

PSALMS OF LAMENT AS A RESOURCE  
FOR CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis claims that Contemporary Christian Worship (CCW) currently does not include songs of lament which were significant in the worship of Israel and the Early Church. Moreover, a proper understanding of both the genre and function of lament can play a formative role in the enrichment of CCW which seeks to be genuinely biblical. It begins with an overview of the biblical usage of lament in the Old and New Testaments, with special emphasis given to the way Jesus transforms the lament for a New Testament context. Through a qualitative analysis of the most popular songs in the CCW movement the thesis shows that lament is missing from its music. Since this thesis argues that lament should be sung in CCW services it also demonstrates the importance of singing for Christian worship. Using four lament psalms as examples of the genre it focuses on four primary lessons that laments teach the contemporary Christian, concluding with the creation of two laments in CCW style music as examples of how the genre can be used in a contemporary context.

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## CHAPTER 1: PROLEGOMENA

### Introduction

Humanity lives in a fallen world, a world filled with sin, suffering, and death. Musician and author Michael Card claims that from the time children are born they are taught to “be quiet” in the face of pain.<sup>1</sup> This silence continues into adulthood and is even reinforced in contemporary Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Card believes that true biblical faith does not encourage this silence, that the Bible contains a lost language that Christians must recover.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout Jewish and Christian history the book of Psalms has been at the center of the worshipping lives of believers.<sup>4</sup> As one of the most common genres in the Psalms, “laments, or prayers, are cries to God in times of need, whether sickness, affliction, slander, war, or some other crisis.”<sup>5</sup> Through the laments in the book of Psalms the faithful approached God with their pain, using this rich vocabulary to ask God for deliverance, or simply ask Him, “Why?”

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), 20.

<sup>2</sup> Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 21-22, 137-43.

<sup>4</sup> William Lee Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)* (3 vols.; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2011), 111.



## **Statement of Problem**

In more recent years, especially in Contemporary Christian Worship (CCW) circles, the use of the Psalms has diminished in worship. The impetus within CCW to sing new songs unto the Lord has generated hundreds of fresh songs; however, it has also denied worshippers the rich breadth of forms<sup>6</sup> available in the Psalter.<sup>7</sup>

## **Purpose of Research**

Specifically, worshippers have lost the language of lament. Approaching God with life's pain can be very intimidating, especially for Christians who are encouraged to praise God in all circumstances. Yet, the Psalms, as Israel's and the Church's book of worship, contain the lament. The Psalmist's language enables Christians to approach God and to praise Him and to stand in solidarity with those who suffer before, during, and after crises. Despite the need to learn to praise God while enduring difficulties, many people in CCW lack exposure to the language of lament. They lack tools with which to approach God with their sufferings and to offer Him praise while in crisis.

I propose that lament is a component of biblical worship, that lament is a missing genre in CCW, and that the return of lament to CCW will benefit contemporary Christians. This paper aims to be a resource for CCW to enhance its worship. In addition, I hope to enhance believers' worship lives and to strengthen their faith by regaining the language of lament as a tool for praise to God in the midst of suffering.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a description of the various forms in the psalter see: Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 111-45.

<sup>7</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Case for the Psalms: Why They Are Essential* (New York: HarperOne, 2013), 4-5.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Parry, "Wrestling with Lamentations in Christian Worship," in *Spiritual Complaint: The*

The CCW movement can use the psalms of lament to fill a void in believers' lives by showing them that God is the answer to all suffering and by teaching them how to go to Him with life's suffering, to praise Him in the midst of suffering, and to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering.

### **Definitions and Presuppositions**

What is "Contemporary Christian Worship"?

Recognizing that Christianity is a global movement with a multitude of cultural expressions, as well as differences of style and form within those cultural expressions, I will focus on the expression of Christian worship that is popularly labeled "Contemporary Christian Worship."

The phrase "Contemporary Christian Worship" can legitimately refer to any expression of Christian worship that takes places today. However, the title "Contemporary Christian Worship" refers to a specific cultural expression of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (with no indication that it will be replaced by another movement anytime soon) that occurs within, and in some limited cases outside of, mainstream western evangelical Christianity.

There are two primary defining characteristics of CCW. The first is a sense of informality and/or anti-formality. This essence is found in all aspects of the CCW worship service. The order of worship is free flowing, allowing for the Spirit to change the direction of the service. The leaders and participants dress casually, coming "as they are." Even

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*Theology and Practice of Lament* (eds. Miriam J. Bier and Tim Bulkeley; Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 150.

building design is often more utilitarian, having the aesthetic of a conference center, or shopping mall.

The second characteristic of CCW is the music. CCW employs popular music styles, using brief songs written in popular folk styles with one or two verses and a chorus. Such songs are usually simple in lyrics and melody. A “worship team” leads the musical portion of the service. CCW also emphasizes singing new music, and lyrics are typically displayed on a screen at the front of the sanctuary, often with enhanced visuals. Instrumentation is that of a pop or rock band utilizing guitars, drums, and keyboard/synths. The musical portion of the service may often appear to be like a rock concert. The lights dim, the band takes center stage, everyone stands, and the congregation moves. Worshippers may raise or wave their hands, sway to the music, and jump up and down during upbeat songs.

### Biblical Worship

This paper rests on an assumption that CCW practitioners desire to be biblical. By biblical worship, I do not necessarily mean following the forms and styles employed by worshippers in biblical times. Being situated apart from biblical worshippers by time, location, and culture, CCW will necessarily use different forms and styles of worship than those employed in biblical times. However, the contemporary Christian needs to glean from the Bible the spiritual and theological themes most applicable to a contemporary setting. For worship to be biblical it must employ those spiritual and theological themes that can be considered “universal,” having the flexibility to be applied to any worship situation regardless of the form or style employed. While I agree that songs with themes of praise, thanksgiving, worship, and prayer frequently comprise elements of CCW, I identify lament as one of those spiritual, theological themes that should be a part of all biblical worship; the

psalms of lament can function as a resource or guide to what lament should look like in a contemporary setting.

#### Author's Intention

A number of CCW critics question the legitimacy of this style of worship and its effects on the church,<sup>9</sup> but I have no desire to engage this argument. Rather, I affirm CCW's validity as a genuine expression of Christian worship. Moreover, I offer positive critique of CCW, suggesting how it can correct a deficiency and thereby offer its participants a more biblical experience of worship than they may currently experience.

#### On the Use of Scripture

Taking seriously Paul's teaching in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that "all scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work"<sup>10</sup> I will use a redemptive-historical hermeneutic, by which I mean that "the Bible claims to be nothing less than God's own true story of our world and it calls us to appropriate this story for ourselves."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Dan Lucarini, *Why I Left the Contemporary Christian Music Movement: Confessions of a Former Worship Leader* (Darlington: Evangelical Press, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quotations herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Councils of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., and are used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>11</sup> Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 22.

The Bible will be viewed as a single unfolding story,<sup>12</sup> and I will look for “the theological trajectories that can be detected in the development of scriptural conceptions over time.”<sup>13</sup> These theological trajectories result from God’s authorship and not from the editorial workings of those who compiled the Bible. This means the spiritual and theological themes developed in the New Testament are best understood and applied when read in light of the initiation and development of those themes in the Old Testament.<sup>14</sup> The Bible is also a culturally situated book, written in cultures and time periods far removed from the modern reader. This paper will show the spiritual and theological themes that can be drawn from the pages of the Bible and are most applicable to a contemporary setting.

Part of the biblical narrative, the Psalms have unique features that most of the other books in the Bible do not have: superscripts and postscripts. Superscripts are introductory comments at the beginning of Psalms that provide notes on author, genre, and historical occasion. Postscripts are notes on psalm performance. The postscripts are usually located at the beginning of a psalm, in a similar place to the superscript, but should really be placed at the end of the preceding psalm.<sup>15</sup> Following the traditional exegetical method, I will assume

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<sup>12</sup> Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 25.

<sup>13</sup> P. K. Tull, “Methods of Interpretation,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* (eds. Bill T. Arnold and H. G. M. Williamson; Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 690.

<sup>14</sup> M. A. McMickle, “Preaching from the Pentateuch,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (eds. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 637-43.

<sup>15</sup> See Bruce K. Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110, no. 4 (1991); For a follow up on the reception of this article see: Bruce K. Waltke, “Biblical Theology of the Psalms Today: A Personal Perspective,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (eds. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 2014), 22-23.

the reliability of the superscripts and postscripts as part of the original composition, and not treat them as later editorial additions.<sup>16</sup>

When referring to the two major sections of the Christian Bible I will use the terms “Old Testament” and “New Testament.”<sup>17</sup>

### On Language

When referring to the Trinitarian God of the Bible (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), I will use the capitalized male pronouns of He, Him, Himself, and His.<sup>18</sup> The capitalization is to show respect and reverence for God, the relational nature of God (which using gender neutral pronouns can limit), as well as the more practical aspect of clarity so the reader knows when I speak of God and when I do not. While acknowledging the validity of some feminist critiques that using only male terms for God can be oppressive and hide God’s more feminine aspects, I choose to use only male terms for God to be consistent with the primary way that God related to His people in the Bible--as a Father--while attending to those passages in Scripture that reveal the more traditionally feminine aspects of God’s Divine character and nature (Isa 66:13, Luke 15:8-10).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 86-88.

<sup>17</sup> The Society of Biblical Literature recommends the label “Hebrew Bible.” (Patrick H. Alexander, John F. Kutsko, James D. Ernest, Shirley A. Decker-Luke, and David L. Petersen eds, *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 17).

<sup>18</sup> This usage is distinct from that recommended by the Society of Biblical Literature (Alexander, et al., *The SBL Handbook of Style*, 21).

<sup>19</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *My Soul Waits: Solace for the Lonely in the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2007), 13; Marva J. Dawn, *Talking the Walk: Letting Christian Language Live Again* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 20-22, 51-53.

## **Methodology and Outline**

### Chapter 1: Prolegomena

This chapter will introduce the topic of the paper, present the research problem, and provide the thesis statement that will guide the rest of the paper. Chapter 1 will also define key terms, explain how I use certain words, and limit the scope of the paper. The Prolegomena will also provide a brief outline of the paper, describing the purpose of each chapter and briefly explaining the methodology for each following chapter.

### Chapter 2: Lament as a Component of Biblical Worship

By presenting a survey of Old and New Testament materials, this chapter will argue that lament is a part of biblical worship throughout the whole of Scripture. This chapter will examine themes common to the biblical lament, highlighting the differences between the Old and New Testaments to determine how Christ's coming transformed the lament. The second chapter will also help the reader to understand lament use in the New Testament church, in order to demonstrate ways that CCW can use laments.

### Chapter 3: Contemporary Christian Worship and Lament

This chapter will offer analysis of complete songs from the CCW movement to reveal the absence of the genre of lament. My qualitative methodology will have the most impact in this chapter. I will examine the Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) annual church reports on music usage. The CCLI is the largest licensing body for Contemporary Christian Music, providing over 200,000 churches worldwide with information regarding copyright laws and copyright protection<sup>20</sup>. They compile lists of the

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<sup>20</sup> CCLI, "Who We Are: About Us: Company Profile" n.p. [cited January 5 2014]; Online:

top 25 worship songs for each year going back to 1999, twice annually, and divide the results by reporting region. Reports from the United States during the time period of April 1, 2003 and March 31, 2013 provide a list of 500 total songs.<sup>21</sup> Removing duplicates brings the total down to 56 unique songs. I will analyze these songs to determine if any fit within the lament genre. Moreover, the CCW uses a business model based upon that of the secular popular music industry, wherein “Top 25” lists guide artists in creation of the next generation of songs. This model equates popularity and success, so artists treat the most popular songs as models when creating new ones.

#### Chapter 4: The Importance of Singing

Having shown that the lament is missing from CCW and asserted that, as a component of biblical worship, lament should be a part of its music, I will then argue the importance of singing. Laments were often sung in their original context. Singing expresses emotions and teaches in ways that other forms of worship do not, and it can also express corporate sympathy with those who suffer. For these and other reasons, CCW should begin singing the lament. This chapter will explore, in brief, the value of singing in the lives of believers.

#### Chapter 5: Psalms of Lament

In this chapter, I will build upon the foundation of the first four chapters; I will show how the psalms of lament can function as a resource that CWW songwriters may employ to

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<http://www.ccli.com/WhoWeAre/CompanyProfile.aspx>.

<sup>21</sup> CCLI, “Top 25 Songs” n.p. [cited January 5 2014]; Online: <http://www.ccli.com/Support/LicenseCoverage/Top25Lists.aspx>.



correct the absence of lament. The chapter will start with a brief introduction to the psalms of lament (what they are, structure, personal vs. corporate) and some general comments on their use in the Bible and in the church. I will use four psalms of lament as examples of the genre. A brief introduction to each psalm will include its literary context, analysis of its structure, and commentary on its content. I will then show how each selected psalm of lament fulfills the thesis of this paper, referring to other lament psalms as appropriate.

### Chapter 6: Conclusion

Having shown that the lament is a vital, necessary part of Christian worship, that CCW is missing this element, and that using the psalms of lament can correct this deficiency, I will show practical examples of how contemporary worship can include lamentation. I will, thereby, recreate a psalm of lament in contemporary language suitable for popular-style singing and create an original lyric lament in contemporary language suitable for popular-style singing. The purpose of this chapter is to engage practically with the culture of CCW by showing how the theological and analytical work presented in this thesis is valid, relevant, and usable within CCW.

## CHAPTER 2: LAMENT AS A COMPONENT OF BIBLICAL WORSHIP

### Introduction

Pain and suffering are part of the fallen human condition. Every person who has ever lived has had at least one point in life when s/he experienced pain and suffering in such a way that s/he felt the need to cry out to someone, anyone who would listen. These cries were recorded in the Old and New Testaments as laments directed to God in times of pain and suffering.

People used laments in varied ways for varied reasons. Special laments exist for individuals and for entire communities.<sup>1</sup> These laments helped individuals and the Israelite nation clearly respond to life struggles. Many laments also direct the people to the only One who could adequately resolve or answer their suffering. A lament does not simply bemoan a negative life situation. Laments are pleas to God to change current circumstances.<sup>2</sup> By examining ways that laments formed part of the worshipping lives of Old and New Testament believers, the contemporary believer can learn to lament in a biblical way.

### Old Testament Lament

Containing the largest collection of laments, the book of Psalms is a logical starting place to examine lament use in the Old Testament. However, laments, like the entire psalter, comprise part of a larger psalmody tradition in the Old Testament. This tradition extends from the Israelites' earliest days through the monarchy, to the darkest days of exile,

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<sup>1</sup> Craig C. Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 387-94.

<sup>2</sup> Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study* (52; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 14.

and into the post-exilic community seeking to rebuild Jerusalem and the nation. An editor or group of editors created the book of Psalms, late in the tradition.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, this chapter will explore the tradition outside the Psalms for lament use, and then study the book of Psalms as the liturgical version of lament for the worshipping community to use. Analysis will then move to New Testament laments.

### Old Testament Lament: Outside of the Psalms

Israelites may have preserved the oldest laments orally or in writing. Many are not the liturgical laments of the Psalms, but rather desperate cries in painful life situations. People directed some of these cries to God, and others elsewhere. Regardless of direction, laments name some of the most painful times in a person's life, without explanation or help. Some songs lament a person's death, God's calling, civic destruction, or a person's day of birth. Israelites freely expressed their deepest, darkest emotions within the context of their lives of faith, and these cries and laments did not go unanswered. God responded when His people cried out, and because of this, they continued crying out.<sup>4</sup> This section will explore literary laments rather than textual references to moments when the Israelites cried out to God (Exod 3:7-8; Judg 3:15; 10:10-16; 1 Chr 18:28-31).

Outside of the Psalms, literary laments abound. For example, David composed funeral laments, as 1 Samuel 1:17-27 and 3:33-34 demonstrate (others include 1 Kgs 13:30; Ezek 28:12-19). These kinds of laments differ in form and structure from laments in the

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<sup>3</sup> Peter C. Craigie and Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 1-50* (19; eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker; Waco: Word Books, 2004), 25-31.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen C. Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy: Improvising on a Divine Performance of Lament* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2013), 151-4.

Psalms. They are not directed to God, and do not seek God's assistance as lament psalms do; rather, such funeral laments, or dirges, honor, mourn, and remember the dead.<sup>5</sup> Even God speaks a prophetic funeral lament over the king of Tyre (Ezek 28:12-19).<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, the prophet Jeremiah provides two examples of laments.<sup>7</sup> The first of these two laments is found in Jeremiah 20:7-13. In this passage Jeremiah laments God's call. Jeremiah asserts his sense that God has deceived and betrayed him (Jer 20:7) and that his friends/enemies have done likewise (Jer 20:10). Jeremiah clearly feels that "he is 'damned if he does and damned if he doesn't speak out" God's word.<sup>8</sup> However, despite his feelings, Jeremiah expresses his grievance to God, and articulates his belief that God will not allow Jeremiah's friends/enemies to prevail because God sides with Jeremiah (Jer 20:11). Despite his bitterness towards God, Jeremiah does not abandon his faith.<sup>9</sup> Rather he ends this lament with praise because events are not as they appear, and God is not his enemy but will deliver Jeremiah from his enemies.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (11; eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 13.

<sup>6</sup> There is some debate about what is actually going on within this dirge. It does, however, show that this practice was an accepted form within Israel. See: Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (eds. Paul D. Haddon and Leonard J. Greenspoon; trans. James D. Martin; 2 vols.; vol. 2; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 87-95.

<sup>7</sup> W. H. Bellinger Jr., *Psalms: A Guide to Studying the Psalter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 3.

<sup>8</sup> William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 1-25* (ed. Paul D. Haddon; Philadelphia: Fortress, 2009), 558.

