

Legacy Leadership Collective / Spiritual Disciplines / *Lamenting*

No one enters a relationship hoping you will be betrayed. One helpful way I have heard to define relational betrayal...

*"If I had to choose the form of betrayal... that was the most dangerous in terms of corroding the trust connection, I would say disengagement. When the people we love or with whom we have a deep connection stop caring, stop paying attention, stop investing, and stop fighting for the relationship, trust begins to slip away and hurt starts seeping in. Disengagement triggers shame and our greatest fears—the fears of being abandoned unworthy, and unlovable. What can make this covert betrayal so much more dangerous than something like a lie or an affair is that we can't point to the source of our pain—there's no event, no obvious evidence of brokenness. It can feel crazy-making."*¹

- Chip Dodd in his book *The Voice of the Heart* says that hurt is the most shameful emotion we can feel. When we admit hurt, we admit *someone got to us*.
- Unacknowledged hurt leads to cynicism, resentment, and bitterness. Only acknowledged hurt can be healed.
- When we fail to acknowledge our hurts, we become cynics and the cynic is never wrong and never surprised.
 - *"Nothing good can come of this." "This is the way it will always be." "I know how this will end."*
- *"Culture says, 'Buck up. Get a grip. Control your emotions. Don't feel. Don't talk. Stuff the pain. Pretend or medicate if you have to - but get over it and move on.' Christian culture can say, 'If you're full of faith, you won't get hurt, confused or discouraged. You won't feel hopeless or have a life filled with pain and loss.' This is a myth and doesn't do justice to our lives, to Scripture or to the life of Jesus."*²
 - When we are hurt, instead of stuffing it, God invites us to acknowledge it by expressing that hurt to him through a specific form of prayer called *lament*.
- Betrayal and hurt are experienced when there is a gap between our hope and our reality. (*The diagrams that follow are based on material from P. Miller, A Praying Life.*)³

¹ Brene Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (Avery, 2015) pages 51-52

² Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook; Practices that Transform Us* (IVP Books, 2005) page 272

³ Paul Miller's Book *A Praying Life* is the greatest book of prayer I have ever read and belongs on every Christians shelf.

HOPE

Betrayal - Hurt - Hurts to Hope

REALITY

When we feel that betrayal and hurt, when it hurts to hope, we find ways to protect ourselves by not engaging with that hope. We usually follow a three-step process.

- STEP 1: Denial ⇒ Unrealistic Hope. There is no look at reality.
 - STEP 2: Determination ⇒ Try to force reality into hope.
 - STEP 3: Despair ⇒ No Hope. We only see reality
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- The move from determination to despair usually comes as we start to believe our situation isn't going to change. And, if we stay in despair long enough, we eventually find something to distract us from reality—busy ourselves with a new task or project, look for some kind of physical stimulation or numbing, or find a way to change our environment (new house, new job, new city, etc.).
 - When we experience the gap between hope and reality, *it's God's invitation to prayer*. It's God's invitation to cry out to him in lament.
 - **Lament neither gives up on hope nor does it ignore reality.** *It recognizes where we are and where we need to be and cries out for God to narrow that gap.*
 - In Rom. 4:18, Paul uses an unusual phrase to describe Abraham's lament: *"In hope he believed against hope."* Abraham stakes his life on hope, but never takes his eyes off reality. This is faith expressed through lament.
 - Lament expresses faith in God and expects God to act. It recognizes God should get the glory if the situation changes.
 - Refusing to lament attempts to short-circuit God and attempts to limit his ability to act. It allows you to claim credit if the situation ever changes.

How to Write a Lament

The Psalmists typically follow a basic pattern when they write their laments. (See Tremper Longman, *How to Read the Psalms* for more detail.)

- **Direct Address** | Address God directly, expressing dependence on him. You have nowhere else to turn; to turn anywhere else is blasphemous idolatry.

- **Lament / Cry for Help** | Express your specific complaint to God.
- **Confession of Sin / Assertion of Innocence** | Sometimes you suffer because of something you've done. Other times you suffer because of something done to you. And other times it's a combination of both.
 - Confessing your sin is a sign of humility; taking responsibility for another's sin is refusal to admit hurt and can be a sign of arrogance.
- **Imprecation** | Imprecation leaves your desires for justice, vengeance, and vindication with God, asking him to act.
 - This side of the cross, imprecation should include a longing for repentance, meaning the punishment for the sin falls fully on the shoulders of Christ.
 - It can also include a longing for those in authority (EX: government) to execute justice.
- **Confidence in God's Response** | The expression of confidence in God often starts with, "But you..." This is a theologically full statement, often including applicable attributes of God.
- **Praise** | Most laments end with a statement of praise to God.

Writing Your Lament

Reread Brené Brown's explanation of betrayal (at top of first page).

- Think of a specific, recent time you've been betrayed like this.
- Who betrayed you?
- When did they betray you?
- How did they betray you?
- Take 30 minutes to write a lament about that recent betrayal.

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