

## Shedding Christian Tears

### Session 4 of Truthful Speech as Common Prayer: A Study of the Psalms

Lesson Summary: “While pain is something none of us would invite into our lives, it’s not something we can avoid either, living in a broken world as we do. Betrayal, loss, and injustice—to name a few—enter our lives as unexpected and unwelcome guests, just as they did for King David and the other psalmists. Learning to pray the psalms of lament can teach us, however, to offer these negative experiences to God in faith, just as we do our praise, and remind us that healing for our grief and sorrow always happens in God’s presence.” (Fr. Michael Funderburk)

1. Here’s the John Stott quote that Fr. Michael used to begin this lesson:

We need, then, to observe that the Christian life, according to Jesus, is not all joy and laughter. Some Christians seem to imagine that, especially if they are filled with the Spirit, they must wear a perpetual grin on their face and be continually boisterous and bubbly. How unbiblical can we become? No, in Luke’s version of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus added to this beatitude a solemn woe: “Woe to you who laugh now.” (Luke 6:25) The truth is there are such things as Christian tears, and too few of us weep them. (From Stott’s *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*)

*Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? How might this be true in your life? In the life of the church?*

2. Fr. Michael pointed out how we live in an age of information and consumption; he described how our *anxiety and grief fester inside us* and often *come out as anger* at those with whom we disagree.

The *psalms of lament* show God’s willingness to be a full participant in lively and hard dialogue with us, dialogue that asks us to express our thoughts and feelings, to get them out so we can eventually reorient from self-reference to God-reference and be with God in our pain. Anger can be a protection from our fear and hurt, more vulnerable emotions that open us to God’s mercy and comfort.

If we are in shock or paralyzing grief, we may need others to come alongside us, perhaps offering silent comfort by their prayer and presence.

*How has praying lament psalms impacted your awareness of and expression of your emotions? What do you think about Fr. Michael's statement that "Our pain is as important to offer to God as our praise."*

*How has the truth that Jesus your Savior, in his earthly life, was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" impacted your growth in His grace and love?*

3. More than 1/3 of the psalms fall into the category of complaints to God in situations of limitation or threat. A *lament* is an outcry to God from a responsive heart.

Choose one of the *lament psalms* from this week's lectionary, one that is meaningful to you (Psalms 51-61, 64 or 69). Find the 4 parts Fr. Michael described: **Complain, Confess, Curse, and Call to Mind**.

*How difficult is it for you, as you read and pray these lament psalms, to make your own complaints to God and to curse enemies?*

*These 4 C's are a summary of 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.*

5. *What do you think about the shift that happens as the psalmist "calls to mind?"*

*How did Fr. Michael's references to the Old Testament book of **Lamentations** and his explanation of its structure as a lament add to your understanding of the shift and movement from pain to praise? (Lamentations 3:19-21, a prayer)*

(Book recommendation: *Prophetic Lament* by Soong-Chan Rah explores *Lamentations*.)

*How can you be more deliberate about "calling to mind" God's steadfast love when you are in need or trouble? How can you lean on others in the Body of Christ to help you "call to mind" during difficult times?*

6. *What is your greatest challenge in praying psalms of lament? What is one practical step you can take this week to overcome this challenge?*

7. Fr. Michael is encouraging us to read Psalm 6 and use it as a template for each of us to compose our own lament psalm in preparation for the next session. Pray your psalm to the Lord and/or share it with a trusted friend.