<sup>9</sup> Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 559.

<sup>10</sup> Peter C. Craigie, et al., *Jeremiah 1-25* (26; eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker; Waco:

Laments also focus on civic destruction. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Jeremiah<sup>11</sup> wrote the longest lament in the Old Testament: Lamentations. Theologically and literarily, similarities exist between the book of Lamentations and the laments in the Psalms.<sup>12</sup> Both Lamentations and the lament psalms help people to face suffering rather than try to explain it away.<sup>13</sup> Outside of embracing suffering, rather than hiding from it, the most important feature of these laments is that they point to God as the answer. Lamentations 3:21-24 says, “But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’” This theme repeats throughout the lament psalms, with the possible exception of Psalm 88. Although Psalm 88 is a very bleak psalm, it still shows the writer approaching God with his troubles, indicating that he knew only God could answer his questions.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Micah 1:8-16 the prophet Micah laments the forthcoming destruction of the cities of Judah, offering no hope, but in the final chapter, he reminds

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Word Books, 1991), 275.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah is the traditional author of Lamentations. However, contemporary scholarship casts doubt on this tradition. See: Robin Parry, *Lamentations* (eds. Gordon J. McConville and Craig G. Bartholomew; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 3-5.

<sup>12</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “The Laments of Lamentations Compared to the Psalter,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (eds. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 2014), 130-3.

<sup>13</sup> Kaiser Jr., “The Laments of Lamentations Compared to the Psalter,” 132-3.

<sup>14</sup> David M. Howard Jr., “Psalm 88: Praising God in the Bad Times,” in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul* (eds. Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr.; Chicago: Moody, 2014), 252-3.

Judah of God's compassion, forgiveness, and love (Mic 7:18-20). In Jeremiah's and Micah's laments for their cities their laments are directed to God, and they confront the suffering that they have and will experience.

In addition to laments for deaths and destruction, some people lament that they were ever born. Jeremiah's second lament (Jer 20:14-18), for example, is very similar in content and style to a lament found in Job (Job 3:1-26).<sup>15</sup> Both Job and Jeremiah lament their days of birth. For Jeremiah this is not the first time (Jer 15:10). The similarities between Jeremiah and Job suggest that they may have used an established form.<sup>16</sup> Strikingly, both men honestly describe their depths of emotional despair. Still, these laments differ in an astonishing way: Jeremiah directs his lament to God, who welcomes such cries, while Job directs his to no one.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Job's complaints about God compare to laments found in Numbers 11, which God detests because they occur "behind his back."<sup>18</sup> Regardless of topic or situation, these writers include laments in their texts.

#### Old Testament Lament: The Psalms

The laments explored above give witness to a tradition of lamenting in worship, which led to the eventual inclusion of laments in the Psalms. The lament psalms express deep anguish and cry to God when everything else fails. The psalmist accuses God of failing

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<sup>15</sup> Craigie, et al., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 277-278.

<sup>16</sup> Craigie, et al., *Jeremiah 1-25*, 277.

<sup>17</sup> Tremper Longman III, *Job* (ed. Tremper Longman III; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 106-7.

<sup>18</sup> Longman III, *Job*, 107.

to protect him or to prevent tragedy. These outcries reveal the fallen state of creation and generally verbalize one of the following themes:<sup>19</sup>

1. Personal Suffering (Ps 6:2-7; 22:14-17; 102:6-7)
2. Communal Suffering (Ps 44:11-25; 79:10-11)
3. Oppressive Enemies (Ps 25:19; 17:11-12; 10:8-10)
4. Nature and Death (Ps 42:7, 88:3-7)

Intriguingly, the lament psalms lack specificity although they seem to describe particular struggles. The psalmists speak in extremes, using imagery to convey a wide variety of circumstances experienced by a wide variety of people. These psalmists use language that is “embracing rather than limiting”<sup>20</sup> Because they embrace worshippers, these psalms function as ideal “set prayers written for worshipers to use for typical distresses.”<sup>21</sup> These prayers are best understood when read liturgically rather than as autobiographical pictures of individual psalmists.<sup>22</sup>

When reading, praying, or singing the lament psalms worshippers must note the distinction between lament and complaint. Some scholars use lament and complaint interchangeably, but subtle differences exist between the two.<sup>23</sup> Situations occasion lament.

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<sup>19</sup> The following list is taken from Philip S. Johnston, “The Psalms and Distress,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches* (eds. Philip S. Johnston and David G. Firth; Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 65-72.

<sup>20</sup> Broyles, “Lament, Psalms of,” 385.

<sup>21</sup> Broyles, “Lament, Psalms of,” 385.

<sup>22</sup> Broyles, “Lament, Psalms of,” 386.

<sup>23</sup> For examples of a scholar using the terms interchangeably see Tremper Longman III, *How to Read*

The grieving person approaches God as external to the situation and as savior. In contrast, a complaint presents an argument with God about the current situation, sometimes blaming God for causing, allowing, or prolonging the situation. God is not external to the situation, but complicit in the situation. Complaints remind God of His past deeds to show that He can and should intervene. Notably, the majority of lament psalms do not contain a complaint against God; speakers reserve these complaints for the direst situations.<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, lament psalms follow an identifiable structure, which is not always present in laments outside the psalter. Most lament psalms contain some variation of the following elements,<sup>25</sup> and often not in this order:<sup>26</sup>

1. Invocation
2. Plea to God for help
3. [Lament]<sup>27</sup>

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*the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988), 26-30; Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 157-8.

<sup>24</sup> Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller, "Introduction," in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square* (eds. Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), xv; Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," 388.

<sup>25</sup> List comes from Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 27. Relevant sources discussing each element will be noted as appropriate.

<sup>26</sup> Not all scholars agree on the exact order of the elements or the specific elements themselves. While all cover the same ground, some are more detailed than others. See: Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 50-51; C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction* (eds. Walter A. Elwell and Eugene H. Merrill; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 136.

<sup>27</sup> Longman III uses the term *complaint* at this point in his list. However, because of my distinction in this paper between lament and complaint, I will use the term *lament* here, and will use the term in this way throughout this paper.



4. Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
5. Curse of enemies (imprecation)
6. Confidence in God's response
7. Hymn or blessing

The *invocation*, often coupled with the *plea to God for help*, shows to whom the psalmist directs the psalm.<sup>28</sup> This section functions as more than just a mere “Dear God,” as if the psalmist were writing to an advice column. This portion shows the psalmist reaching out to the God who has had an ongoing covenantal relationship with him and with Israel, a God who has intervened in the past for Israel, and whose ongoing relationship with Israel shows a God interested in everything that affects the people of Israel, individually and as a nation (Ps 4:1; 12:1; 13:1, 17:1).<sup>29</sup>

The *lament* is the focus of the psalm, voicing the problem and naming what (or who) the psalmist believes to be the cause. The psalmist often uses colorful, emotional language when describing the problem and often shows ways in which a larger problem has a personal affect (Ps. 6:2-7; 22:14-17, 102:6-7).<sup>30</sup> In this section, the psalmist may blame God for the problem, shifting into the complaint form. The psalmist does not pretend the

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<sup>28</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 27-28.

<sup>29</sup> Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 156-7.

<sup>30</sup> Johnston, “The Psalms and Distress,” 65-67; Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 157-8.

problem does not exist nor try to explain it away. He openly pours out his experiences. In the *lament* the “...soul of the lamenter is laid bare before God.”<sup>31</sup>

The *confession of sin or an assertion of innocence* is more than the psalmist's reason for God to respond. This section often contains the Psalmist's stark appraisal of the situation. The psalmist presents reasons for his current situation: either he has sinned, experiences judgment, and now repents, or the psalmist indicates that he does not know why he suffers and proclaims his innocence before God. This assertion does not mean that the psalmist is completely innocent before God. The psalmist may feel that, because of his faithfulness to God, the suffering seems unjustified (the book of Job is a prime example of this assertion).<sup>32</sup>

Some lament psalms include a *curse of enemies (imprecation)*. This language continues the psalmist's use of emotional, colorful language as in the *lament* section. The imprecation asks God to render judgment and to take vengeance on those who have caused the psalmist's suffering. Enemies feature prominently in laments, and the entire psalter, and psalmists depict them as those who oppose God's people and by extension God Himself.<sup>33</sup> Strikingly, God is the primary subject of the Psalms, “but enemies are established in solid second place.”<sup>34</sup> Continuing the lament pattern of using embracing language, broad brush

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<sup>31</sup> Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 158.

<sup>32</sup> Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 160-1.

<sup>33</sup> Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 95.

strokes describe enemies, thus making the identity of specific enemies default.<sup>35</sup> Talk of enemies may be the most honest language in the Psalms. These passages do not attempt to hide or deny raw emotions of hate, disgust, or loathing; rather these texts bring such emotions to God who can transform them into just, compassionate actions.<sup>36</sup> The imprecations also show the psalmist leaving vengeance in God's hands, surrendering to Him hateful emotions and revengeful desires.<sup>37</sup>

Many lament psalms continue to express a *confidence in God's response*. Through confessions of trust and a recital of God's previous deeds, the psalmist records concrete examples of how God has responded in the past. This recollection gives the psalmist confidence that God will respond similarly in the future. Such expressions of confidence also testify to the fact that the psalmist calls upon a God with whom he has an ongoing relationship, not some distant far off god.

A *hymn or blessing* commonly concludes a lament psalm: "As the psalmist realizes what God can and will do for him, it leads him to praise God."<sup>38</sup> This understanding can appear as praise in the present or a vow of public praise that the psalmist will fulfill once God responds to his cry.

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<sup>35</sup> Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 57.

<sup>36</sup> Peterson, *Answering God*, 99-103.

<sup>37</sup> Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 237.

<sup>38</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 29.

The psalms of lament testify to a relationship between God and the individual or community petitioner. The psalmist goes to a God who has responded and will respond.<sup>39</sup> These psalms also articulate the hope the psalmist has in God, a God that can “be addressed *because* he is believed to have the capacity to change things, but, at the same time, *because* he is in faithful, loving relationships with his people and is both deeply interested and deeply affected by their state...It is a voiced desperation to the loving life partner of this people.”<sup>40</sup> Psalms of lament, then, incorporate elements that reveal the intimate relationship between Israel’s God and His people and make that aspect of intimacy part of worship.

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<sup>39</sup> Scott Ellington, “The Costly Loss of Testimony,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8, no. 16 (2000): 56-58.

<sup>40</sup> Torr, *Dramatic Pentecostal/Charismatic Anti-Theodicy*, 157.

## New Testament Lament

Lament is just as important in the New Testament as it is in the Old Testament.<sup>41</sup> As with Old Testament laments outside the Psalms, New Testament laments may not fit the pattern of laments in the Psalms, but do fulfill the broad definition of lament as a plea to God to change current circumstances. Readers must remember that the Bible does not provide specific instruction on worship for all generations, so some worship patterns and parts will change. Therefore, this section will look for ways that the New Testament continues and modifies Old Testament laments and highlight those spiritual themes that readers can universally apply. Readers can also generally group laments into three categories: Quotations of the lament psalms (Luke 23:46 quoting/alluding to Ps 31); new prayers of lament (Rev 6:10); and texts that echo or evoke the lament function (Luke 18:35-43).<sup>42</sup>

The following section will use these three categories to identify New Testament laments in order better to understand their functions. This section will first explore Christ's use of lament and then continue to explore the wider use of lament in the New Testament. The two sections may overlap because the gospel writers may use a psalm of lament to interpret something that Christ did, although Christ did not specifically speak the lament.

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<sup>41</sup> Kathleen D. Billman and Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: Prayer of Lament and Rebirth of Hope* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1999), 33.

<sup>42</sup> Rebekah Ann Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve: Jesus' Laments and Christian Hope" (Dissertation, Duke University, 2012) 18-19.

## New Testament Lament: Christ's Usage

While not a plea to God for help, Christ does prophetically lament over Jerusalem in Matthew 23:37-39 and Luke 13:34-35.<sup>43</sup> These passages record Christ's lament that Jerusalem has rejected not only Him, but also the prophets who came before (Matt 23:37a; Luke 13:34a). He speaks as God, wishing that Jerusalem had allowed Him to gather Jerusalem's people and to care for them as a mother hen cares for her chicks (Matt 23:37b, Luke 13:34b). Christ then prophesies Jerusalem's pending destruction (Matt 23:38; Luke 13:35a), although He does offer Jerusalem hope, as in the lament psalms, if the people will turn and accept Him (Matt 23:39; Luke 13:35b). However, the crucifixion of Jesus that follows the Triumphal Entry (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-44; John 12:12-19) is clearly not the fulfillment of this promise. Rather this proffer of hope points to a future hope that Jerusalem will accept Jesus and receive promised blessings.<sup>44</sup>

This broader lament is not Christ's only lament. Not commonly identified as such, Jesus's words and actions upon hearing of Lazarus's death function as lament. Jesus is moved with emotion that ranges from grief to anger over the death of His friend Lazarus (John 11:33-35).<sup>45</sup> He then calls out to God to hear His prayer in the current situation, at the same time expressing His trust that God will respond (John 11:41-42). Jesus then cries

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<sup>43</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53* (3; ed. Moisés Silva; 2 vols.; vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 1248-49.

<sup>44</sup> David L. Turner, *Matthew* (1; eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 562.

<sup>45</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* (4; eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 339-42.

out with a loud voice, and Lazarus exits the tomb. This lament scene not only confirms Jesus's relationship with God but also gives glory to God.<sup>46</sup> In this short scene, all of the lament functions appear: upon experiencing powerful emotions, Jesus laments Lazarus's death, articulates hope for God's answer, and then receives the answer for which he asked. God receives praise and glory as a result.

A more common place to find Jesus lamenting is in the Garden of Gethsemane prior to His crucifixion (Matt 26:36-46; Mark 14:42-42; Luke 22:39-46). This is not a formal liturgical lament like those found in the Psalms; however, Jesus's prayer does contain lament elements and language.<sup>47</sup> Jesus notes to his disciples that something is wrong: "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake" (Matt 26:38; Mark 14:34). As an invocation He directs His prayer to God using the personal term "Father" (Matt 26:39a; Luke 22:42a) or "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36a). While a formal lament section does not appear in His prayer, readers cannot miss a plea to God for help and a request that God change the current situation: Jesus prays to the Father to "remove this cup" (Mark 14:36b; Luke 22:42b) or to "let this cup pass" (Matt 26:27b). Jesus also expresses His trust in God's will when Jesus declares, "not what I want but what You want" (Matt 26:39c; Mark 14:36c) or "not My will but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42c). Through this lament Jesus exemplifies intimacy with and ultimate trust in the Father, even if that leads to suffering. For believers, He makes a similar closeness available to them.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 46-47.

<sup>47</sup> Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 29.

<sup>48</sup> Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, "Mark," in *Matthew - Mark* (eds. Tremper Longman III and

Most commonly, readers look for Jesus's use of lament in His crucifixion. It is here that Jesus quotes directly from several lament Psalms: Psalm 22 (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), Psalm 31 (Luke 23:46), and possibly Psalm 69 (John 19:28). The gospel writers use Psalm 22 and 69 to shape the entire crucifixion narrative and to provide evidence that Jesus fulfills prophecy.<sup>49</sup> However, when examined from a lament perspective, Jesus's words from the cross "display the full range of lament."<sup>50</sup> The cry "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34) directs Jesus's cry to the God with whom He is in relationship and laments the rupture in that relationship. Through the cry "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46), Jesus once again displays the intimacy of His relationship with God and expresses His confidence that God will respond and deliver Him from this trial.<sup>51</sup> The author of Hebrews confirms that God heard and responded to Jesus's prayer (Heb 5:7). However, Jesus's response to His enemies during the crucifixion does not fit with the treatment of enemies in the lament psalms. Rather than curse His enemies, Jesus prays for those who kill and mock Him, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Jesus's action not only aligns with His teachings on loving enemies and forgiving them<sup>52</sup> but also works to transform imprecations

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David E. Garland; vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 951.

<sup>49</sup> Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 48-62.

<sup>50</sup> Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 48.

<sup>51</sup> Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, 1862.

<sup>52</sup> Bock, *Luke: 9:51-24:53*, 1850.



against one's enemies into intercession for one's enemies, thus modifying the lament form for a New Testament context.<sup>53</sup>

### New Testament Lament: Early Church

In fact, a modified lament opens the New Testament. The first lament readers encounter in the New Testament is not a psalm of lament, but a quoted lament from the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more" (Matt 2:18 quoting Jer 31:15). Matthew uses this quote as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy, set in the context of Herod slaughtering the children of Bethlehem in an attempt to kill Jesus as an infant (Matt 2:16-18). This prophetic fulfillment "should not be viewed simplistically as the eventuation of a prediction" (i.e. Jeremiah predicted that women would weep over their lost children).<sup>54</sup> Rather, the wider context of both passages shows a greater narrative in play. Both Matthew and Jeremiah have mentioned the exile: Jeremiah promises a future hope and new covenant (Jer 31:31-34). Matthew uses Jeremiah's passage as a fulfillment, claiming that "the tears of the exile are now being 'fulfilled' - i.e., the tears begun in Jeremiah's day are climaxed and ended by the tears of the mothers of Bethlehem. The heir to David's throne has come, the exile is over, the true Son of God has arrived - and he will introduce the new covenant promised by Jeremiah."<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 138-41.

<sup>54</sup> Turner, *Matthew*, 94.

<sup>55</sup> D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew - Mark* (eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; vol. 9 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 122. See also: Turner, *Matthew*, 94-95.

