on the line than a parking space and a headache, right? And those things really test our faith. They test the muster of our faith. Do we really believe that God sees and hears us when we lay those prayers on his feet and he remains silent?

[18:11] What do we do? Well, lament gives us a way to come to him with honesty in those places. It encourages us to call God to the mat on the basis of his faithfulness and love and ask for what we need him to do.

And if we don't do this, if we don't lament, I think what I've seen is we tend to land in one of two places. One, we will start denying that our needs are that important.

Like, ah, you know what? I guess I'm just a needy person. I'm just a weak person that is wanting things that like really aren't that important anymore. And what's gonna happen if that is you?

Eventually, you're gonna start to look down on people that are needy and you're gonna have disdain for your neediness.

And what, that doesn't promote compassion and kindness, those good fruits of the spirit, actually just gives way to judgment and harshness. You'll become just more judgmental and more harsh because of that.

So you don't wanna land in that place, but another dangerous place we could possibly land in is that like if we don't come to God and we don't lament and we don't bring these things and we're not looking for him to step in and help and wondering why he's not doing that and we just kind of turn away from him, it's going to blind us to God's hidden work in the hard parts of our life, in our life story, which kind of leads us to a prayerlessness that loses sight of a personal God who puts himself into every part of our story, whether we realize it or not, the kind of invisible hand of God.

[19:39] And if you land in either of those two places, none of those really tend to help your faith in God. And what the psalmist is saying here is, okay, lament all those things, but lament always lands with trusting in God, right?

Lament starts with turning to God, getting honest and passionate with him, right? Registering our complaints in raw, real ways. And then we go and we say, Lord, and I need you to come through for me in this way.

We ask him for help with boldness, but finally we always land with trusting God. Verse five, but I have trusted in your steadfast love. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord because he has dealt bountifully with me. And this feels like a bit of a record scratch. Everything going so far, it's like, okay, this guy's in a bad place. This makes sense.

And then suddenly this seems like a very unexpected turn. And let's be honest, if you're like me, it kind of borders on disingenuous religiosity. Of course, we gotta say that at the end, gotta slap the Jesus bow on it and pretend everything's gonna be okay and better.

[20:41] But don't assume that the psalmist says this with a forced smile on his face. Don't assume that he is not saying those things, verse five and verse six, and he might still be walking away in anguish.

But what he's doing with this, even though he may be in anguish, he is forging hope by remembering who God is. Notice the verb tense changes in verse five and verse six.

And what he's doing is he's connecting his past experience of God and what he knows about God with his present and his future. He says, I have trusted, past tense, and so my heart shall rejoice.

That can be present or future tense. And maybe both at the same time is what the psalmist is trying to get across. I have trusted, my heart shall rejoice. I will sing because he has dealt bountifully with me.

He connects the past and the present. He looks past at the faithfulness of God and fuels faith in him. And that brings him to have hope for his present circumstance and future circumstance.

[21:54] Faith fuels hope and hope fuels faith. This is beautiful cycle of our relationship with God. Faith fuels hope, hope fuels faith. Have you ever wondered why, like somebody comes to faith in Jesus Christ and they start praying and it just seems like God always answers their prayers that they lob up and he does it quickly.

And you're just like, man, Lord, can I get some of that? Like coming my way? Like what's going on here? And I think what he does with these new Christians as they come to him, he's building it, in them he's building a track record of his faithfulness, his steadfast love.

I think he's wise enough to know that they're gonna at one day and how he leads their lives and plans for it, they're gonna have to look back on those things. And be like, oh yeah. The psalmist, he can look over his life and he could see God's steadfast love.

And what does that mean? That word steadfast love is to really get an idea for what he's leaning into here, the kind of truth about God the psalmist is leaning into here. That word steadfast love is the Hebrew word *chesed*.

And if you really wanna get Hebrew with it, you would say *chesed*, okay? So this Hebrew word *chesed*, and it was a meaningful deep one for the people of God, for Israel, because for Israel, God's *chesed* was everything for them.

[23:08] This guy, this commentary, he wrote his commentary on Psalm 13, Gerald Wilson. He said this, the psalm, about these verses, the psalmist finds the grounds for hope and Yahweh *chesed*.

