

Wherever you're watching, we're glad you decided to spend this hour with us. We're beginning a new series today called Answering God, learning from the psalmists on how to live well in our current season. The psalmists asked questions of God and their world. They did this in ways that can help you and me as we navigate our current world.

We are going to learn from the psalmist about lament. Here is the definition for lament that we're going to use today. Lament is the language of the space between. It is the space between what we knew and what we don't know, between one place and another, between what we experience and what we long for.

That is where we are in our world. We're living in the space between the way the world used to be, and how the world will look in the future. On one side, we're experiencing the loss of how the world worked. We've lost key moments in our lives - weddings, birthday celebrations, graduations, and simply loss of companionship. Worse, maybe you've lost a job, struggled with poor health, or worse. We've lost the illusion of how the world worked.

On the other side, we face uncertainty about how the world will work in the future. There is a reality setting in that when this is "over," we won't go back to the way things were. A new world will exist that will require us to learn new ways of being. For example, how will we greet each other in this new environment - will handshakes or hugs exist again? How will we meet in large groups and enjoy the power of community? We're living between the world we use to know and the world we do not yet know.

This is where the psalmist can help us through the practice of lament. Lament is the language of the space between. What lament does is helps us to live well in the space between. As we do that, we can hold both honesty and perspective together.

We're going to read Psalm 42 today, learning from the writer the language of lament.

**As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng. Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him my Savior and my God. Psalm 42:1-5**

Verses 1-2

The writer begins by expressing his deep sense of longing. Thirst conveys the urgency of his longing. The human body can go for several weeks without food, but only a few days without water. Thirst is not optional but necessary. His soul - his deepest being - longs to know God and be known by Him.

But there is a gap between what he longs for and what he is experiencing. The space between is seen in the word "when." We know the weight of "when." If you are single, when will I be married? If you want a job change, when will I find something new? As a parent, you're asking when schools will reopen? When will things be different? When will this be over? There is grief - a sense of loss - in the space between. The psalmist puts it this way:

#### **Verse 3**

There are tears. There are voices of fear that we're all alone.

#### **Verse 4**

The psalmist remembers how things used to be. He remembers joining with the community of faith in worship of God. He remembers the celebration of large gatherings. Maybe you've felt the fear and anxiety of the past month feeling alone. Or maybe you're missing the gathering of church and the energy of people. The psalmist describes what it's like to live in the space between. Notice that he is honest that the world doesn't work as it should. But there is also something more.

#### **Verse 5a**

Why is he downcast? We know why - the world doesn't work as it should. But he fights for perspective. His perspective is:

#### **Verse 5b**

He has his eyesight set on a new horizon. He believes that God is not done being faithful. The world may be out of control, but God is not. How does the writer build this perspective? He builds it through language, speech. He talks to himself. After a month of shelter-in-place, you're probably quite good at talking to yourself. There is power in speaking to yourself when life is overwhelming. For the psalmist, language is the path to hope.

A 20th-century British pastor commented on the psalmist's action in this way:

**Have you realized that most of your unhappiness in life is due to the fact that you are listening to yourself instead of talking to yourself? Take those thoughts that come to you the moment you wake up in the morning. You have not originated them, but they start talking to you, they bring back the problems of yesterday...Somebody is talking. Who is talking to you? Your self is talking to**

you. Now [the psalmist's] treatment was this; instead of allowing this self to talk to him, he starts talking to himself. "Why are thou downcast O my soul," he asks... So he stands up and says: "Self, listen for a moment, I will speak to you." Martyn Lloyd-Jone

Language is a creative force in the world. Just as you can listen to language that creates fear and anxiety, you can use language to create hope. This is the lament of the psalmist - it is the language of the space between. It holds both the honest assessment that the world doesn't work as it should, and fights to see a different perspective. You can see these elements in the next set of verses.

**My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar. Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me— a prayer to the God of my life. I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?" Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. vv. 6-11**

#### Verses 6-7

He describes his situation as being in a land far from where he wants to be. He feels overwhelmed. If you've been to a waterfall, you know how loud it is. If you've ever been in a storming ocean, you know how forceful waves can be. Deep calls to deep - he has a sense that everything is working against him. Yet, it's from the distance, from the space between, that he fights for perspective.

#### Verse 8

Two things happen in this verse in the original language. In using the words, the Lord, the writer switches to the personal name for God (Yahweh). He is not simply speaking about God, but addressing how God acts toward people. Second, the word love is more dynamic than might appear at first read. Love is the word *hesed*. It combines both loyalty and love. It refers to God's "unchanging constancy" (Tyndale commentary.) For the psalmist, this is his God who loves him, who is passionately for him. Day and night, God will never cease to be faithful. Lament holds both honesty and fights for perspective. But the psalmist still has to face a world that doesn't work as it should.

#### Verses 9-10

I know this is who You are, but I don't like how the world is working. Lament is allowed to hold both honesty and fight for perspective. Life in the space between needs both. He ends by preaching to himself again.

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*

#### Verse 11

How could he have hope? He didn't hope because everything was great. It wasn't because his circumstance suddenly got better. The psalmist could hope because he made a choice to hope. He chose to believe that there is still good to come.

This is where faith comes alive. The Reformer, John Calvin, put the choice this way: "There is nothing more injurious to faith than to fasten our minds to our eyes, that we may from what we see, seek a reason for our hope." Faith is honest with that you see, and choosing to believe that that God's hesed is not done. His unchanging constancy toward you will continue. Believing that there is still good to come.

This is what we remembered on Good Friday and celebrated on Easter. Jesus died for you and was raised to life for you. The resurrection sets in motion God's redemption of a world that doesn't work as it should. And we can join that redemptive action by embracing lament, holding both honest and perspective.

How can we embrace lament, live in the space between? Two questions for us today. First, where do you need to name the weight of when? We saw in the first two verses the gap of the longing of the psalmist and when it would come about. He was honest about the space between. Where do you need to name the space between?

It's going to be different for each of us. Perhaps you're overwhelmed by the current situation. Or maybe there are aspects of your life you feel like you're living in the space between. Maybe you're parenting your child from one stage to another. You knew what it was like in the one stage, but now you need to learn how to parent well in the next. Maybe at work you're ready for a new challenge, and you're pursuing something different. You're living in between the two. Where do you need to name the space between?

Second, where can you look for grace in your current circumstances? In verses 5 and 11, the Psalmist chose to look for the good that God would do. There is beauty all around us. We just need to look. I've been moved by the John Krasinski videos on Youtube called, Some Good News, in which he finds stories of the good happening all around us. For example, think about good habits that will come out of this season. Maybe it's slowing down. Perhaps it's spending more time with family. Maybe it's pursuing community that one previously thought was optional. Here is the thing about perspective, perspective is found by those who are willing to look for it. It's a choice.

Lament is the language of the space between. What lament does is allow us to live in the in-between. As we do that, we can hold both honesty and perspective together. Though the world doesn't always work as it should, God is still good.

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