While not formal laments as the Psalms are, several passages in the gospels record people crying out to Jesus to change their circumstances; thus, these cries function as laments (Matt 9:27, 15:22, 17:15; Mark 10:47; Luke 17:13, 18:38-39, 23:42). These functional laments use language that distressed people typically direct at God, but in the New Testament, people direct this language to Jesus, who hears and responds to such cries. These laments and Jesus's responses to them act as prophetic markers showing the introduction of Jeremiah's new covenant and the in-breaking of the kingdom of God.<sup>56</sup>

In both the Psalms and the New Testament, the presence of enemies prompts lamentation. They occasion the lament prayer in Acts 4:23-31. Peter and John had just returned to their friends (Acts 4:23) from a confrontation with a council of leadership in/for Jerusalem at which council members threatened the disciples and told them that they were not to spread the name of Jesus (Acts 4:5-22). With their friends, Peter and John responded by praying to God. Their prayer begins with an invocation to God, the Father (Acts 4:23-24), it laments enemies that stand against God in generalities (Acts 4:25-26) and specifics (Acts 23:27-28), it asks God to respond to these threats (Acts 4:29a) by giving His servants power to continue to spread the Word of God and to perform signs, miracles, and wonders (Acts 4:29b-30a). The prayer concludes with an inclusive statement that this group has prayed all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:30b). God then responds to this prayer by filling His servants with the Holy Spirit to speak with boldness (Acts 4:31). Significantly, this New Testament lament does not seek deliverance from enemies, nor does it ask God to punish their (and His) enemies. Rather, the believers ask for boldness to stand against enemies and

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<sup>56</sup> Billman and Migliore, *Rachel's Cry*, 37-38; Eklund, "Lord, Teach Us How to Grieve," 19, 21-22.

to continue to preach the name of Jesus with signs and wonders. God answers their prayers by showing that “the gifts of Pentecost endured and, should the question arise, [. . .] what side God has taken in the conflict.”<sup>57</sup> The fact that God responded by providing the power to stand in the face of oppressive enemies aligns with Paul’s later teachings on the sufficient grace of Jesus in the face of suffering (2 Cor 12:9).

Like enemies, suffering also prompts writers to use lament language. In Romans 8:18-27 Paul discourses at length on suffering, hope, and the role of the Spirit. While this section does not contain a lament prayer, nor does Paul mention lament by name, Paul’s discourse uses lament language in the context of suffering. As Paul describes, creation and Christ’s followers groan in pain and suffering (Rom 8:22, 23b) and express hope in a future redemption that will end all suffering (Rom 8:21, 23c-25). Remarkably, Paul’s teaching here is that the believer is not the only voice of these prayers to God. The Spirit also prays these prayers to God (Rom 8:26). God here is not some distant far off god. He actively relates to His people, helping them to know how to pray and even praying for His people, through the ministry of the Spirit.<sup>58</sup> In difficulties, lament language appears appropriately, but not formally.

Paul himself clearly uses lament language for prayers about his own suffering. In 2 Corinthians 12:8 Paul laments to Jesus regarding a thorn in the flesh: “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me.” Given the lack of information

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<sup>57</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts: A Commentary* (ed. Harold W. Attridge; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 124.

<sup>58</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ed. Gordon D. Fee; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 522-6.

about Paul's appeal, readers cannot know if Paul prayed by quoting a lament psalm, by putting his lament in the form of a lament psalm, or simply by crying out to Jesus, asking Him to remove his suffering. However, Paul clearly lamented his suffering in the broadest sense by crying out to Jesus to have that suffering removed. By making his request three times Paul shows his intense desire to have freedom from this.<sup>59</sup> Jesus responds to Paul by saying, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9), thus revealing to Paul that his suffering has a greater purpose and will remain. Jesus's response to Paul also shows Jesus's care for His people. Although He would allow the suffering to continue, Jesus would provide the grace necessary for Paul to endure it. Paul later reflects upon this understanding of suffering and grace when he states, "I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil 4:12-13)<sup>60</sup> However, despite Paul's acceptance of his suffering, he still lamented to Jesus.

Revelation 6:10 is an example of a new prayer of lament in the New Testament. Martyrs under the altar lament to God: "Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long will it be before you judge and avenge our blood on the inhabitants of the earth?" This lament is uncomfortable for some because of the imprecatory language that it contains.<sup>61</sup> However,

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<sup>59</sup> Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (eds. I. H. Marshall and Donald A. Hagner; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 859-61.

<sup>60</sup> Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 862.

<sup>61</sup> Billman and Migliore, *Rachel's Cry*, 36.

unlike the imprecations of Old Testament laments, these prayers do not seek immediate gratification or vengeance against enemies. Rather the martyrs ask God how long they must wait for Him to inaugurate His justice.<sup>62</sup> God answers the martyrs, telling them to “rest a little longer, until the number would be complete both of their fellow servants and of their brothers and sisters, who were soon to be killed as they themselves had been killed” (Rev 6:11). This answer points to the future when God's kingdom comes on earth and He judges everyone, but God also comforts these martyrs, telling them that their deaths are part of His plan to conquer evil.<sup>63</sup> This structure loosely incorporates Old Testament lament structures, as it evokes imprecation and records God’s hopeful response.

### **Differences between Old Testament and New Testament Use**

Lament in both the Old and New Testaments is not directed to a distant far off god, but rather to a God who intimately relates to His people. In the Old Testament people direct laments to God, the covenant author and partner of Israel. Through Israel's history they learned that God would respond when they called on Him. In the New Testament people direct laments to, or pray in the name of Jesus, the Son of God and author of the new covenant. When praying to Jesus, New Testament believers pray to someone who has suffered for and with them and for that reason sympathizes with them (Heb 4:14-16).

Enemies are also present in Old and New Testament laments. Some view Jesus’s teaching that His followers pray for their enemies and forgive them, leaving vengeance to

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<sup>62</sup> Alan F. Johnson, “Revelation,” in *Hebrews - Revelation* (eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; vol. 13 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 655.

<sup>63</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (ed. Ben Witherington III; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 135.

God (Matt 5:38-48; Luke 6:27-36; Rom 12:14, 17-21) as antithetical to imprecations found in the lament psalms.<sup>64</sup> However, as Revelation 6 shows, this language is not completely foreign to the New Testament. In fact, Jesus's teachings on the treatment of enemies aligns with some of the Old Testament law (Exod 23:4-5),<sup>65</sup> and some of Jesus's own language borrows from imprecatory sections in laments (Matt 16:23, 23, Luke 12:49).<sup>66</sup> Notably in both the Old and New Testaments, the lamenter honestly expresses feelings of anger and aggression, pleads for God's justice, and leaves everything in God's hands.<sup>67</sup> The main difference in the treatments of enemies is that in the Old Testament the lamenter seeks immediate justice, while in the New Testament the lamenter seeks God's eschatological judgment.

Lamenters in the Old Testament cried out to God for immediate relief of personal suffering, national tragedy, or the reinstruction of the nation. Some Old Testament laments clearly slide into complaint. Whether through the specific content of New Testament laments, New Testament teaching on suffering, or Jesus's response to suffering, lament is not a complaint against God. People expect suffering as part of life and accept it as such (Matt 5:11-12; Luke 6:22-23; John 15: 18-21). Rather, through Jesus's example in Gethsemane, Paul's discourse in Romans 8, the martyrs in Revelation 6, and Jesus's

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<sup>64</sup> Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 229.

<sup>65</sup> Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 229.

<sup>66</sup> Peterson, *Answering God*, 102.

<sup>67</sup> Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 59; Johnson, "Revelation," 655; Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*, 237-8.

responses to Paul's and the martyr's suffering, believers are encouraged to ask for relief from their suffering, and to seek God's will in the midst of suffering, to lament the current situation of all creation, and pray for the day when all suffering will end and Jesus will return to set up God's eschatological kingdom. Jesus also taught these prayers for the coming of the kingdom as an example of how New Testament believers should pray regularly, (Matt 6:10) and the New Testament ends with exhortations for all to pray that Jesus come soon (Rev 22:17, 20b). The focus, then is not situation nor imprecation, but God's response and hope.

### **Contemporary Application**

Several spiritual themes in this study of lament contribute to worship for those who attempt to stand in the stream of biblical spirituality. *Chapter 5* will discuss several specific benefits of lament, so I will not offer a prolonged discussion of lament application here. Nonetheless, a few points deserve emphasis. Laments are one of the many ways that believers in the Bible interact with the God with whom they are in relationship. Christian lament, and all Christian worship, is best done in the name of or directed to Jesus, who constantly intercedes for His people (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). The Spirit is active in the prayers of believers, helping them to know what to pray and interceding for them, and Christian worship will benefit from believers developing a sensitivity to the working of the Spirit (Rom 8:26-27). Jesus's example and teaching provides a guide for Christians to pray for and forgive their enemies, leaving vengeance and punishment to God. When offering laments believers must remember to expect suffering as a part of life. Rather than offering complaints, believers will benefit from seeking God's will for their current suffering and praying for God's justice to end not only present but also all future suffering, as this will

bring about His kingdom where “Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away” (Rev 22:4). Finally, Christian lament ends in praise. As the Christian cries out to Jesus and experiences the gift of His grace, praise will naturally pour out of gratitude for such a gift (1 Cor 1:4). Thus lament itself functions as a gift, for it opens the way for believers to experience a specific gift of grace.



## CHAPTER 3: CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AND LAMENT

### Introduction

The use of the Psalms in Christian worship has diminished in recent years, and the CCW movement is no exception. While contemporary songwriters produce many new, wonderful songs for use in worship, the breadth of the Psalter is missing in much of this new music.<sup>1</sup> As I show in *Chapter 2: Lament as a Component of Biblical Worship*, lament is a genre of song that people used in corporate worship in the Old and New Testaments. If CCW desires to be biblical in its worship, then it should include the genre of lament in songs of corporate worship. To determine if lament is truly a missing genre, I will analyze the lyrics of CCW's songs to see if any of the songs are laments.

### Song Selection Methodology

CCW music is a large industry with thousands of songs, and the limited scope of this paper prevents me from analyzing every song in the CCW movement. Therefore, I developed a method to determine which songs I will analyze.

I grounded my method in historical practices of the church related to music use. Before the advent of CCW, most churches purchased hymnals. This purchase granted the church permission to use a book of songs in corporate worship. The purchase price paid for the hymnal (book) production, and more importantly it paid the necessary royalties to composers and lyricists. The church would then sing from this book of songs in worship for years, possibly decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *The Case for the Psalms*, 4-5.

Contemporary churches no longer purchase hymnals. CCW values new, fresh worship music. Many congregations do not even purchase song books. Worship leaders go online and obtain the music at little to no cost or share the music to new songs with each other. Worship leaders then use these songs in corporate worship. In most of these cases the composer of the song is not compensated for his/her labors, and such usage violates United States and international copyright laws.

In an effort to help keep churches within the boundaries of copyright law, as well as to compensate composers for their labors, several copyright organizations were created to work with publishers and composers to develop simple, cost-effective methods for churches to obtain music. These organizations contract with composers and publishers to allow churches to use their music for an annual fee. The organizations require churches to report their usage, and then the copyright organizations pay the appropriate usage fees to the publishers and composers based upon these reports. Several such organizations exist, for example *LicenSing* (<https://www.licensingonline.org/en-us>), *OneLicense* (<https://www.onelicense.net/>), and *Christian Copyright Licensing International* (<http://www.ccli.com/>).

The largest of these organizations is *Christian Copyright Licensing International* (CCLI), with coverage of more than 300,000 worship songs; CCLI caters specifically to CCW music. *LicenSing* and *OneLicense* work with fewer publishers and composers and serve a broader church base encompassing more traditional and liturgical churches. Through the annual church reports on music, CCLI compiles a list of the top 25 worship songs for each year going to back to 1999, reported twice annually and divided by reporting region. Reports from the United States during the time period of April 1, 2003 and March

31, 2013 provide a list of 500 total songs.<sup>2</sup> Removing duplicates brings the total down to 56 unique songs.<sup>3</sup> Every church with a CCLI license is not required to report every year. CCLI selects churches each year to report on their usage, and the reports form the basis of these lists. CCLI also does not cover every song used in the CCW movement, thus limiting the scope and inclusivity of these lists. However, CCLI chooses churches from a wide range of demographics to report, making this list one of the best lists showing the songs that CCW leaders use most often in services.<sup>4</sup>

According to these reports, these 56 songs have been the most widely used songs in CCW for the past 10 years. This fact suggests that they operate as a representative sampling of CCW songs, especially for the purposes of this analysis.<sup>5</sup> I make no claim that my analysis of CCW is comprehensive or conclusive. However, because successful songs generate imitation and inspire the next generation of songs, this representative sampling from a ten-year period offers important insight into CCW practices. Thus, if lament appears only in a limited fashion or does not appear at all, I can conclude that new song writers will not consider the lament when composing new music. Consequently, I can reasonably assume that current and future CCW music will not include laments.

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<sup>2</sup> CCLI, *Top 25 Songs*.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix A for a complete listing of songs titles, composers, copyright information, and CCLI identification number. Song names will only be used in the body of this chapter and will be *italicized*.

<sup>4</sup> See: Robert Woods and Brian Walrath, "Introduction," in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship* (eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 19-20.

<sup>5</sup> This method of limiting songs is also used in: Woods and Walrath, "Introduction," 18-20. However, I developed this method independently and only discovered this resource after I had written this section.

## Analytical Methodology

### What Is a Psalm of Lament?

In order to determine if any of the 56 songs are laments or contain elements of laments we must recall what constitutes a psalm or song of lament. Lament occurs in two types: individual and corporate. These laments are similar and contain many similar elements; the primary difference is that one involves an individual lamenting a personal tragedy, while the other involves a group of people lamenting a tragedy that affects the entire nation. Laments are also pleas directed to God. As noted in *Chapter 2*, most laments contain the following seven elements:

1. Invocation
2. Plea to God for help
3. Lament
4. Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
5. Curse of enemies (imprecation)
6. Confidence in God's response
7. Hymn or blessing<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, not all seven elements always appear in every psalm of lament.<sup>7</sup> As discussed in *Chapter 2*, Christians are not to curse their enemies, but to pray for them. For Christians, lament is not simply a form in which to dialogue with God about the hardships in life. Hardships addressed by laments give Christians a chance to go to God in difficult

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<sup>6</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 27.

<sup>7</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 27.

times to ask for His help and to praise Him because He can and will respond to the suffering of His people. While all laments are typically downcast and melancholy, remarkably most laments also express trust in God.<sup>8</sup>

Because these seven elements identify laments, I will seek them in the sampling of CCW's music. The descriptions of the seven elements from *Chapter 2* will act as a guide when reviewing lyrics. After identifying songs that have these elements, I will examine the elements to determine if they work together to form a lament.

### Limitations

The psalms of lament are liturgical poems, following an established format, from a culture removed in time and geographical location from the composers of CCW music. CCW music does not have set forms that are used, making a line-by-line comparison difficult. Therefore, when looking for the seven elements of the lament psalms I will use as broad a scope as possible in attempting to locate the elements. At times this may mean that I identify a single line (or partial line) in the middle of a larger lyrical section as having language appropriate to connect it with one of the lament elements. This methodology may also mean that my analysis will be somewhat subjective, and others may feel that I overlooked or overvalued a particular lyric in my analysis.

This analysis is also not intended to give an assessment of the theological and/or liturgical value of the songs analyzed. I intend only to determine if any CCW songs fit the genre of lament. As has been noted elsewhere, some of the songs analyzed will have contributions to make to the conversation regarding the Christian response to pain and

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<sup>8</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 28.

suffering.<sup>9</sup> These inputs, while important, are not my subject in this analysis, and while their presence in the lyrics may be noted as part of the analysis, they are not the focal point.

Within CCW music (and many of the Psalms as well), I identify two types of songs: horizontal and vertical. Horizontal songs are *about* God, using third-person (He, Him, etc.) language to talk about God. Vertical songs are sung *to* God, using second-person (You) language. As noted in *Chapter 2*, laments are cries to God; therefore, only songs that qualify as vertical have the potential to be considered laments. The following 10 songs, because of their language, are all identified as horizontal and will not be considered in the following analysis to determine if they are laments: *Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)*; *Awesome God*; *Days of Elijah*; *Forever*; *Give Thanks*; *He Is Exalted*; *Holy Is the Lord*; *How Great Is Our God*; *In Christ Alone*; *We Fall Down*. This is not to say that some of these songs do not contain language to help a suffering person or language that to fulfill one or more of the seven elements, but rather because they are not directed to God, they do not have the prerequisite second-person language to be a lament.

The majority of the songs in the CCLI lists are exclusively vertical, 35 in total. They are: *Above All*; *As The Deer*; *Beautiful One*; *Better is One Day*; *Breathe*; *Change My Heart Oh God*; *Draw Me Close*; *Everlasting God*; *Forever Reign*; *From the Inside Out*; *Glory to God Forever*; *God Of Wonders*; *Hallelujah*; *Happy Day*; *Here I Am To Worship*; *Hosanna (Praise is Rising)*; *How Great Thou Art*; *I Could Sing Of Your Love Forever*; *I Give You My Heart*; *I Love You Lord*; *Indescribable*; *Lord I Lift Your Name On High*; *Lord Reign In Me*;

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<sup>9</sup> Wendy J. Porter, "Trading My Sorrows," in *The Message in the Music: Studying Contemporary Praise and Worship* (eds. Robert Woods and Brian Walrath; Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 90-91.