Yahweh is the name that God revealed himself, the name he gave Israel to no one by. So Yahweh *chesed*. He finds grounds for hope in that. Translated here as unfailing love, and that's the NIV translation, our ESV says steadfast love.

The term has more of loyalty or enduring allegiance about, the term has more of loyalty or enduring allegiance about it than the emotions we normally associate with love.

In the case of Yahweh in Israel, he has freely chosen to enter into a covenant relationship with Israel to be her God while she is his people. Yahweh chooses this relationship, not because of Israel's greatness, but simply because he loves Israel and desires to fulfill faithfully the promises he has made.

That is *chesed*. Even when Israel fails in her commitment to her covenant obligations, her God remains faithful. Though he may punish Israel for her sins, he remains true to his purposes for her.

[24:21] That is why Israel can continue to hope for restoration in the face of the loss and destruction, and that too is why the psalmist here can continue to hope for personal restoration.

Even as death is at the door, therefore his heart can rejoice in Yahweh's anticipated salvation, and he can sing songs concerning Yahweh's goodness.

See, the psalmist, he is honest about not seeing God's restoration in the present, but he can look back in his own life and see it at work, and he can look beyond himself to God's hidden hand in the bigger story involving his life but also Israel's as well.

And from that, he can conclude that God is and will be the promise maker and promise keeper that he says he is, even though my present circumstances seem to be telling me otherwise.

And here's the thing that you and I have to believe. We really believe that God is this God of covenant faithfulness and covenant love and relationship. His steadfast love, we cannot measure it by what is happening to us in a moment or even today or even based on the past month or even year.

[25:32] God's faithfulness, his steadfast love, his ascent is proven and measured across a lifetime and even across lifetimes, across generations. And believing that, when you understand that and you know that and you see that, it keeps you steady and hopeful for God's salvation.

Those sorrows and sufferings may abound in your life where you can stop and you can say, although Lord, I'm looking to you and I'm coming to you and although I can't see what you are doing now, I still know what you have done and I can trust in you.

Going back to my Aunt Jodi, nothing has changed with my cousin Mark, but a lot has changed in my aunt. And I think it's through her suffering and her sorrow, she now has a unique burden for the weak and the least of these.

Like very few people I know. She is more compassionate, she is more kind, she has a capacity to pour herself out like very few people I know. When my mom was dying of cancer, she was there for three months, day in and day out, taking a shift.

She's one of three ladies taking a shift and she had a lot going on in her life, but she would steal away when she could and she would be by her sister's side tending to her care. I don't think my aunt is who she is today, but for those years of suffering and languishing and lament, but continuing to trust God.

[27:03] I'm gonna be honest. That's suffering God used in a powerful way in her life. And we have to get a theology of redemptive suffering.

Lament requires that we get an understanding of redemptive suffering. Suffering will disorient you if you are stuck in religious structures and formulas that have to explain everything neatly and tidy. But through suffering, we can learn things about ourselves that would have otherwise remained hidden, right? We're like these sponges in God's hands and suffering is him kind of squeezing us and we see what comes out of our lives and we're just like, oh my, that's a bit surprising.

Didn't know that was in there. In my own life, I've learned my proclivities toward pride. I'm a performance-oriented guy.

I wanna prove how amazing I am. I wanna be better than everybody else. And through God's suffering, he pointed those things out. Through suffering, he pointed out my selfishness and indulging in and searching for comfort in all the wrong places, things like pornography or food.

[28:15] Later on, after God dealt with those things, he used suffering to expose a sinful passivity that I have that manifested in procrastination or overlooking people's sin to keep up the pretense of a false harmony.

Suffering is not enjoyable, but it can bring about God's redemptive change. Let me tell you about a story.

I'm gonna leave the guy's name out, but a pastor, like amazing man of God, God used him in a lot of ways. Like he could preach the pain off the walls.

God used him to, you know, through his sermons to draw a lot of people to himself in salvation. He used him in a lot of places throughout the globe, helping churches out. He was one of those guys that a lot of church leadership looked to for insight and wisdom.

And God used him in a lot of those ways. I mean, he was like, if you looked at him, you're just like, dude, that guy is rocking, man. I wanna be like him one day. And he was getting on a plane. I think he was in his early 50s at the time.

