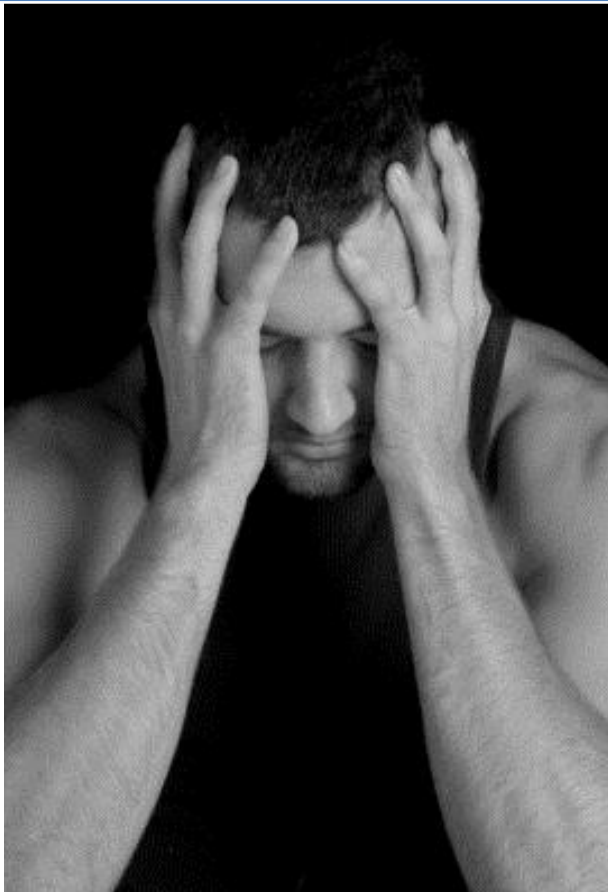


How to Yell at God



The Art of the Lament

Kim Martinez

A Deep Imprints Coaching

Resource

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Can I Yell at God?

The people who wrote the Psalms did so while living real life. They wrote in response to their situations. They wrote to vent their own emotions, and to pass on what they had learned to future generations. The Psalms are about how people maintained their faith in the face of real stress. They are also about people who experienced real victory, and wanted to make sure it was remembered.

In this study we will look at the biggest category of the Psalms and weave in key Proverbs. There are 67 lament psalms. A lament is one of the forms of literature in the Old Testament. We see laments in Job, Jeremiah, Lamentations (thus the name), as well as Psalms. Although every lament is special to its circumstances, there are major components common to laments:

- Call to God
- Explanation of the distress
- Confession of trust in God
- Request for God to intervene
- Anticipation of deliverance
- Praise to God

As we look at a few of the laments, we will discover that they are usually a bit vague on exactly what the writer was going through. I think this is deliberate. The laments are in the bible as your tool to discuss the hard times of life with God and to call on Him for deliverance. The enemy works overtime to make life difficult for us, to distract us or discourage us. God has given us tools to fight the enemy – and the sword of the Spirit is the only offensive weapon. I encourage you to learn from these laments, and the next time life is too difficult, to run to your bible and read them – not as someone else’s feelings, but as your own.

This study is designed as a workbook. You can pick your favorite topic, or you can work from front to back in about 5 days. Since this is published as a PDF, you can either print out the ebook, or you can take a journal and work through the problems alongside your reading.

Let’s begin our journey by looking at Psalms 3-5.

These three songs were probably written at the same time, perhaps just hours or a day apart. They show the progression of David’s feelings as he fled from his son Absalom.

David seemed to do a lot of journaling or song writing when he was under stress. Have you ever experienced relief by writing out your feelings? Tell of a situation where writing out your feelings helped you gain perspective.