*One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails); Open the Eyes of My Heart; Our God; Shine Jesus Shine; Shout to the Lord; The Heart of Worship; The Stand; You Are My All In All; You Are My King (Amazing Love); Your Grace Is Enough; Your Name; and You're Worthy of My Praise.* Some songs blend third- and second-person language; I will include these as vertical songs. However, because of the combination of language, I anticipate some difficulty in identifying specific elements, such as an invocation. I have identified the following 11 songs as having horizontal and vertical elements: *10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord); Blessed Be Your Name; Come Now is the Time to Worship; Friend of God; Hosanna; How He Loves; Jesus Messiah; Mighty to Save; Revelation Song; The Wonderful Cross; and Trading My Sorrows.* This brings the total number of songs that have the potential to be laments to 46 (from the original 56 songs in the list).

### **Analysis**

Each section below will provide general comments on the lament element and then list the songs that have been noted to contain that element. I will include songs even when I question their incorporation of a specific element. The element of invocation provides a good example of this kind of questionable inclusion. The song *Beautiful One* questionably contains an invocation. The song begins with the lyrics “Wonderful so wonderful is Your unfailing love / Your cross has spoken mercy over me.”<sup>10</sup> An invocation shows to whom the song is directed, as this song does. This song uses the term “You” and refers to the “cross” but does not include concrete language (such as “God,” “Lord,” “Jesus,” “Father”) that

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<sup>10</sup> Tim Hughes, *Beautiful One*. 2002 Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3915912, 2002.

shows to whom worshipers sing the song.<sup>11</sup> Without a distinctly Christian worship service where congregants understand that they sing all songs to or about, the Triune God, determining the recipient could be challenging. For this reason, I identify this song as having a questionable invocation.

#### Invocation

The following songs contain clear invocations: *Better is One Day*; *Change My Heart Oh God*; *Everlasting God*; *Glory to God Forever*; *God of Wonders*; *Here I Am to Worship*; *How Great Thou Art*; *I Give You My Heart*; *I Love You Lord*; *Jesus Messiah*; *Lord I Lift Your Name on High*; *Open the Eyes Of My Heart*; *Shine Jesus Shine*; *Shout to the Lord*; *The Wonderful Cross*; and *Your Grace Is Enough*. Lyrics such as “How lovely is Your dwelling place / O Lord Almighty”<sup>12</sup> and “Strength will rise as we wait upon the Lord”<sup>13</sup> clearly show to whom the worshippers sing. Considering the above rubric, the following songs have questionable invocations: *10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)*; *As the Deer*; *Beautiful One*; *Blessed Be Your Name*; *Draw Me Close*; *Forever Reign*; *Friend of God*; *From the Inside Out*; *Hallelujah*; *Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)*; *I Could Sing of Your Love Forever*;

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<sup>11</sup> Some songs will start out using the term *You* and later in the song will use a name or recognized descriptor for the Triune God, but because it is located after the opening stanza, failing to identify the recipient from the outset, it is not noted as being included as part of the invocation. The song *Glory to God Forever* is a good example of this.

<sup>12</sup> Matt Redman, *Better Is One Day*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 1097451, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> Brenton Brown and Ken Riley, *Everlasting God*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4556538, 2005.



*Indescribable; Lord Reign in Me; Our God; The Stand; You Are My All in All; You Are My King (Amazing Love); Your Name; and You're Worthy Of My Praise.*

#### Plea to God for Help

The following songs contain a plea to God for help: *Better is One Day; Change My Heart Oh God; Draw Me Close; From the Inside Out; God of Wonders; Hosanna; Lord Reign in Me; Mighty to Save; Open the Eyes of My Heart; Shine Jesus Shine; Your Grace Is Enough; and Your Name.* Interestingly, the plea found in many of these songs is not for deliverance, but for intimacy with God. Language such as “Precious Lord reveal Your heart to me / Father hold me hold me”<sup>14</sup> reveals a cry for intimacy. Only 5 out of the above 12 songs include a plea for God to save the singer from something: *Change My Heart Oh God; God of Wonders;*<sup>15</sup> *Hosanna; Mighty to Save; and Shine Jesus Shine.* Four of the five songs include requests that God save the worshippers from what can best be described as sin, or at least the evil intentions of the human heart. *God of Wonders* is the only song that possibly refers to something other than sin. However, the lyric “When I stumble in the darkness”<sup>16</sup> is very vague and could refer to sin or to some other danger that causes singers to stumble.

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<sup>14</sup> Marc Byrd and Steve Hindalong, *God Of Wonders*. Never Say Never Songs (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.), New Spring (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.), Meaux Mercy (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Storm Boy Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3118757, 2000.

<sup>15</sup> This inclusion is questionable. The lyric goes “When I stumble in the darkness / I will call Your name by night” showing that the author will call but it is not a plea in the present tense. It is included here giving the composer the benefit of the doubt that it shows his understanding that it is to God that he gives his plea for help.

<sup>16</sup> Byrd and Hindalong, *God Of Wonders*.

## Lament

No songs have an obvious lament section containing the colorful, emotional language found in the Psalms. Three songs contain language that could suggest lament for a given situation, while using much more reserved language than the psalmists used. These songs are *Here I am to Worship*; *Mighty to Save*; and *The Heart of Worship*.

*Here I am to Worship* contains the following lyric as part of the bridge: “And I’ll never know how much it cost / To see my sin upon that cross.”<sup>17</sup> The song may lament the fact that Christ had to die on the cross for sin, or this fact may give the singer reason to sing this song of worship. *Mighty to Save* begins with the lyrics

Everyone needs compassion / Love that’s never failing

Let mercy fall on me / Everyone needs forgiveness

The kindness of a Saviour / The hope of nations.”<sup>18</sup>

However, the singer may not lament these issues, but rather state a fact that leads to the ideas expressed in the chorus of confidence in God’s ability to respond to these situations. Similarly, *The Heart of Worship* may or may not contain a lament section. The lyrics “I’ll bring You more than a song / For a song in itself is not what You have required”<sup>19</sup> seem to indicate the singer’s awareness that the status quo of his/her worship is inadequate.

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<sup>17</sup> Tim Hughes, *Here I Am To Worship*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3266032, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Ben Fielding and Reuben Morgan, *Mighty To Save*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4591782, 2006.

<sup>19</sup> Matt Redman, *The Heart Of Worship*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 2296522, 1999.

However, it is hard to tell from the lyrics if the song is lament or confession and repentance.

#### Confession of Sin/Assertion of Innocence

Some songs do include confession of sin. *The Heart of Worship* contains a confession, while *Change My Heart Oh God*, and *Shine Jesus Shine* contain implied confessions. The confession in *The Heart of Worship* is very clear with the lyric “I’m sorry Lord for the thing I’ve made it.”<sup>20</sup> *Change My Heart Oh God* and *Shine Jesus Shine* both contain similar lyrics asking God to change worshippers in manners consistent a confession and repentance, but the lyrics lack an actual confession, implying that the singer has already confessed or that rather than confessing their sinful states, they acknowledge it through the requests for change.

#### Curse of Enemies

Despite the appearance of enemies in earlier laments, no CCW songs curse enemies. Very few songs mention enemies, and those that do often use generic language that implies enemies without naming them. Lyrics such as “When I am surrounded / Your love carries me”<sup>21</sup> imply enemies but do not clearly show who (or what) surrounds the singer. The following songs contain language that could refer abstractly to enemies: *Everlasting God*; *Hallelujah*; *Our God*; and *Trading my Sorrows*. Interestingly, talk of enemies makes up a

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<sup>20</sup> Redman, *The Heart Of Worship*.

<sup>21</sup> Brenton Brown and Brian Doerksen, *Hallelujah*. Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) (Admin. by Vineyard Music UK), CCLI Song # 3091812, 2000.

large portion of the Psalms (see *Chapter 2*), but this language is almost entirely absent from CCW' songs.<sup>22</sup>

### Confidence in God's Response

Laments frequently conclude with statements expressing confidence in God. The following songs contain lyrics that clearly indicate the singer's confidence in God's ability to respond to life's challenges: *Everlasting God; Forever Reign; Friend of God; Hallelujah; Jesus Messiah; Lord I Lift Your Name on High; Mighty to Save; One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails); Our God; Trading My Sorrows; You Are My All in All; Your Grace Is Enough*; and *Your Name*. The following songs contain lyrics that infer confidence in God's ability to respond, but do not confidently state that God will do so: *From the Inside Out; God of Wonders; Hosanna (Praise is Rising); Shine Jesus Shine*; and *Shout to the Lord*. Lyrics such as "Your light will shine when all else fades,"<sup>23</sup> "When I am surrounded / Your love carries me,"<sup>24</sup> and "My comfort my shelter / Tower of refuge and strength"<sup>25</sup> show the singer's belief that God can and will respond. However, the lyrics do not clearly indicate

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<sup>22</sup> It is possible that this absence can be traced to the difference in how enemies are treated in the Old and New Testaments. However, even though they are treated differently, talk of enemies in prayer is not absent from the New Testament. It might be beneficial for CCW to look at how the New Testament treats enemies and work to incorporate that language into their prayers and laments, especially as a way to help Western Christians pray for their brothers and sisters around the world who are facing persecution for Christ's sake.

<sup>23</sup> Joel Houston, *From The Inside Out*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4705176, 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Brown and Doerksen, *Hallelujah*.

<sup>25</sup> Darlene Zschech, *Shout To The Lord*. Wondrous Worship (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.), CCLI Song # 1406918, 1993.

confidence that God will respond. Lyrics like ““When I fall down You pick me up / When I am dry You fill my cup”<sup>26</sup> and “Who am I that You are mindful of me / That You hear me / When I call”<sup>27</sup> assert that God has and will respond to calls for help.

### Hymn or Blessing

One final element of laments is a hymn of praise or blessing to God. Because another name for CCW music is “Praise and Worship music” a majority of the songs in the top 25 lists contain some form of hymn of praise or blessing. For the purposes of this analysis, the shorter list is that of songs lacking a hymn or blessing. These songs are *Breathe; Change My Heart Oh God; Draw Me Close; Friend of God; How He Loves; Lord Reign in Me; One Thing Remains (Your Love Never Fails); Shine Jesus Shine; The Heart of Worship; and Trading My Sorrows*.

### Summary Analysis

First, if a circumstance demands a lament, a person may look to other Psalm genres. Notably, some elements of a lament appear in other Psalm genres. For example, Psalm 65 is a psalm of praise.<sup>28</sup> Yet, when compared to the descriptions of lament elements, this psalm has an invocation (Psalm 65:1), shows confidence in God’s ability to respond (Psalm 65:2-7), and is entirely a hymn of praise or blessing directed to God. The elements that appear to

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<sup>26</sup> Dennis Jernigan, *You Are My All In All*. Shepherd's Heart Music, Inc. (Admin. by PraiseCharts Publishing, Inc.), CCLI Song # 825356, 1991.

<sup>27</sup> Israel Houghton and Michael Gungor, *Friend Of God*. Integrity's Praise! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), Sound Of The New Breed (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), Vertical Worship Songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), CCLI Song # 3991651, 2003.

<sup>28</sup> Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 87.

set laments apart from other psalm genres include the plea to God for help, a confession of sin or assertion of innocence, and if applicable to the situation, a curse on enemies.

Setting aside shared elements across various Psalm genres, the following songs contain elements that only occur in the laments: *Better is One Day*; *Change My Heart Oh God*; *Draw Me Close*; *From the Inside Out*; *God of Wonders*; *Here I Am to Worship*; *Hosanna*; *Lord Reign in Me*; *Mighty to Save*; *Open the Eyes of My Heart*; *Shine Jesus Shine*; *The Heart of Worship*; *Your Grace Is Enough*; and *Your Name*. The majority of these songs contain a plea to God for help. However, many of the songs that plead with God ask for intimacy rather than for deliverance from a specific situation. Of these songs only five include multiple lament elements: *Change My Heart Oh God*; *Here I Am to Worship*; *Mighty to Save*; *Shine Jesus Shine*; and *The Heart of Worship*. Of these five, only *Change My Heart Oh God* and *Shine Jesus Shine* plead with God for help and confess sin. In both of these songs the confession is questionably direct or only implied. Neither song laments anything. *Change My Heart Oh God* is a song of confession and repentance, and *Shine Jesus Shine* is a song of praise asking Jesus to “Shine on me.”<sup>29</sup>

Eliminating these two songs leaves the following three songs as possible laments: *Here I Am to Worship*; *The Heart of Worship*; *Mighty to Save*; and. *Here I am to Worship* contains an invocation, possible lament, and a hymn or blessing. However, the questionable lament may lament Christ’s death or function as part of the praise section in which the

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<sup>29</sup> Graham Kendrick, *Shine Jesus Shine*. Make Way Music (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.), CCLI Song # 30426, 1987.

worshipper admits that s/he does not fully comprehend the cost of salvation. This song also lacks a plea to God for help. These features indicate that this song is not a lament.

Similarly, *The Heart of Worship* contains a confession and a possible lament. The entire song appears to lament the state of worship and confess that the singer is “sorry” for “the thing I’ve made it.”<sup>30</sup> This song lacks a plea to God for help and therefore is not a lament. In fact the lyrics of the song suggest that the singer has the ability within him/herself to bring to God what God requires: “I’ll bring You more than a song” and “I’m coming back to the heart of worship.”<sup>31</sup> Although the singer may lament the current situation, because to the singer does not ask God for help and questionably announces an ability satisfactorily to fix the situation without God’s help, this song is also not a lament.

The strongest contender for a CCW lament is the song *Mighty to Save*. It contains a questionable lament (as noted above), a plea to God for help, shows confidence in God’s ability to respond, and includes language of praise that can be considered a hymn or blessing. Unfortunately, this song fails to provide focus for lament. The song uses a mix of singular and plural pronouns. In what could be considered the lament section the lyrics contain “Everyone needs compassion” and “Everyone needs forgiveness” but in the same verse couples these comments with the plea “Let mercy fall on me.”<sup>32</sup> The second verse contains lyrics of a singular personal nature “So take me as you find me / All my fears and failures / Fill my life again / I give my life to follow / everything I believe in / Now I

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<sup>30</sup> Redman, *The Heart Of Worship*.

<sup>31</sup> Redman, *The Heart Of Worship*.

<sup>32</sup> Fielding and Morgan, *Mighty To Save*.

surrender”<sup>33</sup> Further confusing the situation, when the lyrics that can be identified as praise arise, they use plural pronouns “We’re singing for the glory / Of the risen King Jesus.”<sup>34</sup> The combination of singular and plural pronouns shows confusion regarding the intent of the song, making a determination of intent and focus—corporate? individual?—quite difficult. Although this song contains a number of lament elements, the song does not function as a lament because it lacks specific references.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis supports the conclusion that lament is a “lost language” within contemporary Christianity,<sup>35</sup> at least in worship songs. Again, this analysis does not comment on the theological or liturgical value of the songs analyzed. My only aim is to identify any of the most popular songs in CCW that might assist worshippers in lament. Some CCW songs contain lament elements, and some may even positively contribute to the conversation regarding the Christian response to suffering, but none can be classified as laments as defined and typified by Psalms of lament or by other laments located throughout the Old and New Testaments. As *Chapter 2* shows, lament is a component of biblical worship and for this reason should be a part of worship for all Christians who want to stand in the stream of biblical spirituality.

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<sup>33</sup> Fielding and Morgan, *Mighty To Save*.

<sup>34</sup> Fielding and Morgan, *Mighty To Save*.

<sup>35</sup> Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 22 and 137.



## CHAPTER 4: THE IMPORTANCE OF SINGING

### Introduction

After analyzing CCW's song lyrics and going on to make the case that CCW should include lament as a genre, I now turn to two important questions. Considering song, readers may legitimately ask: "Why is congregational singing so important, regardless of the genre of songs being sung?" and "Why is singing lament so important?" These are difficult questions to answer, for the effects of music are difficult to measure. Scholars such as Jeremy Begbie have tried. In his book *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*, Begbie dedicates twenty-nine pages simply to describing the western tonal music tradition that he plans to explore<sup>1</sup> and spends the rest of the volume discussing a few ways that music works and impacts audiences and performers. As Begbie's work indicates and as many scholars have long noted, people appreciate music on many different levels. As an art, music has an aesthetic quality. Music also has the ability to soothe a crying baby, to rally a nation, to woo a lover, or to comfort a grieving person.

Because of the complexity inherent in music and responses to it, answers to questions about the importance of singing in a wide variety of genres are both simple and intricate. Simply put, God created the universe and gave humans the ability to sing and make music.<sup>2</sup> More importantly, many passages in the Old and New Testaments instruct people to sing or declare people's intentions to sing to the Lord (Exod 15:1, 20; 1 Chr 16:23;

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 29-58.

<sup>2</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 213.

Ps 96:1–13; Isa 42:10, Col 3:16). These passages give worshippers reasons to sing and instructions for ways to use song in worship (Eph 5:18-22).

### **Why Sing in Worship?**

Singing is a tradition in biblical worship that continues into the present. This is an important tradition for contemporary Christians to understand, especially if they want to stand in the stream of biblical spirituality. The Bible first records singing in corporate worship when Moses and Miriam lead the Israelites in song after God delivered them from the Egyptians:

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea ...” Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. And Miriam sang to them: “Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.” (Exod 15:1, 20-21)

This song, the *Song by the Sea*, became the archetype for worship songs sung throughout the Old and New Testaments.<sup>3</sup> People sang in response to God’s character, God’s acts, and God’s promises.

#### God’s Character

People cannot sing to God unless they know, either through revelation (Divine or human teaching) or experience, who God is and His defining characteristics. Moses

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<sup>3</sup> Donald P. Hustad, “Music in the Worship of the Old Testament,” in *Music and the Arts in Christian Worship* (ed. Robert Webber; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 189.

operated as a go-between, providing the Israelites with knowledge of God. In response to Moses's request that he know God's ways (Exod 33:13) and that he behold His presence (Exod 33:18),<sup>4</sup> God answers:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.  
(Exod 34:6-7)

This list of God's characteristics became a confessional statement for Israel, who probably started using it in worship sometime before the exile, and continue to use it today.<sup>5</sup>

It is these characteristics of God that are extolled in song in biblical worship. In the Old Testament, the faithful used songs such as Psalms 86, 33, 103, and 145, to sing of these attributes of God in the temple. In the New Testament these attributes are reflected again in Mary's *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55, specifically verses 50 and 55).