[29:19] He was getting on a plane, coming back from a trip to a church to help a church out. And he had a stroke. And he's never been able to speak the same sense.

Lost his, all the stuff it was God using him for. His ministry just like that. And I remember looking at that and being like, that is crazy. And then the years went by and he started to cover a little bit of his speech so he can make tiny little sentences.

And I would see him from like random times. And he would be, he would like remember my kids' names and see like stuff through like Facebook or something and be like, man, your kid, your son seems like such a wonderful person.

I'm praying for him. As much as you can get out and make sense of. And he was this guy that was like dealing with like the, like we would call in the Christian world, the cream of the crop people at the top. Like man, he was running in circles and rubbing elbows with people that we were like, ooh man, that guy's really counting.

And now he's a guy that is caring and encouraging people just like you and me every day and our kids. And I'm like, Lord, what is all that about? Like he was so counting for you.

[30:27] He was a key player in your kingdom. That does not make sense to me. And I remember praying to God about that. And he said like, Jess, how do you know my best work is in being done right now in his weakness?

How do you know that I didn't take away those things because I wanted him to grow in him a humility and compassion and a kindness that probably would have otherwise not been capable to do?

I was like, oof, I don't know about that. That's a tough one. I don't even like to say that out loud. But when you and I, when we accept a theology of redemptive suffering, we can look back and see God involved in ways that we didn't understand at the time as we went through them.

And yet we can look back and we start to see God's hidden hand more visibly and see that it was at work that whole time to transform us into something of more depth and substance and character. The good that comes out of us in suffering, I just want to argue this. The good that comes out of us in our suffering is a more powerful expression of the same thing that can come out of us in times of blessing.

[31:39] Here's some proof. What is more powerful? To say to a good friend that you're forgiven for something they've done to you or to say to a man, a stranger who murdered your family, you're forgiven.

I've seen both. And the second one's a lot more powerful. At the beginning of Jesus's ministry, he healed a lame man that was being lowered down while he was teaching a crowd.

And he said to him, it's like, your sins are forgiven. And then to show that he had the power to heal, to forgive sins, he healed the man. The man got up and walked away and the crowd marveled.

And that's amazing. But I think this is even more amazing is that Jesus dying in agony on the cross, blood flowing from his head from the crown of thorns, his back ripped open by the Roman whip, bleeding, nails bleeding, or nails causing his hands and feet to bleed from that place.

And also remember, the cross is an instrument of asphyxiation. Most people died because they suffocated. And so as you were, the longer you hung on the cross, breathing became more and more difficult.

[32:48] Every breath that you could breathe became more and more precious. And Jesus, he looks on the Roman soldiers carrying out his crucifixion. He looks at the crowds that were chanting, crucify him.

And he spends a precious breath to say, Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. Both stories, Jesus offers forgiveness. But in the second one, he does it at the height of his suffering. Which one moves you more deeply? See, redemptive suffering, friends, has its purpose. We are revealed in it, for sure, but so is the power of God's grace.

My Aunt Jodi was, and still is, a bit of a firebrand. Very competent woman, very capable, very confident, very opinionated on many things.

But over the years, I've seen her become more humble, more compassionate, more patient, more God-dependent, more childlike in her faith, more surrendered to his will. She's become more aware of her faults and failures and limitations.

[33:54] And she's become more patient with those of others. Now, she may never fully understand what God was up to with all that's happened in her life, but I know this about my aunt.

She has trusted and seen his invisible hand at work as she looks back over her life. She sees his faithfulness. She sees his steadfast love woven through her story in the many different ways.

And we need to see that for ourselves in our own stories because Lament believes God places himself in our story. If God only answered prayers quickly, we'd miss out on a big part of our relationship with him.

So much of who we are would have to be left out. Consider the story of Jesus with the Canaanite women in the Gospel of Matthew. Like, Jesus is sitting at a table and this Canaanite woman, she comes begging for Jesus' help to heal her daughter.

My daughter has a demon. I need you to heal her. Jesus ignores her and she keeps asking and he ignores her. It gets to the point where his own disciples are like, Jesus, this is getting really awkward. Are you gonna say anything to her or you just want us to send her away?

