

Poems, Prayers & Promises



A Sufferer's Prayer

Key idea:

The pattern of biblical lament illustrates the pattern of the life of trusting in and following Jesus Christ. The pattern of biblical lament leads us through humiliation toward the cross with a view to glory: by faith we come to share in Christ's sufferings and gain assurance of sharing in Christ's glory.

Key text:

Psalm 102 (CSB)

⁰ *A prayer of a suffering person who is weak and pours out his lament before the LORD.*

¹ LORD, hear my prayer;

let my cry for help come before you.

² Do not hide your face from me in my day of trouble.

Listen closely to me;

answer me quickly when I call.

³ For my days vanish like smoke,
and my bones burn like a furnace.

⁴ My heart is suffering, withered like grass;
I even forget to eat my food.

⁵ Because of the sound of my groaning,
my flesh sticks to my bones.

⁶ I am like an eagle owl,
like a little owl among the ruins.

⁷ I stay awake;
I am like a solitary bird on a roof.

⁸ My enemies taunt me all day long;
they ridicule and use my name as a curse.

⁹ I eat ashes like bread
and mingle my drinks with tears

¹⁰ because of your indignation and wrath;
for you have picked me up and thrown me aside.

¹¹ My days are like a lengthening shadow,
and I wither away like grass.

12 But you, LORD, are enthroned forever;
your fame endures to all generations.

13 You will rise up and have compassion on Zion,
for it is time to show favor to her—
the appointed time has come.

14 For your servants take delight in its stones
and favor its dust.

15 Then the nations will fear the name of the LORD,
and all the kings of the earth your glory,

16 for the LORD will rebuild Zion;
he will appear in his glory.

17 He will pay attention to the prayer of the destitute
and will not despise their prayer.

18 This will be written for a later generation,
and a people who have not yet been created will praise the LORD:

19 He looked down from his holy heights—
the LORD gazed out from heaven to earth—

20 to hear a prisoner's groaning,
to set free those condemned to die,

21 so that they might declare
the name of the LORD in Zion
and his praise in Jerusalem

22 when peoples and kingdoms are assembled
to serve the LORD.

23 He has broken my strength in midcourse;
he has shortened my days.

24 I say, "My God, do not take me in the middle of my life!
Your years continue through all generations.

25 Long ago you established the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you will endure;
all of them will wear out like clothing.
You will change them like a garment,
and they will pass away.

27 But you are the same,
and your years will never end.

28 Your servants' children will dwell securely,
and their offspring will be established before you."

Key points:

1. Faithfully engaging in prayers of lament is a means “through which our desires are changed to conform to the will of God” (BRCC Catechism 84) and through which our lives conform to the likeness of Christ in his humiliation and exaltation.
2. The *but you* element in the pattern of lament (see Ps 102:12) distinguishes biblical lament from venting and grumbling. We should confess our trust in the character of our loving, good, faithful God as we bring to him complaints about our circumstances and suffering and boldly asking for things to change.
3. The individual’s hope is tied to the promises that God has made to his people as a whole (called “Zion” in Ps 102:13, 16). We gain greater assurance by seeing ourselves connected to the church, the body and bride of Christ.
4. Those who learn to lament like the sufferer of Psalm 102 train their hearts to despair of this world’s fading promises and long for what is heavenly, eternal, and (for now) unseen.
5. The ultimate hope of the sufferer who prays Psalm 102 is realized in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus is both the eternal God and the promised covenantal “offspring” who overcomes Satan, sin, and death, and who vindicates God’s people, and who *will* bring God’s people through suffering to everlasting glory.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday’s teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What is prayer? (See BRCC Catechism 84.)
3. What is the basic pattern of biblical lament? How is it related to the work of Jesus Christ? How can lament help the suffering Christian conform to the likeness of Jesus Christ?
4. Does any of the poetry in Psalm 102 give expression to your own suffering—such as sorrow (verses 3–5), loneliness (verses 6–7), humiliation (verses 8, 23), shame (verses 9–10), or the fear of death (verses 11, 23–24)?
5. Is there anything that the sufferer prays in Psalm 102 that you would not feel comfortable praying? What is it, and why would you hesitate to pray it?
6. Is there someone in your life who is suffering—someone whom you can encourage by walking with them in the pattern of lament? Do you yourself need to “pour out a lament before the LORD”?