Building on this tradition Paul writes in his letter to the Colossians what has traditionally been known as the *Christ Hymn*<sup>6</sup> of the early church, praising Jesus for who

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<sup>4</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Exodus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (eds. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 216.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, et al., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), electronic edition no page numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Scholars disagree on whether or not this was a musical text or simply a poem. However, it is highly likely that this was a liturgical text used in early Christian worship and whether it was sung or spoken

He is:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20)

These characteristics are also important for a person approaching God in lament. S/he needs to have an understanding that God is a loving God who is willing to respond to the needs of His people.

#### God's Acts

Mary's *Magnificat* and Paul's *Christ Hymn* are more than just hymns of praise for the beings that God and Christ are. These texts are also hymns of praise for God's and Christ's acts (Luke 1:51-53, Col 1:16-17) and their continuing actions (Luke 1:48-49, Col 1:18-20). Mary and Paul, by singing these songs of praise for God's acts, participate in a long tradition going back to Moses and Miriam.

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antiphonally is unclear. See Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 60-61.

Praise songs often find subject matter in God's acts of salvation. Moses's *Song by the Sea* begins with "I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously; horse and rider he has thrown into the sea" (Exod 15:1), explicitly responding to God's victory over the armies of Egypt, celebrating His "direct, unmediated, personal incursion into the world of humankind."<sup>7</sup> In this moment, God's act saves the people of Israel from a return to slavery and leads them into a covenant relationship. As mentioned above, the *Song by the Sea* became the archetype for songs sung in the Old Testament to sing praises to God for His acts. The primary theme of many of these songs is His work of salvation (1 Chr 16:7-36, Ps 18; 25; 40; 96, Isa 25; 35).<sup>8</sup>

In the New Testament, songs such as the *Magnificat* and the *Christ Hymn* extol God and Christ for their acts. However, New Testament songs also help singers to envision the future when in the eschaton great celebrations will include songs praising God's ultimate victory and salvation: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power to our God, for his judgments are true and just..." (Rev 19:1-2). Even now in heavenly worship around God's throne, heavenly beings sing about God's character and acts:

And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and inside. Day and night without ceasing they sing, "Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come." And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to the one who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall

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<sup>7</sup> Sarna, *Exodus*, 75.

<sup>8</sup> William Sheppard Smith, "Why Do People Sing?," *Worship* 86, no. 5 (2012): 420.

before the one who is seated on the throne and worship the one who lives forever and ever; they cast their crowns before the throne, singing, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”

(Rev 4:8-11)

These acts of God form the foundation for songs of lament. Worshipers are lamenting to a God who has responded and saved His people in the past, giving the worshipper hope that God is more than able to respond to their suffering in the present.

#### God’s Promises

God’s promises figure prominently in biblical psalms of lament. With the exception of Psalm 88, all laments found in the book of Psalms end with a section of praise to God.<sup>9</sup> This repeated praise section shows a confidence in God’s abilities to fulfill His promises, which derives from remembering God’s character and God’s earlier acts.

In Isaiah 54 God commands His people to sing because of His promises. The passage begins with “Sing, O barren one who did not bear; burst into song and shout, you who have not been in labor” (Isa 42:1). This is a curious beginning, because in the culture of Old Testament the lack of children signaled great shame, yet it is these who bear shame who are commanded to sing.<sup>10</sup> The text continues to tell these barren ones to “enlarge the site of your tent, and let the curtains of your habitations be stretched out; do not hold back;

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<sup>9</sup> Howard Jr., “Psalm 88,” 248-9.

<sup>10</sup> G. W. Grogan, *Isaiah* (6; ed. Frank E. Gaebelain; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 308.

lengthen your cords and strengthen your stakes. For you will spread out to the right and to the left, and your descendants will possess the nations and will settle the desolate towns” (Isa 42:2-3), indicating that the current state of shame is not permanent. The shift between acknowledging current shame and confirming its temporary nature is quite quick. Almost immediately, God promises deliverance.

For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the LORD, your Redeemer...No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper, and you shall confute every tongue that rises against you in judgment. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD and their vindication from me, says the LORD. (Isa 54:7-8, 17)

God comes to His people in the midst of their pain and extols them to hope, for He will come and rescue them. He then commands them to sing when rejoicing in the hope of this promise.<sup>11</sup> Clearly, laments turn and lead to hope.

### **Instructions on Using Song**

This tradition is so important that the Apostle Paul instructs the early church to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts *sing* psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God” (Col 3:16,

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<sup>11</sup> William White, “רָנַן (rānan),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 851.

emphasis added). However, this is not the only place that Paul instructs the early church to use song. In his letter to the Ephesians he writes:

Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. (Eph 5:18-22)

An admonition, this passage clearly connects daily behaviors like drinking and praying with worship. Paul associates being filled with the Spirit and singing.<sup>12</sup> An outline of this section will clarify my point:

**Be filled** with the Spirit:

- *singing* to one another in songs, hymns, and spiritual songs
- *singing*
- and
- making music* in your hearts
- *giving thanks* to God the Father...
- *be subject* to one another<sup>13</sup>

Three of the five admonitions to be filled with the Spirit link to singing and/or music. When combined with Paul's teachings in Colossians 3, this teaching makes clear that

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<sup>12</sup> Steven R. Guthrie, "The Wisdom of Song," in *Resonant Witness: Conversations Between Music and Theology* (eds. Jeremy Begbie and Steven R. Guthrie; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 387.

<sup>13</sup> Guthrie, "The Wisdom of Song," 387. Outline and emphasis are original to Guthrie. However, the NSRV was substituted in place of the translation used by Guthrie.



to Paul singing is more than just something that the church does. Singing has a didactic function related to wisdom and being filled with the Spirit. Music is not only a way to praise God, but also a way to teach about God and for the worshipper to become open to God's Spirit. Steven Guthrie asserts:

The command to be filled with the Holy Spirit is also a command to be filled with the wisdom and understanding that come from the Spirit. And the singing of the church – speaking to one another, admonishing and teaching one another, in songs, hymns, and spiritual songs – is one of the means by which the Spirit reveals the wisdom of God.<sup>14</sup>

The consistency and repeated themes of these passages indicate that singing and music have a long history of biblical importance. Thus, I must next explore the ways in which music operates in significant biblical ways. Music works in many ways, but because of space, I will explore only one example here.<sup>15</sup>

### **Music as a Vehicle for Thought and Emotion**

Because of its complexity, music offers a medium for thought as well as emotional expression. Jeremy Begbie argues that music is not only a channel for text, but that the musical setting itself also informs and shapes the performers' and worshippers' understandings of the text.<sup>16</sup> Begbie uses the hymn *What a Friend We Have in Jesus* as an

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<sup>14</sup> Guthrie, "The Wisdom of Song," 390.

<sup>15</sup> See Begbie, *Resounding Truth*. for a more comprehensive look at how music works. This work includes exhaustive endnotes and bibliography for further study.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremy Begbie, "Music, Words and the Word," in *Conference Presentation* (vol. Charlottesville, VA of; Center for Christian Study: Music and the Spheres: Music, Faith and Culture in America Today, 2002).

example.<sup>17</sup> The hymn text itself is positive and uplifting, focusing on the friendship of Jesus and His desire to carry the believer's burdens, as the first verse clearly indicates:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!

O what peace we often forfeit, o what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!<sup>18</sup>

The traditional tune, by Charles C. Converse, is a “happy” tune, in a major key signature and the melodic line itself is quite buoyant. People usually associate this sound with happiness, so this text becomes an expression of the joy the Christian has in Jesus's friendship. However, this text also fits very well with another tune, *Ebenezer*, which is most commonly associated with the hymn *O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus*. This hymn tune is minor in key signature, a sound more often associated with “contemplative” music. Opposite the sound of the traditional tune, this one is mournful, sounding more like lament than joyful expression of friendship. This alternate tune changes the focus of the text from Jesus's friendship to the grief and weight of our sins that He bears. The worshipper is reminded that s/he is a sinful fallen creature who does not have peace and who lives in a pain-filled world. The fact that the choice of hymn tune changes the emphasis of the text is true for other hymns as well.

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<sup>17</sup> Begbie, “Music, Words and the Word.” The entire discussion of this hymn is taken from this lecture.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph M. Scriven, “What a Friend We Have in Jesus (No. 621),” in *The Worshiping Church: A Hymnal* (Carol Stream: Hope, 1990).

Certainly, as Begbie argues, both musical settings of this text are legitimate, although they express different aspects of the text and different facet of God's story. Another example not cited by Begbie is the hymn *Amazing Grace*. This hymn can be sung to many different tunes, each expressing unique lyrical and emotional dimensions of the text. This is most clearly evident by the contrast of singing the text to the traditional tune and singing the text to the tune of *The House of the Rising Sun*, especially considering this song is written about a brothel in New Orleans.

Begbie also asserts that, because music acts as a vehicle to nuance the meaning of a text, choosing appropriate music for a text is essential. He jokingly uses the example that the musical theme for the 1980's TV drama *Dallas* would make an excellent tune for the hymn text *O God Our Help in Ages Past*. However, as long as the cultural memory of that show, with its less-than-Christian story lines, lasts, the tune would never fit in worship. It would bring images to the mind that would not fit within a Christian worship context.

### **Conclusion**

One of God's gifts is to have created the universe in such a way that humans could sing and make music.<sup>19</sup> By recalling God's character, God's acts, and God's promises, singing forms an integral part of biblical and heavenly worship. As the long history of singing in worship indicates, even laments form an important thread in worship. Indeed, God's people are commanded to sing as part of corporate worship. Still, because music has such power in worship, worship leaders must take great care when choosing lyrics and music to sing in worship.

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<sup>19</sup> Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 213.

## CHAPTER 5: PSALMS OF LAMENT

### Introduction

The psalms of lament have much to offer the contemporary Christian and can be a valuable asset to use in CCW services. Psalms of lament are rich with lessons for contemporary believers but four in particular are relevant to the use of lament songs in CCW: 1) God is the ultimate answer to all suffering, 2) Believers should use lament songs in public worship to bring issues of suffering to God, 3) Lament songs equip believers to praise God in the midst of suffering, and 4) Lament songs enable believers and their communities to stand in solidarity with those who are suffering. This chapter will briefly review the content of *Chapter 2*, give some additional information about individual and corporate laments, and then focus on four psalms of lament as examples to show how the psalms of lament can benefit the contemporary believer in the four ways listed above.

As *Chapter 2* established, lament is a plea to God to change the current circumstance of a person's life. Throughout the Old and New Testaments laments are used by people who are suffering to go to God, with whom they have relationships, a God, as mentioned in *Chapter 4*, who has saved His people in the past, giving the lamenter hope that He will respond in the present.

Laments appear throughout the Old and New Testament. These laments are shown to be cries to God in the midst of suffering. Many lack specific form; however, the laments found in the Psalms are liturgical laments, composed for use in a variety of circumstances. The following elements generally characterize laments in the Psalms:

1. Invocation
2. Plea to God for help
3. Lament
4. Confession of sin or an assertion of innocence
5. Curse of enemies (imprecation)
6. Confidence in God's response
7. Hymn or blessing<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, As *Chapter 3* noted, multiple psalm genres may include many of these elements. Laments, no matter how many elements, always involve the person/s pleading directly with God for God to respond and to change the current situation.

Because laments form an important part of biblical worship, CCW leaders, planners, song- and lyric-writers must understand how laments can help believers continue to worship God during difficult times.

Before moving on to the Psalms themselves, it will be important to look more closely at the two forms lament psalms take. Briefly noted in *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 3* lament psalms take two forms: corporate and personal. Corporate laments (sometimes called communal or national laments) brought the community together in lament before their covenant God. Military crisis, famine, or corruption in society generally occasion community specific laments.<sup>2</sup> Many corporate laments are directed against God as if He had failed in some way to protect the community, and these laments remind Him of His past

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<sup>1</sup> Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 56.

saving deeds as motivation to save once again.<sup>3</sup> Broyles classifies certain psalms as corporate laments: Psalms 9–10; 12; 14; 44; 53; 58; 60; 67; 74; 79; 80; 82; 83; 85; 89; 106; 108; 137; 144.<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this examination, this chapter focuses on Psalms 44 and 83 as examples of corporate laments.

Biblical laments are not just present for corporate suffering. There are laments for individuals to use during times of personal crisis. Individual laments are the most common of the laments found in the Psalms. Occasions for individual laments are usually specific to an individual, even if the writers use general language. For this reason, identification of the specific circumstance is difficult.<sup>5</sup> However, reasons such as illness, false accusations, gossip, innocence in the face of an accusation, pleas for asylum, persecution, and penitence usually comprise generic themes for the lament: Some psalms are non-specific laments, so they adapt to any life situation.<sup>6</sup> Broyles classifies the following psalms as individual laments: Psalms 3; 4; 6; 7; 13; 17; 22; 25; 27; 31; 35; 38; 39; 40; 41; 42–43; 51; 54; 55; 56; 57; 59; 61; 64; 69; 70; 71; 77; 86; 88; 102; 109; 139; 140; 141; 142; 143.<sup>7</sup> This chapter will focus on Psalms 4 and 88 as examples of individual laments.

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<sup>3</sup> Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," 390-1.

<sup>4</sup> Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," 391. Not everyone agrees on which laments are corporate laments. See: Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 50.

<sup>5</sup> Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," 385.

<sup>6</sup> Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 53-56.

<sup>7</sup> Broyles, "Lament, Psalms of," 388. Not everyone agrees on which laments are individual laments. See: Bellinger Jr., *Psalms*, 50.

## Psalm 4

### Introduction

The first psalm to consider as a model lament for the contemporary Christian is an individual lament. The superscript of Psalm 4 is “A Psalm of David.”<sup>8</sup> There is some debate regarding what this phrase means. It could refer the psalm being written “‘by,’ ‘for,’ or even ‘about’” David.<sup>9</sup> However, according to Bruce Waltke this phrase identifies King David as the author.<sup>10</sup> The internal evidence of this psalm offers no reason to doubt this claim. The author claims special grace in prayer (Ps 4:3), a trait that commonly associated with psalms ascribed to royalty. The author also stands in solidarity with the prayers of the community (Ps 4:6), another trait of royal psalms.<sup>11</sup>

Psalm 4 is often labeled an “evening prayer” and is tied with Psalm 3, often labeled as a “morning prayer,” to form a pair of psalms that the believer can use to approach God in prayer during crisis.<sup>12</sup> Ascribed to King David, both psalms contain similar language regarding enemies within the king’s own ranks.<sup>13</sup> Theories about, but no consensus exists

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<sup>8</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 223.

<sup>9</sup> Dale A. Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 619.

<sup>10</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 228.

<sup>11</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 228.

<sup>12</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, *Psalms* (5; eds. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 107; John Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41* (ed. Tremper Longman III; 3 vols.; vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 117; C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26* (6 vols.; vol. 1; Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 34.

<sup>13</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 194.

regarding the specific event in David's life that caused the composition of this psalm. The language of the psalm itself is also less than clear, making identification of the specific event problematic; however, the psalm text does indicate that the problem at hand has to do with famine in the land that causes a loss of confidence in David's leadership.<sup>14</sup> The primary focus of the psalm is not the specific event in David's life; rather, it a message of confidence in God's ability to respond and to save David.<sup>15</sup>

Psalms of laments were cultic songs in their original context. It is from the superscripts where contemporary readers gain an understanding of the authorship, historical setting, and cultic function of the lament. The poetic nature of the laments notwithstanding, it is from the postscripts where contemporary readers gain an understanding regarding the original musical performance instructions for the lament.<sup>16</sup> The superscript identifies this psalm as "a psalm." The heading מְזִמֹּר (*mizmôr*) occurs "fifty-seven times in the Psalter and nowhere else" and may be considered a technical term for temple music.<sup>17</sup> The root of this term is זמר (*zmr*), a verb used in the context of playing a string or percussion instrument in worship.<sup>18</sup> The usage of מְזִמֹּר (*mizmôr*) in the lament psalms, and the entire psalter, most likely

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<sup>14</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 225-7.

<sup>15</sup> VanGemenen, *Psalms*, 107-8.

<sup>16</sup> Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," 586.

<sup>17</sup> Brueggemann, "Psalms 4: Titles," 618.

<sup>18</sup> Leslie C. Allen, "זמר (*zmr* I)," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemenen; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:1116.



refers to a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument or perhaps to temple music in general.<sup>19</sup>

The postscript of Psalm 4 is “To the leader: for the flutes.”<sup>20</sup> “To the leader” is a translation of לְמַנְצֵחַ (*lamnaṣṣēah*), which occurs 55 times in the psalms.<sup>21</sup> This term is a Piel participle of נָצַח (*nāṣah*)<sup>22</sup> which “fixes upon the sense of ‘outshine’ or ‘excel greatly,’ leading to the usage ‘take a lead, preside,’ and thence on to ‘act as overseer, superintendent, director.’”<sup>23</sup> This use of the term suggests a dedication of the song to “the leader.”<sup>24</sup> The leader is most likely a choir director or worship leader, to use contemporary terms. “For the flutes” is a translation of אֶל-הַנְּחִילֹת (‘*el-hannēhîlôt*). In this context the term ‘*el*’ most likely refers to “how the psalm was to be performed in the sense of ‘according to’ or ‘with.’”<sup>25</sup> נְחִילֹת (*nēhîlôt*) only occurs in this postscript.<sup>26</sup> The meaning is disputed and could

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<sup>19</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 618.