[34:56] Something's gotta change here. This is getting real weird. And so Jesus says something but it's kind of very dismissive towards her. He just looks at her and says, I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

And so she says, oh my goodness, he's engaging me now and she just persists. Lord, help me. And then Jesus says something that makes us go like, oh man, is this like a Jesus feeling here? Like he's having a bad moment or something? Like it makes us gasp when he says, it's not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs. And most of us would be like, Jesus got the picture, I'm just gonna go over here now.

Sorry, sorry, excuse me for using your time. she sees an opening. She goes right in there, doesn't hesitate and says, yeah, but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the master's table.

And then Jesus marvels at her faith, heals her daughter. And that's an amazing thing. But because, think about this, because Jesus didn't answer her prayer instantly, this woman becomes more than just her problem and her ethnicity.

[36:04] She, we learn a lot about her. She is cheeky, she is quick-witted, she is bold, she is persistent, she is not gonna give up. She is a mom who loves her daughter deeply to put up with this and push in despite all the rebuffs Jesus was giving her.

We get to see her and her faith on full display. And you know what? We'd miss out on all of that about her if Jesus quickly answered her prayer. And he didn't. And so we get to learn these wonderful things that could have remained hidden.

But because Jesus remains at the edge of her problem for a while, he tarries there, she becomes interesting and real and authentic. It is like, man, we get to see hues and contours and dimension to this lady that we would have otherwise not have known.

And that's the, that makes for beautiful relationships. relationships. Not a lot of pretense. Like coming to God with a lot of pretense. It's the real authentic thing that he wants.

See, God was never removed from this lady's story. We don't know how long this mom was in agony over her child's circumstance. We don't know how helpless she had felt to never be able to change it.

[37:21] We don't know what kind of shame and guilt that she carried because of this or how much society had even heaped on her because of that. But we do know this. We do know that one day Jesus drew close.

She came for help and ultimately her daughter was healed. God was in her story seeing and hearing though for a lot of that time silent and yet in the silence his hidden hand was on her life guiding her pulling her towards that moment with Jesus that changed everything.

So friends in the waiting and lamenting just remember important invisible things are happening. In the mystery wonderful things can be wrought by God. So keep turning and trusting him.

Lament and look with hope. The band comes up and we look to respond. In a moment we're going to be taking communion but I want to say to you today if you're here you are not yet a follower of Jesus. You would kind of put yourself in that category of like wanting to know some more intrigued not sure about this.

I am so glad that you're here and we're going to come to the communion table but this little meal is for those that have faith in Jesus and so don't come to Jesus in this way. Jesus wants to come you to come to him right where you are just as you are.

[38:34] And he wants you to know how much he loves you how much he sees you how much he wants to be God at the center of your story not on the fringes anymore and so he did that by making a way.

He came and he died a death that you couldn't die. He suffered and died for you. He took on your sorrows because of your sin so that you can live in him forgiven forgiven of your sins healed of your sins your sins washed away and to know him that the judgment that any of us would face apart from Jesus doesn't have to be one that you walk into but you could be saved from that and be given eternal life by faith in him and if that's you there's gonna be a prayer on the screen for you to pray and I wanna encourage you to pray that if that is you.

Now for those of us in the room that we would say hey we're we already followers already are followers of Jesus we're gonna come to the communion table and as we prepare ourselves to take this I want us to think about this.

Communion reminds us that Christ suffered and died for us to redeem us from sin and death. This is a celebration of that a thankfulness for that. Faith in the cross and what Jesus has done fuels our hope for today and the hope for the future that one day despite all the sorrows and sufferings we may face now all of that is gonna come to an end one day.

Jesus is all gonna bring all of that to an end one day. So come to him just as you are. Pray with me. Jesus we wanna come not all polished not pretending we have it all together we wanna come to you just as we are right now.

[40:18] Maybe some of us we are facing some difficult trials some suffering prolonged we're wondering are you really there? What is going on?

Why are you so silent for so long? This doesn't make any sense. Lord I pray that you would meet us in this time. maybe we're just like that guy that said Lord I have faith help my lack of faith.

Help us where we need the help right now Lord God meet us where we're at every single one of us. If it's encouragement if it's strengthening if it's just compassion and empathy if it's just knowing it reminded that no no no God you are there I haven't seen your hand in a while but you know you are there.

Lord just meet us right where we're at. Pray that in your name. Amen.