The one thing that continually strikes me throughout these psalms is David's brutal honesty with himself and God. **Do you find it easy or hard to be totally honest about your feelings in prayer? Why?**

For background of these Psalms, **read 2 Samuel 15-17**

Why did David leave Jerusalem? (see 15:14)

David's concern wasn't just for himself, but primarily for the City of Jerusalem. In fact, we see in 15:25 that David didn't even take the Ark of God with him. The Ark of God was the presence of God. David left the presence of God in Jerusalem, believing that God was capable of bringing him back to it. David was more concerned about taking care of Jerusalem than he was about protecting himself. He maintained his faith in the omnipotence of God by not trying to take all he could to protect himself, but leaving the protection in the city.

Psalms 3-5 were probably written between the events of 2 Samuel 17 and 18. After David had crossed the Jordan, he and all his men, then they went to Mahanaim and bought supplies. Psalm 3 is very likely a morning psalm (a song designed to be sung in the morning), Psalm 4 an evening psalm, and Psalm 5 another morning psalm. As David fled to Mahanaim, after crossing the Jordan, he took the time to compose expressions of his feelings.

Now read Psalm 3-5

Describe David's overall feelings in each of the Psalms.

Psalm 3

Psalm 4

Psalm 5

When my children are feeling frustrated by life, we try to teach them to look at their situation from another viewpoint. In this case, David expressed how he was feeling, then he looked at it from another perspective, usually God's, and answered himself. Some of the most powerful words you can add to your vocabulary are "but God..."

I was down, 'but God...'

My life is overwhelming “but God”.

Now go back to the three Psalms and make note of how David answered each one of the feelings you discovered earlier.

Psalm 3

Psalm 4

Psalm 5

Application:

Do you think that being brutally honest with his feelings helped David to then bring himself back to the place where he was able to really trust God?

Think about one of your frustrations. In a sentence, describe the issue, (remember, in a lament, you are vague about the situation, but brutally honest about your feelings); then write a declaration of who God is, a request for His help, and praise Him for it.

What About my Attitude?

Yesterday we looked at Psalms 3-5, and David's lament while he was on the run from Absalom. As you review those Psalms, answer the following questions:

What attributes of God did David hold close to his heart and remind himself of in this time of crisis?

In Psalm 4:4-5 what did David admonish himself to do and not do?

David was able to remind himself how to act properly because he trusted in God. He admitted how he felt in the situation, but chose actions that were righteous. Today, I'd like for us to take a look at what it means to be a person who can act with integrity in times of stress.

Read Proverbs 15:1-10 and 24-33

As we mentioned early on in this study, Proverbs are primarily about how to live life with others. Yet for a major part of Proverbs 15, we see the author discussing how one can stand in favor with God.

List the behaviors or attitudes that these verses name as being wise, or in God's favor:

There were many things in these verses, but three major things jumped out at me. First, we have to accept discipline. In a sense, David was submitting to discipline when he refused to take the Ark of God with him. He was submitting to God's will – if God wanted him back, he would come back.

What are some ways that we don't submit to discipline in our lives?

Has God shown you an area that he wants to work in and you haven't let Him? Take a moment now, write that area here and give Him the authority to work in that area of your life.

The next area that I see listed in these proverbs is that of humbleness. Here is a story about two men: One of them had a tycoon mentality. He wanted to rule the world. He spent his days and nights building his business so that it could dominate the market share. Eventually, he had a large empire of businesses, but he had lost his whole family along the way – he was alone. The other man had dreams, but his attitude was very different. He got up every morning and did what was in front of him. He didn't spend his emotional energy expanding his business; instead he invested time in the people around him. As he built people up, he found many opportunities open up for him. He became a rival of the first man, and in the end his conglomerate of businesses did dominate the market. The difference was that in his humble approach, he found that he had friends and family all around him for the journey.

A humble person sees other people as more valuable than themselves. It isn't that they don't value themselves, but they realize their limitations, and know that they need other people in order to fill in their blind spots. As they build other people up, they too will be built up – not because that was the goal, but because they are adding value to the world.

Think about the people God has put in your life. List two or three ways that you can add value to their lives this week.

The last area to look at in this chapter is the importance of our words.

