

Struggle and Hope in Lament Psalms

Reminder: The Psalms are deeply interactive, an ongoing dialogue between God and His people Israel. Like Israel, we converse with God in response to the faithfulness and generosity of God who takes all initiatives. Yet a **role reversal** also happens in the laments, complaints and protests. **God is willing to be a full participant in a lively dialogue—an initiator or responder—in an intimate, face-to-face relationship.** He longs for, even demands, our willing participation in dialogue with him, **asking us to initiate** our thoughts and feelings and **to respond** to his call for trust and obedience.

Here's an excerpt from Embodied Hope, by Kelly Kaptic:

“But the psalms , which are full of struggle, do not point us to answers or formulas. Hope? Yes. Answers? No. **The Psalms orient us to God.** Our hope is in him who made and redeemed heaven and earth, not in our own intellectual acuity.”

Kaptic believes that biblical laments offer a guide for painful experiences, a pattern “encouraging us to actively cry out to God rather than merely become passively absorbed by the pain.” (p. 37) Laments help us learn to be honest with ourselves, with God, and with others.

Here are the **conventions of prayer** often found in laments:

address to God, initial appeal, description of distress, complaint against God, petitions, motivation for God to hear, accusations, call for redress, claims of innocence, confessions of sin, professions of trust, vows to praise for deliverance, calls to praise, motivations for praise

Two of the laments, Psalms 88 and 39, do not resolve with praise. Yet the psalmist keeps interacting with God, like the persistent widow in Jesus' parable in Luke 18:1-8, despite remaining in an unresolved crisis. Affirming the pain and perplexity of life, the psalms call us to keep identifying and expressing our thoughts and feelings to God.