<sup>20</sup> Taken from the beginning of Psalm 5. Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 224.

<sup>21</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 615.

<sup>22</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 615.

<sup>23</sup> Milton C. Fisher, “נָצַח (nāṣah),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 593.

<sup>24</sup> Robert C. Stallman, “Music, Song,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 486.

<sup>25</sup> Stallman, “Music, Song,” 486.

<sup>26</sup> Leonard J. Coppes, “נְחִילֹת (nēhîlôt),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 569.

refer to an unknown technical term;<sup>27</sup> it could also be connected to חָלִיל (*hālīl*) “flute;” however even though older translations such as the LXX and the Vulgate do not treat it as a musical term,<sup>28</sup> this does not undermine the musical nature of the psalm.

### Structure

Because this paper focuses on using psalms of lament in the music of CCW, rather than on analyzing the structure of selected psalms in the typical way a commentary would (e.g. poetic form, rhythmic patterns, rhyming schemes), this section will use a similar methodology to that used in *Chapter 3* to look for and explain how the selected psalm does or does not include the seven elements found in lament Psalms. In Psalm 4:1 David ties his invocation to the plea to God for help. David directs this psalm to “God of my right” (Ps 4:1b). This odd turn of phrase is also translated as “my faithful God”<sup>29</sup> or “my righteous God.”<sup>30</sup> David thus directs this psalm to a righteous, faithful God whose previous interactions with David, and with the Israelites as a whole, fulfill His covenantal promises and give David hope that God will respond on his behalf.<sup>31</sup> The plea comes in the form of “Answer me when I call” (Ps 4:1a) and “You gave me room when I was in distress. Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer” (Ps 4:1c). Here

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<sup>27</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 242.

<sup>28</sup> Stallman, “Music, Song,” 486.

<sup>29</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 116.

<sup>30</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 223.

<sup>31</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 108.

David calls to God, reminding Him that He has responded positively in the past and asking Him to do the same in the present.

David then laments and rebukes his enemies in Psalm 4:2-4: “How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies? *Selah* But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to Him. When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. *Selah.*”

The focus of David’s lament changes here: he does not direct his lament at God, but rather at those who are attacking him. David wants to know how long they will oppose him as God’s anointed king, and by extension oppose God Himself, and encourages them to respond rightly.<sup>32</sup> David’s exhortations of his enemies to respond rightly continues in Psalm 4:5.

David ends his prayer, by showing confidence in God’s response and by using language that implies worship and that functions as a hymn or blessing. David begins this new section by saying to God that “There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!’” (Ps 4:6), a text that shows that David is not the only one to call on God. But then David responds with “You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound” (Ps 4:7), indicating that His confidence in God comes not from physical necessities but from “an awareness of the light

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<sup>32</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 80-81.

of God's countenance."<sup>33</sup> After showing confidence in God's response, David, as an act of worship, lies down in peace and rests in God's safety.<sup>34</sup>

### Commentary

The power of this lament lies not in the fact that God responds and rescues David from his enemies. This lament's power lies in the fact that it shows David resting in God's loving care regardless of the fact that those who mean him harm surround him.<sup>35</sup> This psalm is "more a declaration of trust than a request for help."<sup>36</sup> This circumstantial shift, however, does not negate the fact that David does ask God for help. David shows trust in God in two ways in this psalm: 1) David goes to God with his problem rather than dealing with it himself; 2) David rests in God's protection although he does not know how God will to save him.

### God is the Answer to All Suffering

The most obvious way that this psalm shows God to be the answer to all suffering is that David goes to God with his problem, as occurs in every psalm of lament. However, in this psalm the language depicts someone confident that God is the answer. The statement "You gave me room when I was in distress" (Ps 4:1b) shows that God has responded to David's suffering in the past. For this reason, David has confidence that God will respond

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<sup>33</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 81-82.

<sup>34</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 242.

<sup>35</sup> John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (5 vols.; vol. 1; Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 50.

<sup>36</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 124.

now. David also demonstrates this confidence when he says “But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself; the LORD hears when I call to him” (Ps 4:3). Although David directs this language to his enemies and not to God, the phrases demonstrate David’s understanding of the covenant relationship that he and God enjoy.<sup>37</sup>

In this psalm, the final way that David shows his confidence in God as the answer to all suffering is David’s ending resolve that he “will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety” (Ps 4:8). David’s firm confidence in God allows him to rest in peace although God has not yet responded, which reifies the truth David expresses in this psalm-- in God is the answer to all suffering.

#### How to Go to God with Life’s Suffering

David approaches God in this psalm as one who knows the God to whom he prays and knows that this God responds to human suffering.<sup>38</sup> Although not every person who draws near to God has quite this background and confidence, this psalm demonstrates how to go to God with suffering, confident that God will respond (Ps 4:3). However, such confidence only comes through a relationship with God and knowledge of God’s previous actions.

#### Praising God in the Midst of Suffering

In this psalm, David praises God with words and deeds in the midst of suffering. David begins praises by calling God “O God of my right” (Ps 4:1), which as noted above, shows that he prays to a righteous, faithful God. David extols God for his acts by declaring

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<sup>37</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 109.

<sup>38</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 108.

“You gave me room when I was in distress” (Ps 4:1b) and again by asserting “You have put gladness in my heart more than when their grain and wine abound (Ps 4:7). However, David praises God most dramatically by sleeping in peace because of God’s promises, despite the fact that his distress continues and that God has not yet responded. Bruce Waltke states of this rest: “When God’s promises and life’s realities seem far apart, saints live by faith; when they meet and touch each other they celebrate their God in praise.”<sup>39</sup> This confluence of faith and lament is demonstrated precisely in Psalm 4.

### Standing in Solidarity with Those Who Are Suffering

Because this psalm is an individual lament, recognizing how this psalm can help believers stand in solidarity with those who suffer can prove difficult. However, the text provides two surprising examples. The first suggestion in the text is that other believers can help the suffering not believe the lies that the enemies of their faith tell.<sup>40</sup> David clearly identifies his enemies and their lies when he says “How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame? How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies” (Ps 4:2)? Believers should stand with their brothers and sisters, encouraging them to believe with confidence in the promises of God, and to embrace the reality that their only hope comes from God.

The second example this text provides appears in David’s encouragement to his detractors: “When you are disturbed, do not sin; ponder it on your beds, and be silent. *Selah* Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD” (Ps 4:4-5). Given that the context of this psalm is possibly a famine and thus the people’s loss of faith in David’s

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<sup>39</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 242.

<sup>40</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 240.

leadership, the entire nation likely suffers and seeks answers. David here encourages his detractors, and by extension the entire nation, to respond to their suffering rightly: “Offer right sacrifices, and put your trust in the LORD” (Ps 4:5).<sup>41</sup> Encouraging brothers and sisters to respond rightly to the circumstances of their suffering can be difficult, but by directing them to their only source of hope, they may see how to respond to the situation as David did and “...lie down and sleep in peace” (Ps 4:8a).

## **Psalm 44**

### Introduction

The second psalm to consider is a corporate lament. The superscript of Psalm 44 is “Of the Korahites. A Maskil.”<sup>42</sup> The Korahites are most likely the decedents of Korah (Num 16, 1 Chr 6:22), who was a decedent of Kohath, “one of the three Levite clans responsible for the sanctuary.”<sup>43</sup> This clan is also listed among those David organized for sanctuary music (1 Chr 6:33). This musical guild operated during the monarchy, survived the exile, and continued to minister after the exile.<sup>44</sup> Psalms bearing the superscription “Of the Korahites” refer to music that the Korahites either created or performed.<sup>45</sup> Eleven psalms bear this superscription (Ps 42–43; 44; 45; 46; 47; 48; 49; 84; 85; 87; 88).

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<sup>41</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 236-8.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 182.

<sup>43</sup> David G. Firth, “Asaph and Sons of Korah,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (eds. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 26.

<sup>44</sup> Firth, “Asaph and Sons of Korah,” 26.

<sup>45</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 620.

The superscript also identifies this psalm as a maskil. מִשְׁכִּיל (*maskil*) is a heading used in wisdom, royal, and petition psalms,<sup>46</sup> and appears in the superscript of thirteen psalms (Ps 32; 42–43; 44; 45; 52; 53; 54; 55; 74; 78; 88; 89; 142). This term also occurs associated with wisdom<sup>47</sup> outside of psalm superscripts (Ps 14:2; 47:7), 1 Samuel (1 Sam 18:14–15), Job (Job 22:2), and Proverbs (Prov 10:5, 19; 14:35; 16:20; 17:2; 21:12).<sup>48</sup> The word is translated in a variety of ways when used outside superscripts, such as: “wise” (Ps 14:2), “success” (1 Sam 18:14–15), “wisest” (Job 22:2), “who are attentive” (Prov 16:20), and “observes” (Prov 21:12). The use of the term in the superscripts of lament psalms could relate to the idea that the person who has wisdom looks to God for deliverance or that the song “should be understood as a successful, that is, ‘efficacious,’ song.”<sup>49</sup>

Psalms 42–43 (originally a unified psalm), an individual lament, to begin the second book of the psalms with individual and corporate laments.<sup>50</sup> The context does not yield sufficient detail to determine a specific incident, but certainly the nation has suffered terrible defeat.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 618.

<sup>47</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, “שִׁכְלָה (*skil*),” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (ed. Willem A. VanGemeren; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:1243.

<sup>48</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 618.

<sup>49</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 618–9.

<sup>50</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 186.

<sup>51</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1–50*, 332.



Psalm 45 follows, a psalm celebrating the great triumph of the king and his marriage. Perhaps this contrast of defeat and triumph is what Jesus referenced when He “rebuked them [i.e., the two disciples] from the Scriptures for not understanding that Messiah must first suffer before entering into his glory” (Luke 24:25-27).<sup>52</sup>

The postscript of Psalm 44 is “To the leader: according to Lilies.”<sup>53</sup> See the discussion above in Psalm 4 regarding the phrase “To the leader.” The phrase *עַל־שִׁשְׁנִים* (*al-šōšannîm*), “according to Lilies” most likely gives instruction that the psalm should be sung to a popular tune entitled *שִׁשְׁנִים* (*šûšhan*) “lily.”<sup>54</sup> Such information may seem to not be relevant to practitioners and planners of CCW services, but this information reminds the reader that these laments were culturally relevant songs and by extension show that CCW can create lament songs that are culturally relevant.

#### Structure

Psalm 44 begins with an invocation directing the prayer to “God” (Ps 44:1) and recitation of God’s previous acts connects the material in this section (Ps 44:1-7). This recitation not only reminds God of His past relationship with the His people, but also functions to explain why the community laments to God: God brought victory for His people in the past, so they question why did He not act in the same way now. This lament

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<sup>52</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 186.

<sup>53</sup> Taken from the beginning of Psalm 45. Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 185.

<sup>54</sup> Herbert Wolf, “שִׁשְׁנִים (*šûšhan*)” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 914; Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 617.

next goes into a brief section of praise by saying: “In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to Your Name forever” (Ps 44:8).<sup>55</sup>

The lament section begins in verse 9 with an accusation of God: “Yet You rejected us and abased us, and have not gone out with our armies” and continues lament against God through verse 16. The people are bewildered and confused had been faithful in the past, and they perceive Him as having acted faithlessly in the present.<sup>56</sup> This bewilderment extends into the next section of the lament as the people assert their innocence before God.

This assertion of innocence begins with “All this has come upon us, yet we have not forgotten You, or been false to Your covenant” (Ps 44:17) and continues on to list the many ways that the people have behaved faithfully to God. The insistence upon innocence also explains why the people do not understand His absence in the battle (Ps 44:18-22).<sup>57</sup> The lament ends with a plea to help, beginning with the language, “Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever” (Ps 44:23)! This plea ends with a note of hope as the people call up God’s covenantal “steadfast love” (Ps 44:26b) as the only basis by which they can hope for salvation.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 390-1.

<sup>56</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 392-3.

<sup>57</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 334.

<sup>58</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 334.

## Commentary

This lament psalm works to bring a community together to ask many of the same questions that Job asks.<sup>59</sup> This community, like Job, asks where God is during a tragedy, a tragedy that seems unfair. These people, like Job, offered sacrifices, worshiped God, and followed God's law. Yet, like Job, they suffer defeat and shame. Unlike Job, they have no reason for their defeat.<sup>60</sup> This psalm shows that God's people do not need simply to accept their suffering. In their suffering, they can take their pain to God and ask why, particularly when the suffering does not make sense. This lament also incorporates a reminder of God's steadfast love (Ps 44:26b). Regardless how dark the defeat, how painful the shame, God's people are never truly separated from His love and can hope that He will respond out of His steadfast love.<sup>61</sup>

### God is the Answer to All Suffering

By beginning with a reminder of the deeds God has done in the past for His people, this psalm shows God as the answer to all suffering: "We have heard with our ears, O God, our ancestors have told us, what deeds You performed in their days, in the days of old..." (Ps 44:1). Following this reminder, these same people turn and accuse God of failing to protect them, although they have remained faithful:

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<sup>59</sup> Craigie and Tate, *Psalms 1-50*, 334-5.

<sup>60</sup> John Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89* (ed. Tremper Longman III; 3 vols.; vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 50-51.

<sup>61</sup> Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)* (3 vols.; vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2013), 54-55.

In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to Your name forever. *Selah* Yet You have rejected us and abased us, and have not gone out with our armies. You made us turn back from the foe, and our enemies have gotten spoil. (Ps 44:8-10)

Even in defeat the nation holds God responsible for their defeat. The enemies of Israel did not defeat them; their defeat results from God's absence in battle.<sup>62</sup> This psalm ends with demands that God answer suffering: the people turn and ask God to respond and save them: "Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever" (Ps 44:23). They conclude by hoping in the promise of God's "steadfast love" (Ps 44:46b).

#### How to Go to God with Life's Suffering

This lament, like others, recites God's previous deeds, holds God accountable, and asks God to respond; however, this psalm hinges its entire request on His steadfast love.<sup>63</sup> This "steadfast love" or חֶסֶד (*hesed*) is more than simply love or mercy. Steadfast love in this sense has its roots in God's "loyalty to his covenant obligations," and the expectation that in return Israel would extend this same loyalty.<sup>64</sup> As shown in *Chapter 2* the relationship between God and His people is now mediated through Jesus. Jesus's own suffering allows Him to sympathize with humanity's sufferings (Heb 4:14-16). Through Jesus, the contemporary believer who has been faithful to God can go to Him with life's

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<sup>62</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 200.

<sup>63</sup> Waltke, et al., *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 207. See also: Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 54.

<sup>64</sup> R. Laird Harris, "חסד (*hsd*)," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 305.

suffering with the same expectation that He will respond to them on account of His “steadfast love.” The author of Hebrews expresses this by saying: “Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

### Praising God in the Midst of Suffering

This psalm begins with what could easily be described as praise. In fact, verses 1-8 could be read as an independent psalm recounting God’s great deeds. Yet, when combined with the rest of the psalm, this section functions as more than mere praise for God’s deeds. It is a set-up,<sup>65</sup> like the questions a courtroom lawyer uses when trying to make a witness comfortable before going for the damning testimony. The true praise of this psalm is the psalm itself. In spite of the fact that God seems absent and has allowed His people to suffer defeat, the people still return to Him in confidence that He will save them. This expression of faith in the midst of defeat is in itself an act of praise to God.

### Standing in Solidarity with Those Who Are Suffering

A corporate lament, this psalm is designed to rally people around a common cause to approach God. Certainly in the context of the psalm a person may have not had a personal loss due to the defeat of the nation’s army, but because they experience defeat as a community, this psalm brings people together in lament before God.

As a lament following national defeat, this lament can help Western Christians in a contemporary setting in a completely different way. This psalm provides them language to approach God on behalf of the Christians who suffer persecution around the world.

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<sup>65</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 41.

“Because of [God these Christians] are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Ps 44:22). This fact confuses contemporary Christians as much as their own defeats and trials confounded Israel. By using this psalm as a model Western Christians pray for their suffering brothers and sisters around the world even when they do not fully understand their suffering. Western Christians can modify this psalm and pray for God to “rise up, come to [their aid]. Redeem [them] for the sake of your steadfast love” (Ps 44:26 modified).

### **Psalm 83**

#### Introduction

A third psalm to consider as a model lament for the contemporary Christian is a corporate lament. The superscript of Psalm 83 is “A Song. A Psalm of Asaph,”<sup>66</sup> which points to Asaph as author. The Asaph mentioned here is most likely the Asaph mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:24 as a leader of a group of temple singers. This Asaph later appears in 1 Chronicles 15:17-19 as a worship leader, and again in 1 Chronicles 16:5 where he is in charge of the music “when the ark was brought into Jerusalem.”<sup>67</sup> Chroniclers also record that Asaph led a musical guild (2 Chr 5:12). The Chronicler “traces a continuing role for this musical guild through the reigns of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:14), Hezekiah (2 Chr 29:13)

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<sup>66</sup> Waltke uses the long superscript of Psalm 88 in the Masoretic Text to argue that the postscript of one psalm was sometimes conflated with the following Psalm in the Masoretic tradition. Based on Waltke’s argument that superscripts contain information regarding the authorship, genre, and cultic setting the term “A Song” is included as part of the superscript of Psalm 83 and not a performance postscript for Psalm 82. Following Waltke’s argument that postscripts contain information regarding musical performance “To the leader: according to the Gittith.” is taken from the superscript of Psalm 84 and included as the postscript for Psalm 83. See: Waltke, “Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both,” 591-2.