Looking at these Proverbs, what are some of the ways that a wise person uses words?

How does a fool use words?

In the midst of David's flight, he dealt with each person so carefully. He told some people to stay in the city for the sake of the city, others that they didn't need to come with him, and still others he sent to the city to frustrate Absalom's plans. He operated in logic while on the run for his life – yet we see in his Psalms that his emotions were running very high. Even under stress, David was able to act and speak in wisdom.

Questions for the Day:

Think about David's self talk – his explanation of the problem, his description of God's role, his request for God's help, and his praise of God's work – in Psalms 3-5. If you could run to God when you were feeling overwhelmed and be assured that He was still in charge, would that help you to have control of your tongue?

Read Romans 8:31-39. Write verses 37-39 below:

One of the hardest things for us to do when we are in conflict with someone is to admit that God can be on their side and our side at the same time. We feel that if we are right, than God should be with us, and...well they just can't be in his favor. David left the Ark of God in Jerusalem where Absalom would soon be setting up his power base. He left the presence of God with his enemy and trusted God to walk with him without the visual representation of his presence.

How can we submit to discipline, be humble, and use our tongue for good in the midst of strife?

When You Feel Beaten Down

Do you ever get tired of being a Christian? Not in the private sense – the relationship with God, but the public sense – the loving other people part – even when it hurts?

I think there are times when we all cry “How long, Lord?” Sometimes the relationships are close to us, like our family, or maybe a bit more removed, like our workplace – but again and again we face people’s angry approach to life and return love; and it gets exhausting. Before long, we find that we have shrunken. We’ve stopped interacting with people, because people hurt us. We find cynical thoughts dominating our mind – second-guessing everyone for their deeper motives. At times like this, it seems that everyone else is just operating on their own agenda, and we are left to fend for ourselves.

Today, we will find that we are not alone. It is perfectly normal to feel this way - but we don’t have to stay there!!! When we feel pressed down, that’s when we look for God.

Read Psalm 71

How old do you think the Psalmist was?

What seems to be his concern?

Psalm 71, verse 7 says that the writer has become like a ‘portent’ or ‘omen’ to many. The Message says “many gasp in alarm when they see me.” In the early days of the Pentecostal movement, what is now known as the Azusa Street Revival, people were mocked, ridiculed, and harassed. Sometimes, as we walk in our Christian life, we feel beaten down, isolated, and avoided. There comes a point that even people’s honest questions feel like an attack on us as individuals.

This is the attack of the enemy! Notice the key word in the description above is ‘feel’. Satan comes against us with everything he has.

Write Ephesians 6:12 here:

In Psalm 71, the psalmist felt beat down as well.

How did he respond? (See Psalm 71:8 and verses 14-24)

When we are beaten down, we have to fill our faith tanks – we have to look at the situation from a different perspective.

Take a look at the following Proverbs. In either the NIV or the Message, each of these verses contains the phrase “but God”.

Proverbs 12:2, 16:1-2, 9, 33; 17:3; 21:2
For each verse, fill out the chart below:

Man’s perspective	But God...

Just as we need to keep our mind trained on God’s perspective, it is important to keep our heart pure. When those cynical thoughts seem to overwhelm us, we need to return to the basics of our faith and put our trust again in God.

Read Hebrews 10:30-36

The writer of Hebrews is talking to Christians who have been in the faith a while. ‘Don’t forget your zeal, and how you stood up to public ridicule – how you became a ‘portent’ to many – and you did it with joy! You loved the poor and withstood bad attitudes.’ (Kim’s paraphrase)

***Don’t throw away your confidence* he says. How does throwing away our confidence relate to feeling fed up with dealing with difficult people or societal attitudes for the sake of Christ?**

Questions for Today:

List 2 or 3 of your own 'but God' phrases here:

Many believe that Psalm 71 was written by an older person. In what ways is it harder to keep going through adversity when we are older than when we were younger?

What is the Psalmist's answer to this?

