

## **Spotted with a Story**

Sandra Glahn

James 4:13-14 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.

### The 7 Times I Said "I'll Never..." and How I Had to Eat My Words

If you are going to be used by God, He will take you through a multitude of experiences that are not meant for you at all. They are meant to make you useful in His hands, and to enable you to understand what transpires in other souls so that you will never be surprised at what you come across. —Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*

I had been taught not to ask questions of God, but look at Psalm 22... WHY?

As a new Christian, I read guides that told me to pray using the acrostic "ACTS": Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. And years later when my husband and I experienced seven pregnancy losses and three failed adoptions, I found myself continually drawn to the psalms. New phrases such "How long, O Lord? (6:3) and "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (22:1) filled my prayers. And while echoing these spiritual gripes, I discovered to my surprise that the ACTS formula had left out the most common form of psalm in The Bible—the lament.

#### LAMENT:

- Short for lamentation
- Moan, wail, dirge
- Expression of suffering, complaint

We find the psalms of lament in 6, 13, 22, 27, 44, 69, 70, 74, 102, and 142.

In these prayers of complaint I found some frequently recurring elements:

- (1) an introductory appeal
- (2) a description of what's wrong (the lament itself) and
- (3) a formal request.

Sometimes I'd also see evidence that the psalmist received

- (4) an oracle from God in response.

And finally, following such an oracle, the lament usually ended in

- (5) an expression of confidence or praise.

Consider Psalm 12, a lament from a victim of slander:

“Help, Yahweh, for the devout one has ceased” (v. 1). (Introductory appeal)

“For the faithful have vanished from the face of the land. The unholy speak nothingness, each one with his neighbor, From a divided heart they speak flattery (vv. 1–2). (What's wrong)

Sometimes at this point in a lament, we read that curses are called down on enemies. This pre-dates the New Testament ethic in which both Jesus and Paul exhort believers to bless their enemies rather than cursing them. Nevertheless, today we pray for God to bless our enemies within the long-term context of looking toward the day when God will right all wrongs (1 Thess. 1:6–10).

The psalmist continues: “May Yahweh cut off all flattering lips/And the tongue speaking exaggerations—Which say, “We’ll talk big; We can say whatever we want. Who is master over us?” (v. 3–4). (The formal request)

As for the oracle from God, in the present age we don’t generally expect to receive such revelation or audible words from God. But the psalmist might have expected to hear from God through a prophet, a dream, or the Urim and Thummim, articles placed in the high priest’s breastplate used to discern God’s will in decision making.

In this psalm we read God’s response: “Because of the violence done to the afflicted, Because of the groaning of the oppressed, Now I will arise,” says Yahweh. ‘I will provide safety for the one who gasps for it” (v. 5) (God’s response)

Next come expressions of praise. Consider the final expression of confidence in Psalm 12: “Yahweh’s words are words of purity—silver refined in a furnace of earth, purified completely. You, Yahweh, You will preserve the victims. You will protect him from this generation continuously, for all around criminals walk to and fro while people exalt worthlessness.”

Once I learned to pray my own laments, I learned to be honest about the trauma and move from there to trust--though not always that same afternoon.

When I shared with sixth-graders how they could do the same, they created a group lament:

“O Lord, help me because I can’t seem to get just one minute of total peace and quiet. My brother interrupts me constantly. My big sister thinks she’s the boss of me. My little sister won’t let me talk without butting in, and when I have a friend over, she won’t stop pestering us. She whines. She nags. She pulls my ponytail. Help the bruise on my shin to heal (the one my brother put there). Help my brother and sister to grow up fast so they’ll leave me alone. Thank you that I can hope in You!”

Before a friend directed me to the psalms of lament, I had thought it wrong to express displeasure about my circumstances. But afterward, with new courage to express the pain I felt, I found greater respect for the Lord's greatness, amazed that He not only allows us to talk this way to Him, but has even provided examples of how.

Sixth Graders:

O Lord, help me because I can't seem to get just one minute of total peace and quiet. My brother interrupts me constantly. My big sister thinks she's the boss of me. My little sister won't let me talk without butting in, and when I have a friend over, she won't stop pestering us. She whines. She nags. She pulls my pony tail. Help the bruise on my shin to heal (the one my brother put there). Help my siblings to grow up fast so they'll leave me alone. Thank you that I can hope in You.

Infertility Patient

O Lord, not again. How could you allow this again? Once more the doctor has said our baby's gone, and I feel pain deeper than my own soul. Our friends say, "Maybe you can have another," but why would you let me conceive this one if it wasn't going to live? How long must we keep going through this endless cycle of hope and despair? It feels so cruel. I hate it and I don't understand it, but I have nowhere to go but You. Please help me to trust You!

What I learned from laments...

- It's okay to tell God we feel abandoned.
- He gives us a guide for complaining.
- Jesus prayed with loud crying and tears (Heb. 5:7).
- We have a high priest who can sympathize.
- Jesus was abandoned so that we'd never have to be.

Took the kitten to the vet: Cat theology

God's ways: As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. Isaiah 55:9

God's love: For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him. Psalm 103:11

BOILS down to two questions:

- Is God good?
- Will I trust Him?

Preach the gospel to myself daily: Romans 8:32.

**He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, will He not also give us all things with Him?**