<sup>67</sup> Firth, “Asaph and Sons of Korah,” 24.

and Josiah (2 Chr 35:15).”<sup>68</sup> A collection of psalms attributed to Asaph is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 29:30 and Nehemiah 12:46, but accounts do not clearly connect these collections to the contemporary canonical collection. Biblical evidence also suggests that Asaph’s guild was active in the post exilic periods (Ezra 3:10; Neh 11:17, 22). Twelve psalms are attributed to Asaph (Ps 50; 73; 74; 75; 76; 77; 78; 79; 80; 81; 82; 83). Biblical evidence of Asaph as a musician, worship leader, and composer of psalms, thus supports the claim in the superscript.

The superscript also identifies this psalm as “A song.” שִׁיר (*šîr*) translates simply as “song.” No clear difference appears between the terms “A Psalm” and “A song.”<sup>69</sup> This psalm is also identified as “A Psalm.” As mentioned above in the discussion on Psalm 4 the term “A Psalm” most likely refers to a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument or to temple music in general.

Psalm 83 is an imprecatory psalm, often compared to other imprecatory psalms that call for God to shame and destroy Israel’s enemies (Ps 35; 58; 69; 109; 137).<sup>70</sup> The mention of Assyria (Ps 83:8) indicates pre-exilic composition; however, given the dearth of historical evidence that the listed nations (Ps 83:6-8) ever formed a coalition against Israel, readers have great difficulty in determining an actual date or event related to the composition of

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<sup>68</sup> Firth, “Asaph and Sons of Korah,” 25.

<sup>69</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, “שִׁיר (*šîr*),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 920.

<sup>70</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 730; VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 627.

this psalm.<sup>71</sup> Most likely, the nations in this psalm represent the enemies that had destroyed Israel in the past and symbolize future adversaries, making this psalm a universal lamentation to God against those who would seek to destroy Israel, regardless of who attacks or when.<sup>72</sup>

The postscript of Psalm 83 is “To the leader: according to the Gittith.”<sup>73</sup> See the discussion above in Psalm 4 regarding the phrase “To the leader.” As with Psalm 44, the phrase עַל־הַגִּתִּית (‘*al-haggittîṭ*’) “according to the Gittith” is most likely an instruction that this psalm should be sung to a popular tune entitled “Gittith.” Gittith “is a musical term of uncertain meaning,” possibly related to a musical instrument or tune from the Philistine city of Gath, or a winepress.<sup>74</sup> Again, this information reminds contemporary readers of the importance of singing and crafting contemporary laments to meet the needs of CCW participants.

### Structure

Psalm 83 begins with an invocation coupled with a plea to God for help. The psalmist begins by calling to “God” and follows with the plea, “Do not keep silence; do not hold your peace or be still, O God” (Ps 83:1). The psalm continues into the lament section (Ps 83:2-8) which begins by articulating the problem: “Even now your

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<sup>71</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 573-5.

<sup>72</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 730.

<sup>73</sup> See footnote 66.

<sup>74</sup> Herbert Wolf, “גִּתִּית (gittîṭ)” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke; Chicago: Moody, 1980), 361; Stallman, “Music, Song,” 486.



enemies are in tumult; those who hate you have raised their heads. They lay crafty plans against your people; they consult together against those you protect.” (Ps 83:2-3). The lament continues with the psalmist detailing conspirators and their plans (Ps 83:4-8).

The psalmist expresses confidence in God’s ability to respond by listing the ways that God has responded and dealt with enemies in the past (Ps 83:9-12). As an imprecatory psalm, verses 13-17 demand that God to deal swiftly with His enemies. This is most evident when the psalmist cries:

O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane. Fill their faces with shame, so that they may seek your name, O LORD. Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace (Ps 83:13-17).

This psalm ends on an unexpected note. It praises God by acknowledging Him as “the Most High over all the earth” (Ps 83:18b) but does so in the midst of a prayer for God’s enemies. After imploring God to destroy His enemies, the psalmist then turns and prays that God’s enemies would change their attitude towards Him and serve rather than oppose Him (Ps 83:18a). The psalmist here calls for God’s enemies to know that they were defeated by Him, and then extends prayer that these enemies repent of their opposition to God, seek Him, and do His will.<sup>75</sup> This section also aligns with the way that Christ transformed imprecations against enemies into prayers for enemies.

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<sup>75</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 50-100* (20; eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts.; Waco: Word Books, 1990), 348-9.

## Commentary

With a cursory read, this psalm may appear to have little to offer the contemporary Christian living in the Western world.<sup>76</sup> The very language of imprecation jars contemporary ears. Yet, like the prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6:10, Israel in this psalm calls for God to defeat His enemies and establish His rule.<sup>77</sup> However, Israel does not merely want their (and God's enemies) defeated. Israel wants their enemies to know that God is "Most High over all the earth" (Ps 83:18b), to turn from their wicked ways, and to serve God as they do.<sup>78</sup>

### God is the Answer to All Suffering

Apart from simply going to God with life's suffering, this psalm concludes with a statement of faith that God is the answer to all suffering. The final petition demands "Let them know that you alone, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth" (Ps 83:18). Specifically the claim that God is "Most High" over all the earth demonstrates this faith. God is not some tribal deity. God is the only God whose name is יהוה (*yhwh*), and His rule extends to all of creation. This statement shows that being יהוה (*yhwh*) "and thus God alone means being the Most High, because there is no other Most High."<sup>79</sup> As these psalms testify the one and only God over all responds to the suffering of His people (Ps 4:1; 44:1-3, 4-8; 83:9-12).

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<sup>76</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 741.

<sup>77</sup> Richard J. Clifford, *Psalms 73-150* (ed. Patrick D. Miller; Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 70-71.

<sup>78</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 585.

<sup>79</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 583-4.

## How to Go to God with Life's Suffering

This psalm shows how Israel went to God to deal with enemies who rose up against them, and thus against God. It uses language that may make the contemporary Christian uncomfortable, as the psalm calls on God to “make them [i.e., enemies] like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane” (Ps 83:13-15). However, the psalm also includes language more familiar to the contemporary Christian: the psalmist asks God to turn the enemies to Himself, in essence to bring them into the fold (Ps 83:18).<sup>80</sup> This psalm provides the contemporary Christian an exemplary way to go to God when enemies cause suffering. The approach is twofold: 1) pray for God’s justice to deal with the enemies and 2) pray that the enemies become followers of God. Whatever end the enemies come to, the Christian’s role is to pray for enemies, and to seek God’s glory.<sup>81</sup>

## Praising God in the Midst of Suffering

This psalm shows that situating God as “Most High over all the earth” (Ps 83:18) offers the faithful the opportunity to praise God. Regardless of circumstances, the opposition that believers face, or their circumstantial pain, God remains God over all the earth. When the faithful remember this and approach God as the “Most High,” they give Him praise by coming near to Him as He truly is. This reminder can be especially important for Christians within CCW (and in more traditional churches as well) who live in

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<sup>80</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 632.

<sup>81</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 742.

societies that look to anything other than God for answers and place personal success and happiness as the ultimate goal of life.

### Standing in Solidarity with Those Who Are Suffering

Like Psalm 44, this psalm is a community lament intended to gather people together around a common cause. Like Psalm 44 as well, this psalm can guide contemporary Western Christians to pray for their persecuted brothers and sisters around the world. In places where violence comes against God's people, and by extension God Himself, the faithful around the world must pray to the "Most High" God to end the suffering. Allen Ross writes, "This psalm models for us, and therefore invites us, to pray for God to end these serious threats against his people and his program."<sup>82</sup> Even when Western Christians cannot physically stand in solidarity with their suffering sisters and brothers, they can--through prayer--stand in solidarity with them before God.

## Psalm 88

### Introduction

The final psalm considered as a model lament is an individual lament. The superscript of Psalm 88 is "A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite."<sup>83</sup> This psalm claims Heman

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<sup>82</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 741.

<sup>83</sup> Psalm 88 has a conflated superscript that when taken as rendered in the NRSV is contradictory. The full superscript in the NRSV is "A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth. A Maskil of Heman the Ezrahite." This superscript identifies two authors, two genres, and performance instructions. Following Waltke's argument and placing "A Song. A Psalm of the Korahites. To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth" as part of Psalm 87 fits better thematically and textually with the other Korahite psalms (to which Psalm 88 does not). Following the rest of Waltke's argument it makes sense that the performance instructions "To the leader: according to Mahalath Leannoth" should be part of Psalm 87 as well. See Waltke, "Superscripts, Postscripts, or Both," 591-2. Special thanks to Shawn Goodwin for his help

the Ezrahite as its author and is the only psalm to do so. As with Asaph, Heman the Ezrahite is identified as a leader of “Levitical singers (1 Chr 6:33; 15:16–17, 22; 16:41–42; 25:1–6) who prophesied with musical accompaniment by Levitical instrumentalists and by priests blowing their trumpets (2 Chr 5:12–13; 7:6; 29:25–28).”<sup>84</sup> He is also listed in 1 Kings 4:31 as one of the wise men who was not as wise as Solomon. Since Heman is one of these wise men, it is possibly not a coincidence that this psalm is identified as a maskil<sup>85</sup> because in some traditions a maskil is related to wisdom.<sup>86</sup> Based on the biblical evidence of Heman as a musician and worship leader, readers have no reason to doubt the claim in the superscript.<sup>87</sup>

As with most laments, determining the precise nature of the circumstances that led to the composition of this psalm is challenging. Clearly that the psalmist’s life is in danger (Ps 88:3-4); his friends and family have abandoned him (Ps 88:8); and he feels abandoned by God (Ps 88:6-18). Regardless of the nature of the affliction, this psalm gives voice to those times in the life of faith when God appears absent and believers find themselves on the brink of utter despair.<sup>88</sup>

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in translating the Hebrew for this section of the article.

<sup>84</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 619.

<sup>85</sup> See the discussion above in Psalm 44 regarding the term “A Maskil.”

<sup>86</sup> Brueggemann, “Psalms 4: Titles,” 619.

<sup>87</sup> Psalm 88 does not have a postscript.

<sup>88</sup> John Calvin and James Anderson, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (5 vols.; vol. 3; Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 407; Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, 813-5.

## Structure

Psalm 88 begins with a clear invocation: “O LORD, God of my salvation” (Ps 88:1a). This invocation expresses the psalmist’s understanding that he calls to a God who can deliver him from his suffering.<sup>89</sup> The language used in the invocation also expresses the psalmist’s confidence in God. The psalm then transitions into a plea to God for help by stating: “when, at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry” (Ps 88:1b-2).

This psalm is unique among laments in that it does not have a praise section. the invocation and plea to God for help, the psalmist spends the rest of the psalm his situation and wondering at God’s absence during his trials (Ps 88:3-18). Still this psalm shows evidence of a relationship between God and the psalmist, and the psalm reveals the psalmist’s desire to praise God. The writer asks, “Do the shades rise up to praise you? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?” (Ps 88:10b-12). The psalmist asks God if those who are dead praise Him, in effect calling on God to save him so that he can then go to the sanctuary and offer praise. Yet, if God does not respond, the psalmist will die and then will not be able to declare God’s praises in Abaddon (or grave).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 807.

<sup>90</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 810-11; C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 88-110* (6 vols.; vol. 4; Bellingham: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 5.

## Commentary

Psalm 88 is considered the darkest psalm of Biblical psalms. If the author were living in contemporary times, he would be considered in need of serious counseling and possibly be placed on a suicide watch. Yet, this psalm's power lies in its very existence. It proves that, no matter how low a person gets, how absent God seems to be, or how alone a person may feel, prayer remains possible God.<sup>91</sup> Although this psalm has no praise section and offers no real hope, the text shows the author clinging to God, in the very face of death. God may be absent, and here even treated as an enemy, but the author still feels that his only hope is in God.<sup>92</sup>

### God is the Answer to All Suffering

In a psalm that offers no hope, no praise, and treats God as an enemy, seeing God as the answer to all suffering is a challenge. Yet, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says regarding laments: "Even in the deepest hopelessness God alone remains the one addressed."<sup>93</sup> The psalmist cry: "O LORD, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry" (Ps 88:1-2) shows that it is to God that he pours out his lamentation. Faithful people believe that God hears their prayers, regardless of bleak situations.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Goldingay, *Psalms 42-89*, 658.

<sup>92</sup> Clifford, *Psalms 73-150*, 86-87.

<sup>93</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1970), 47.

<sup>94</sup> Tate, *Psalms 50-100*, 405.

## How to Go to God with Life's Suffering

This psalm teaches uniquely how to approach God with life's sufferings. Without recitation of God's deeds, this psalm includes no statement of praise or offered hope. It ends in bleakness and despair. This hardly seems a pattern for a contemporary song or prayer. Yet, this psalm gives contemporary Christians permission to feel as if praising God were not possible in their situations.<sup>95</sup> It gives the Christian permission to feel so low as to be able only to groan out complaints to God, in essence asking God, "Where are You?" and "When will You answer?" This psalm also suggests that the only hope the suffering have is in God and that the only recourse they have is persistent, relentless prayer to God.<sup>96</sup> Living in a society that appears to believe that money and success can solve any problem it is important for contemporary Christians to be reminded that going to God is truly to only answer to life's sufferings.

## Praising God in the Midst of Suffering

A psalm that offers God no praise, only questions may seem a counterintuitive model for praise to God in the midst of suffering. Yet, in a psalm that offers no praise, the writer expresses a desire to praise God (Ps 88:10-12). As noted in Psalms 44 and 83, the author suggests that lament can become praise.<sup>97</sup> Upon God's answer, the author believes

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<sup>95</sup> Tate, *Psalms 50-100*, 405.

<sup>96</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 807.

<sup>97</sup> Tate, *Psalms 50-100*, 405.



that he will be whole again, in the land of the living, and that his restoration will give him a reason to stand up in the congregation and praise God.<sup>98</sup>

### Standing in Solidarity with Those Who Are Suffering

Examining an individual psalm that expresses hopelessness, despair, and feelings of abandonment makes difficult determining how best to stand in solidarity with those who suffer. Any comfort offered may, like the “comfort” offered by Job’s companions, do more harm than good. Even, as noted above in Psalm 4, encouraging the sufferer to respond properly may be of little help depending on the circumstance.

However, one of the author’s complaints is that “You have caused friend and neighbor to shun me; my companions are in darkness” (Ps 88:18). He discovers that in his darkest moment his closest companions abandon him.<sup>99</sup> Standing with someone who suffers can be difficult, if not impossible, especially when the sufferer asks questions, like those articulated in this psalm, to which there are no easy answers.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes the only way to join in solidarity with suffering people is to stand with them before God and cry out “O LORD, God of my salvation, when, at night, I cry out in your presence, let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry” (Ps 88:1-2).

### Conclusion

Pain and suffering are a part of life. The laments offer hope that the faithful can approach God and that He will hear and respond. The laments offer ways to praise God

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<sup>98</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 814.

<sup>99</sup> Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 2 (42-89)*, 813.

<sup>100</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 662-3.

during suffering and ways to support those who suffer. The power of the laments lies in the evidence of a relationship between God and His people, a relationship that shows God's interest in what affects His people. The psalms also suggest that the only answer to suffering is not found through human means, but through continual reliance on God. The minister at my wedding said it this way: "What we have learned is that we're not strong enough, we're not smart enough, we're not rich enough, and we're not resourceful enough, to take care of those things on our own. But we know that God is. We know that Jesus never fails."<sup>101</sup>

These four laments give witness to the unique power of laments. Not only do they help Western Christians pray for their own suffering, even when this suffering may be more psychological in nature (as Psalm 88 shows). They also help Western Christians remember that they need to be concerned with the suffering of their sisters and brothers around the world, as the lament psalms use language that may not be applicable in a Western context, but is vital when praying for the global persecuted church. Practitioners of CCW would benefit from adding laments into their worship services, not only because they are used in the biblical worship of the Old and New Testaments, but also because they offer contemporary Christians valuable tools for dealing with their own suffering and the suffering in the world around them.

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<sup>101</sup> Robert C. Stallman, "Homily" (A Service of Christian Marriage. University Presbyterian Church, Seattle, WA, June 26, 2010).

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

### Summary and Introduction

*Chapter 1* claimed that biblical worship includes lament and that CCW lacks the lament genre. The chapter continued to assert that by using the psalms of lament as a resource CCW could incorporate lament into worship and thereby fill a void in believers' lives. By using laments CCW can show believers that God provides answers for all suffering, and by teaching them how to approach Him with life's suffering, to praise Him in the midst of suffering, and to stand in solidarity with those who suffer.

*Chapter 2* supports these claims by showing that biblical worship in the Old and New Testaments includes laments, even showing how Jesus's use of lament transformed the genre for the New Testament community. *Chapter 3* gave evidence that among the most popular songs in CCW, not one falls into the genre of lament. *Chapter 4* made the case for the importance of singing in the life of the believer to demonstrate why CCW should include laments. Finally, *Chapter 5* showed what the psalms of lament can teach contemporary believers. Building on the foundation laid in the first 5 chapters, this chapter will show how CCW can incorporate lament using the psalms of lament as guides to the creation of cultural artifacts<sup>102</sup>.

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<sup>102</sup> A cultural artifact is an item that is made by human hands (as opposed to natural processes) that relates to a specific culture. See: "cultural, adj. and n.", OED Online, n.p. [cited December 22 2014]; Online: <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.wheaton.edu/view/Entry/45742?redirectedFrom=cultural>; "artefact | artifact, n. and adj.", OED Online, n.p. [cited December 22 2014]; Online: <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.wheaton.edu/view/Entry/11133?redirectedFrom=artifact>.

## Cultural Artifacts

Through the creation of cultural artifacts I intend to show that the work I have done to this point is not just an academic exercise, but that this work can influence CCW writers to create laments for use. I will present two laments I have composed in the style of CCW music. I will conclude with suggestions for how the laments I have created can be employed in the worship services of CCW.