When the Wicked Prosper

Every one of us has asked the question at some time: “I try so hard, why do other people have it so easy?”

Two Psalms deal with this question from different perspectives.

Read Psalm 10 and Psalm 139.

What do the two Psalms have in common?

What is different about them?

Looking at these two Psalms, list all the complaints that the psalmists have:

Now list all the attributes of God that they list:

Elisha’s servant had an interesting moment when he thought the hordes were bigger and more powerful. **Read 2 Kings 6:15-17. When it looked like those against God were about to win, what did Elisha point out to his servant?**

We often see with carnal eyes, but God has a different perspective. The lament is an important part of our lives, because as we explain our perspective to God, we open the conversation for Him to explain His perspective to us.

Part of seeing God’s perspective is learning to trust God. Trust is a product of relationship. You can’t build trust in God if you don’t spend time with Him, and you don’t develop trust if you

never have reason to doubt. Trust is built when you see the armies descending on you, and you then see God's deliverance.

We live in the physical, but there is a greater reality – the spiritual reality. **Read Ephesians 1:18- 2:7. When the eyes of our heart are opened, what three things does Paul say we will see?**

Where is Christ now, according to Ephesians 1:20-23?

What is under Jesus' feet? _____

What is Jesus the head of? _____

Why did God raise Christ up? _____

Now read Hebrews 2:6-9

Fill in the blank: God put _____ under Jesus and left _____ that is not subject to him. "Yet _____ we do not see _____ to Him." (verse 8)

We live in a complex time. We acknowledge that there is a spirit world. We acknowledge that Jesus is in charge of all things, but that reality we don't see with our eyes. We cry like the psalmist "God, why do you let them get away with sin and let them be blessed in the process?" Then we come to learn, just like Elisha's servant, that we aren't seeing the whole reality.

Describe a time that you realized that people you thought had everything were really poverty stricken in some area of their life.

As we transition our thinking from looking with our physical eyes to the eyes of our heart, we have to learn to trust God.

Read the following Proverbs and note what each one says about trusting God, or about God's perspective in situations:

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 10:27

Proverbs 14:2

Proverbs 14:12

Proverbs 14:26-27

Proverbs 15:3

Proverbs 15:33

Proverbs 16:4

Proverbs 16:20

Proverbs 16:25

Proverbs 18:10

Proverbs 19:3, 23

One of the best ways for Satan to attack us (beyond guilt trips, but that is another story) is to undermine our trust in God. Satan has been around since before the beginning of the world, and has developed a few tricks. **According to Proverbs 21:22, what is one of the best ways for Satan to win in a battle over you?**

It is frustrating when we see people prosper who seem to work in opposition to all God is doing. Our job isn't to fix the problem, but to ask that our eyes, like Elisha's servant's eyes, will be opened to the real reality, and that we will be used by God to minister even in difficult circumstances

Questions for the day:

Read Matthew 6:19-21. How do these verses pertain to our topic today – the frustration we feel when the wicked prosper?

What are some tools that you can use to gain a better understanding of what God is doing in a situation?

How can writing a lament open our eyes to what God is doing?

How to win the Mental Battle

Psalms 42 and 43 are some of my favorite Psalms. The reason I like them is because the Sons of Korah shared with us the conversation that goes on inside one's head, and how to win the mental battle. In the Hebrew manuscripts, Psalms 42 and 43 are actually one Psalm, and it is as one piece that we will look at them today.

Read Psalms 42 and 43

As we walk through these Psalms, we are going to make note of the entire process inside of the writer's head. The first thing to note is that this person thinks like you and me. He doesn't say "I've decided and this is it" – he vacillates between feeling overwhelmed and choosing to stand in trust.

When Jesus taught the disciples to pray in Matthew 6:9ff, he taught them to first come before God honoring Him. **How are the first two verses of Psalm 42 more like Jesus' model than some of the other laments we have looked at?**

Does your soul thirst for God? Do you really yearn to see God show up in your life? I am concerned that in America, many people yearn to see goodness win, but they want to watch it from the sidelines. When we allow ourselves to be full participants, to really yearn for God, we will find our lives transformed.

How is yearning for God different than wanting to see the good guys win?

How do you know that you can discern who the good guys are? I have noticed that history shows people who thought they were on God's side doing awful things in His name.

Read Proverbs 16:20, 22:19 and 28:26. Yearning for God in the midst of trouble requires us to trust that He really has the answer. What do these three verses say about:

Trusting ourselves:

Trusting God:

Back to Psalms 42, starting in verse 3. This writer is fabulous! Have you ever had a pity party? In verses 3 and 4, the psalmist is describing a royal pity party. Let's face it – we all have days that we want to curl up in a robe with a bowl of chocolate – and we think about all the things we used to have, or the way things might have been if only...

Describe a time that you had a pity party:

We all sit at the bottom from time to time, but this psalmist was also wise. A wise person will give oneself instruction. In other words, we let ourselves rant, and then we set ourselves down and say ‘self...this is what you need to know.’

What instructions did the psalmist give to himself in 42:5, 11 and 43:5?

Read Proverbs 4:13, 9:9 and 16:20-24 how is instructing oneself helpful in learning to trust God?

Psalm 42:6 is a turning point. First, we had a cry to God, then the pity party, then the self instruction. Now the Psalmist approaches God and tells Him what has been going on. I have heard some interesting directions for prayer over the years, but it is in people’s practices that I find the most variations. Some people are afraid to ask God for anything because He might not want to give it to them. Others feel they have to save up their prayers for the really important things they might need over time, and many people seem to think that they shouldn’t take up God’s time. **Now since God sees all things, and knows everything, why do you think the psalmist told him “my soul is downcast within me”?**

I think this shows the wonderful benefit of a real relationship with God. Of course He doesn’t need us to tell Him, but we need to *be able* to tell him. You should be in our car on a stressful afternoon. Well, actually, you shouldn’t. It never fails that when the kids get mad at each other, they will have an argument, and then turn to me (who has been listening to this argument for the last umpteen miles) and begin to explain to me what just happened. My response is simply “I already lived through this, don’t make me live through this again!” Thankfully, God isn’t like that. He wants to hear us tell Him about it. He wants us to explain to Him what we are thinking and feeling. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter for a reason!

But the psalmist doesn’t leave it there. He then explains what he has decided to do.

Read Psalm 42:6. What has the Psalmist decided to do?

When you are in the midst of stress, and you decide to trust in God, He meets you right there.
Write Psalm 42:7 & 8 here:

In the deepest part of his soul the psalmist felt the presence of God. I hope that you hear the depth of this. You are never too far from God. No matter what is going on in your life, when you decided to trust Him, He will be right there. You will sense His presence. It requires letting go. It requires trust, but God comes through.

When my kids come to me with complaints, most of the time I get annoyed (remember, we already determined that in this, God and I have nothing in common!) But there are times. When they come and I sense their genuine pain, that I will stop everything and just hold them, I will examine their owies, and treat them gently. In these gentle moments, sometimes they will tell me of even deeper hurts – because they know I am really listening.

Once the psalmist felt God’s presence, what did he do? (see Psalm 42:9,10, 43:1-3)

Since prayer is talking to God, how does the psalmist end his prayer in Psalm 43:4?

Three times in these two chapters, there is a refrain, one that we could all use from time to time to instruct ourselves. Write down the refrain from 42:5, 11 and 43:5 here:

Questions for the Day:

What are the main parts of a lament? (You might need to refer to page 1.)

Of these parts, which are the easiest for you to incorporate in your prayers? Which are the hardest?

When is a good time to write a lament?

Now, take a look at a situation that you've been angry at God about. Write your lament:

- Call to God
- Explanation of the distress
- Confession of trust in God
- Request for God to intervene
- Anticipation of deliverance (or self-talk)
- Praise to God