The first lament is an original lyric lament using the elements present in the psalms and then set to music. The second lament is a modification of a lament psalm. I have rewritten the psalm to give it CCW-style lyrics and set it to music. I will present the lyrics to each song first, explaining the decisions I have made and showing how the new laments are faithful to the lessons from *Chapter 2* and *Chapter 5*. I have set each to music, keeping in mind the lessons from *Chapter 4* on pairing text and music, using the style of music typically found in CCW,<sup>103</sup> explaining the musical settings, and providing lead sheets (commonly used in CCW) in appendices.

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<sup>103</sup> An argument could be made that Emo, Hard Rock, Metal, or even Goth music would all make excellent genres with which to express a lament; however, these are not typically used in CCW.

## Song Lyrics

### Original Lyric Lament

I will begin the analysis of my lament with the lyrics:

Verse 1:

Hear my cry, Jesus!  
A cry from my despair.  
Hear my cry, Jesus:  
I'm in my darkest hour

Chorus:

*For You are the One  
Who gives sight to the blind.  
For You are the One  
Who makes the lame to walk.  
For You are the One  
Who gives life to the dead.  
Lord please come and rescue me.*

Verse 2:

Hear my cry, Jesus;  
I do not feel You near.  
Hear my cry, Jesus;  
I'm hanging by a thread.

Bridge:

I feel alone, lost, and afraid.  
Life makes no sense at all.  
I've lost all hope; I've lost my way  
Lord please hear me.

The lament is simple in form, written in a verse-chorus-verse-chorus-bridge-chorus format. The lament begins with an invocation coupled with a plea to God for help by using the language “Hear my cry Jesus.” Directing the plea to Jesus makes the lament distinctly Christian. Deviating slightly from the lament psalm form, I chose not to name the specific, lamentable occasion. I want the lament to have universal application such that anyone, anywhere, anytime, regardless of circumstance might sing it. For this reason I do not mention enemies, nor include a confession of sin/assertion of innocence in my lament. The bridge names the lamenter’s emotions more specifically. Whatever the situation is, the circumstances occasion feelings of loneliness, isolation, and powerlessness. A person might find this lament applicable in a divorce, after loss of a job, or during financial instability, or even during a medical crisis. Following the pattern from the lament psalms I maintained the use of emotive language.

The chorus articulates a confidence in God’s response and a hymn or blessing. The lyrics recount the mighty deeds of Jesus during His earthly ministry, intending to give the singer confidence that Jesus has worked miracles in the past, to point out that He has the ability to work miracles in the present, and to praise Jesus for these miracles that show His omniscient power.

### Psalm Modification

I will begin the analysis of my Psalm modification by presenting the full text of Psalm 3 and then present my modification:

Psalm 3

A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom.

O LORD, how many are my foes!  
Many are rising against me;  
many are saying to me,  
“There is no help for you in God.” *Selah*

But you, O LORD, are a shield around me,  
my glory, and the one who lifts up my head.  
I cry aloud to the LORD,  
and he answers me from his holy hill. *Selah*

I lie down and sleep;  
I wake again, for the LORD sustains me.  
I am not afraid of ten thousands of people  
who have set themselves against me all around.

Rise up, O LORD!  
Deliver me, O my God!  
For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;  
you break the teeth of the wicked.

Deliverance belongs to the LORD;  
may your blessing be on your people! *Selah*

Psalm 3 (Modified)

Verse 1

O Lord Your enemies,  
Are rising up against me!  
They are telling me lies  
Saying: “You won’t help me God”

Chorus

*But You, O Lord, are my shield!*  
*You lift my head.*  
*From Your holy hill, You answer all my cries!*  
*I will sleep and wake in Your sustaining grace.*  
*For I am not afraid of those who oppose me.*

Verse 2

Rise up, O Lord, and save!  
Deliver me my God.  
O turn Your enemies,  
And deliver them from sin

I chose Psalm 3 for two particular reasons. The first is the connection to Psalm 4, examined in *Chapter 5*. Both are Davidic psalms, have similar content, and historically in the church have been paired together as a morning prayer (Psalm 3) and an evening prayer (Psalm 4).<sup>104</sup> The second is that Psalm 3 is a lament focused on conflict with enemies. I will show that CCW can employ language directed originally toward enemies.

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<sup>104</sup> VanGemeren, *Psalms*, 107; Goldingay, *Psalms 1-41*, 117; Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 1-26*, 34.



According to the superscript of Psalm 3 this lament is “A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom.” However, the text of the lament makes no specific reference to Absalom, and for this reason, anyone who feels surrounded by enemies can use this psalm. In a non-Western context enemies can often refer to real people who want to inflict real harm, or even kill. This threat of violence could be for ethnic, religious, or political reasons. People under threat can effectively use this psalm as a prayer to God to deliver them from their enemies.

In a Western context, one’s enemies are not always so clear. However, in Western contexts people can still experience enemies: the playground bully, the office bully, the cyber bully, someone who spreads malicious gossip, someone who persecutes Christians.<sup>105</sup>

When adapting this psalm I maintained the use of the term “enemies” to ensure that this song could be sung by as wide a group of people as possible. At times some people might find defining their enemies difficult, but in those cases these people can sing this song as a way to stand in solidarity with those who are experiencing enemies in a very real sense. I also modified the first line of the lament, making the enemies God’s enemies and not just those of the singers. Moreover, as noted in *Chapter 2* those who oppose God’s people are by extension God’s enemies.

In an effort to stay in line with the original psalm I maintained the first person language in my adaptation, using terms such as “I,” “my,” and “me.” However, if the

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<sup>105</sup> While what Christians in the West experience is not as extreme as the persecution experienced by those in non-Western contexts, Christians in the West still experience some persecution. This can include such cases as not being hired for a job because you are a Christian, as well as those who want to silence any voice the Church has in the public square, or being shamed in school because someone takes a stand for sexual purity.

circumstances warranted I modified the lyrics in such a way so as to easily turn this into a corporate lament by switching out with plural pronouns such as “our,” “we,” and “us.”

The first major modification I made when adapting this psalm was that I took the second and third stanzas of the psalm that articulate the psalm’s confidence in God’s response and blessing sections, simplified them, and made them the chorus of my modified lament. The second major modification I made was to adjust the imprecatory nature of the fourth stanza of the psalm to incorporate the way that Christ modified the lament in the New Testament. Rather than cursing enemies, in my modification the singer prays that enemies will turn away from their sin to God.

The final two lines of the psalm I left off of my adaptation. Thematically in the original context of the psalm those lines work as a fitting close, acting as a way to balance the enemies’ attacks in the first stanza with a final word on God’s deliverance and blessing. But modifying the psalm into a verse-chorus-verse-chorus format changed how the final two lines of the original fit thematically, necessitating their removal from the adaptation.

### **Musical Adaptations**

#### Original Lyric Lament<sup>106</sup>

For this lament I chose the key of E natural minor. E natural minor does not have the raised seventh tone of the scale, which prevents this song from having a major fifth chord. Many contemporary pop composers will use a harmonic minor

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<sup>106</sup> See *Appendix 2* for the lead sheet to this lament.

scale which raises the seventh tone of the scale allowing for the song to have a major fifth chord. By removing the major fifth chord and using a minor fifth chord, I create a sonic pattern that is somewhat unfamiliar to contemporary ears, thus the very scale used indicates that something is not right. I also chose to use a minor key as this key is often associated more with sad or contemplative music.

I begin the song on the minor fifth chord to create a sense of unease. Most songs begin on the tonic or first chord in the key thus allowing the singer (and listener) to ground themselves in the key. Starting on the minor fifth destabilizes singers and listeners by not allowing them to ground themselves in the key. Musically, then, I attempt here to express the sense that a person lamenting is not grounded, but rather feels destabilized in life. When the singer gets to the word “Jesus” I switch to using major chords, almost harmonically invoking the relative major key of G, and move the melodic line up rather than down. This musical choice creates a sense of hope simply in the name “Jesus.” Conversely, on the words “despair,” “hour,” “near,” and “thread” I moved the melodic line down to convey the sense of being brought down low by the lamentable situation.

Moving into the chorus I move into the relative major key of G; however, I never resolve to a G-chord. I hover around the G-chord to evoke a sense of hope in Jesus and to lead toward praise for His acts, but I never resolve because the difficult circumstance remains unresolved, and the hope and praise occur in the midst of lament. When I finally do resolve the melodic structure in the chorus I resolve to an E-minor chord, bringing the chorus back to the minor key of the lament.

In the bridge I use mostly minor chords to express the painful emotions and only move into major chords with the last line as a musical expression of hope in Jesus that leads back into the chorus.

#### Psalm Modification<sup>107</sup>

For this song I chose D natural minor for the same reasons as I chose E natural minor for my original lament. For the lament sections, which encompass verses one and two, I chose to keep the range limited and stayed within four notes: D, E, F, and G. This musically restricted movement mirrors the restrictions that enemies who surround a person can cause. To emphasize this sense, I used two chords for most of the verse and only expanded my chord usage as part of the buildup leading to the chorus. Also the only place in the verses I go outside these four notes is on the last note: I go up to an A as the final move to build to the chorus. This rising pitch evokes a sense of hope.

The chorus has a much wider range, more movement, and more rhythmic variation, in a musical expression of the hope and freedom people have when they truly rest and trust in God's grace. As with the previous song I used mostly minor chords in the verses to evoke a sense of despair and contemplation while using mostly major chords in the chorus to create the sense of hopefulness that trusting in God brings.

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<sup>107</sup> See *Appendix 3* for the lead sheet to this lament.

## **Conclusion**

Lamenting, like any other worship practice, is a learned skill. While crying out in pain is something natural, lamenting before God in a biblical manner requires teaching. Prior to using either of my laments, or any other lament in a worship service, the service, the worship leaders and congregants need introductory teaching on lament and its functions. Simply dropping a lament in the middle of a CCW service without preparation might cause more confusion than worship.

A good place to introduce and use a lament in the worship service is during a special prayer time. Many churches that employ CCW music will have as part of worship a time where people are invited forward to receive prayer from pastors and elders as is encouraged in James 5:14. This would be a very appropriate time for the congregation to sing a lament. Such a practice may offer consolation to those who lament and give words for others to pray as they stand in solidarity with those who cry out to God in despair.

Some CCW churches will also gather for an evening prayer service. These prayer services often involve people sharing “joys and concerns” with the congregation. Many CCW songs work to sing in celebration when someone shares a “joy” but “concerns” will often only receive a short prayer. Laments find natural places here as part of the response to someone sharing a “concern.”

Another place, outside of corporate worship, to introduce and use lament is during a small group prayer time. Many churches build community through small group Bible studies, which often involve the participants praying for one another. A lament can find an appropriate home in such a meeting when one or more of the small group members experiences a time of pain.

Despite the absence of lament in the repertoire of CCW music, these moments and others like them suggest that worship leaders can introduce and use laments within the context of CCW services. Moreover, as shown in this paper, biblical worship includes laments, and they bear witness to a special relationship between God and His people. Within the context of this relationship, God hears and responds to the cries of His people, and His people offer their laments to that very God who has the power to respond. Far from being a mere cathartic release, laments offer suffering people the opportunity to go to God with their cries, to worship Him in the midst of their suffering, and to pray for others who are suffering. Practitioners and participants in CCW will thus benefit by working lament into the fabric of their worship services.

## APPENDIX 1: CCLI TOP 25 LIST 2003 - 2013

Songs are listed in alphabetical order of composer's last name and using the following format:

Composer(s). *Song Title*. Copyright Holder #1 (Copyright Administrator), Copyright Holder #2 (Copyright Administrator), CCLI Song #, Year of Copyright.

This format is an attempt to stay within the citation formatting rules according to *The SBL Style Guide*, but also taking into account the unique nature of CCW's music since many songs are not published in traditional formats.

Baloche, Paul. *Open The Eyes Of My Heart*. Integrity's Hosanna! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), CCLI Song # 2298355, 1997.

Barnett, Marie. *Breathe*. Mercy / Vineyard Publishing (Admin. by Vineyard Music USA), CCLI Song # 1874117, 1995.

Brown, Brenton. *Lord Reign In Me*. Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) (Admin. by Vineyard Music UK), CCLI Song # 2490706, 1998.

Brown, Brenton and Paul Baloche. *Hosanna (Praise Is Rising)*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Integrity's Hosanna! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), CCLI Song # 4662491, 2005 and 2006.

Brown, Brenton and Brian Doerksen. *Hallelujah*. Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) (Admin. by Vineyard Music UK), CCLI Song # 3091812, 2000.

Brown, Brenton and Ken Riley. *Everlasting God*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4556538, 2005.

Byrd, Marc and Steve Hindalong. *God Of Wonders*. Never Say Never Songs (Admin. by Brentwood-Benson Music Publishing, Inc.), New Spring (Admin. by Brentwood-

Benson Music Publishing, Inc.), Meaux Mercy (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Storm Boy Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3118757, 2000.

Cantelon, Ben and Tim Hughes. *Happy Day*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4847027, 2006.

Carpenter, Kelly. *Draw Me Close*. Mercy / Vineyard Publishing (Admin. by Vineyard Music USA), CCLI Song # 1459484, 1994.

Doerksen, Brian. *Come Now Is The Time To Worship*. Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire) (Admin. by Vineyard Music UK), CCLI Song # 2430948, 1998.

Espinosa, Eddie. *Change My Heart Oh God*. Mercy / Vineyard Publishing (Admin. by Vineyard Music USA), CCLI Song # 1565, 1982.

Evans, Darrell. *Trading My Sorrows*. Integrity's Hosanna! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 2574653, 1998.

Fee, Steve and Vicky Beeching. *Glory To God Forever*. Sixsteps Songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Worship Together Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 5384338, 2009.

Fielding, Ben and Reuben Morgan. *Mighty To Save*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4591782, 2006.

Foote, Billy J. *You Are My King (Amazing Love)*. worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 2456623, 1996.

Founds, Rick. *Lord I Lift Your Name On High*. 1989 Maranatha Praise, Inc. (Admin. by Maranatha! Music), CCLI Song # 117947, 1989.



Getty, Keith and Stuart Townend. *In Christ Alone*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3350395, 2001.

Hine, Stuart Wesley Keene. *How Great Thou Art*. Stuart K. Hine Trust ((Administration: USA All rights by EMI CMG, except print rights for USA, North, Central and South America administered by Hope Publishing. All other non USA Americas rights by the Stuart Hine Trust. Rest of World – Integritymusic.com.)), CCLI Song # 14181, 1949 and 1953.

Houghton, Israel and Michael Gungor. *Friend Of God*. Integrity's Praise! Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), Sound Of The New Breed (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), Vertical Worship Songs (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing (IMI)), CCLI Song # 3991651, 2003.

Houston, Joel. *From The Inside Out*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4705176, 2005.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Stand*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 4705248, 2005.

Hughes, Tim. *Beautiful One*. 2002 Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3915912, 2002.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Here I Am To Worship*. Thankyou Music (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), CCLI Song # 3266032, 2000.

Ingram, Jason and Reuben Morgan. *Forever Reign*. Hillsong Music Publishing (Admin. by EMI Christian Music Publishing), Sony/ATV Timber Publishing (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC), West Main Music (Admin. by Sony/ATV Sounds LLC),

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APPENDIX 2: HEAR MY CRY, JESUS

# Hear My Cry, Jesus

## A Lament

Joshua C. Strickler

♩ = 75

Bm7 Em D/F# G2 Am Em

Hear my cry, Je - sus! A cry from my de -  
 Hear my cry, Je - sus; I do not feel You

5 Dsus D Bm7 Em D/F# G2

spa - ir. Hear my cry, Je - sus: I'm  
 ne - ar. Hear my cry, Je - sus; I'm

9 Am7 Em7 Dsus D Dsus 3 C Dsus D Em

in my dar - kest ho - ur: For You are the one Who gives sight to the blind. For  
 hang - ing by a thre - ad:

13 Dsus 3 C Dsus D Em Dsus 3 C Dsus D Em

You are the One Who makes the lame to walk. For You are the one Who gives life to the dead.

17 1. Am7 Bm7 Em 2. Am7 Bm7 Em

Lord please come and res - cue me. Lord please come and res - cue me.

21 Am Bm Am Em Dsus D

I feel al-one, lost, and af - raid. Life makes no sense at all. I've

25 Am Bm7 Am Bm7 Em D <sup>3.</sup>C **Go To Measure 11**

lost all hope; I've lost my way Lord please hear me. For

29 4. Am7 Bm7 Em

Lord please come and res - cue me.

APPENDIX 3: PSALM 3

# Psalm 3

Joshua C. Strickler

$\text{♩} = 60$   
Dm Am7 Dm Am7 Dm Am7

O Lord Your e - ne-mies, are ris - ing up a - gainst me! They are tel - ling me lies say - ing

5 Bb C Dm C/E F Bb2 C F

"You won't help me God:" But You O Lord are my shield! You lift my head. From Your

9 Bb2 C F Bb2 C F Dm

ho - ly hill You an - swer all my cries! I will sleep and wake in your su - stain - ing grace.

13 Bb C F2 Dm Am7

For I am not a - fraid of those who op - pose - me. Rise up O Lord and save de -

17 Dm Am7 Dm Am7 Bb C Dm C/E F

liv - er me my God O turn Your en - em - ies, and de - liv - er them from sin. But You O

21 Bb2 C F Bb2 C F

Lord are my shield! You lift my head. From Your ho - ly hill You an - swer all my cries! I will

25 Bb2 C F Dm Bb C F2

sleep and wake in your su - stain - ing grace. For I am not a - fraid of those who op - pose - me.



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