**Learning to Lament**

**Pastor Gary Post – October 25, 2020**

1. Life is Difficult
2. “Life is difficult.” M. Scott Peck in The Road Less Traveled
3. Tim Keller in Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering

“The implicit but strong cultural assumption of young adults is that God owes all but the most villainous people a comfortable life. This premise, however, inevitably leads to bitter disillusionment. Life is nasty, hard, brutish, and always feels too short. The presumption of spiritual entitlement dooms its bearers to a life of confusion when things in life inevitably go wrong.”

1. Life includes both joy and sorrow, both happiness and pain.
2. Jesus told us that life would not be easy, but there is hope in Him.

“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” John 16:33 (NIV)

1. From Pain to Promise: Learning to Lament
2. “You do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope.” I Thes. 4:13 (NIV)
3. We LAMENT—we pour out our hearts in sorrow to God in prayer for him to rescue and heal
4. Lament defined:

“Lament can be defined as a loud cry, a howl, or a passionate expression of grief. However, in the Bible lament is more than sorrow or talking about sadness. It is more than walking through the stages of grief. Lament is a prayer in pain that leads to trust….Lament typically asks at least two questions: (1) “Where are you, God?” and (2) “If you love me, why is this happening?” Mark Vroegop, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy

1. Example of a lament: Psalm 142(A Psalm of David)

1 I cry aloud to the Lord; I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy. 2 I pour out before him my complaint; before him I tell my trouble. 3 When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who watch over my way. In the path where I walk people have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look and see, there is no one at my right hand; no one is concerned for me. I have no refuge; no one cares for my life. 5 I cry to you, Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” 6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; rescue me from those who pursue me, for they are too strong for me. 7 Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.”

1. Four elements of a lament:
2. **Turning to God:** We choose to talk to God about it.
3. **Bringing our complaint:** Pain, sorrow, frustrations, questions.
4. **Asking boldly for help:** Ask in faith for God to intervene.
5. **Choosing to trust:** Trust in who God is and what he has done.
6. Purpose of a lament

“Lament is how Christians grieve. It is how to help hurting people. Lament is how we learn important truths about God and our world. My personal and pastoral experience has convinced me that biblical lament is not only a gift but also a neglected dimension of the Christian life for many twenty-first-century Christians.” Mark Vroegop, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy

1. **Turning to God**: We choose to talk to God about what is happening.
2. Obstacles to choosing to turn to God
3. Depression turns us inward, isolates us from God, others

“We are not meant to sit in our pain alone. Isolation is one of the most harmful things we can do to ourselves. It keeps us in the very place we want to get out of. Unspoken laments can lead to basement thinking, which will only increase our pain. But speaking of our pain honestly, inside a safe community, is a very good way to start walking into healing. Opening ourselves to others for their care and comfort can help us get unstuck.” Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. We stuff our pain and rely on our own self-sufficiency.

“My laments became an incubator for intimacy with God as I got to know Him as my ever-loving mother and father. Sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom to realize our dependence on God is spiritual strength; not weakness. Sometimes it takes a desperate “don’t forget me, God!” to see with new eyes that He is powerfully present with us, no matter what the circumstance.” Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. Our feelings tell us the lie that God is distant or uninterested.

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and he saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

1. We allow our pain to turn us against God in anger, bitterness.

“If the enemy can get us to feel neglected by God, there’s no way we’ll feel safe enough to bring our laments to Him. That’s the heart of his strategy…..When we believe God has forgotten us, the last thing we want to do is go to Him in prayer. And so, our stuffed-down laments turn into lies about His character. Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. We turn to God (or not) based on who we believe him to be.
2. Many misunderstand who God is and how he sees us.
3. Requires seeing God as our loving Heavenly Father

“I had to bathe myself in Scripture and get to know God again. I had to spend time with Him and in His Word to remind myself of His true character, not the warped reflection I was seeing of Him through the lens of my circumstances. Here is what I found: God is “close to the brokenhearted” (Psalm 34:18), and “his salvation is near those who fear him” (Psalm 85:9). God is “near to all who call on him. .. in truth” (Psalm 145:18). Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. **Bringing our complaint**: Pain, sorrow, frustrations and questions.
2. Complaining about circumstances vs. criticizing God’s character.
3. God listens with empathy and understands our pain.

“If I would have taken my hurt to God, I would have found that God’s love for us is unwavering. This is why we can lament to Him freely. He doesn’t compare our pain to another’s; He doesn’t minimize it; He doesn’t spiritualize it away. We can wrestle deeply with the character and nature of God, because He is longing to give us a deeper revelation of Him all the time.” Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. **Asking boldly for help**: Ask for God to intervene as an act of faith.
2. Easy to get stuck at “complaint” and fail to ask for what we need.

“You do not have because you do not ask God.” James 4:2b (NIV)

1. David fought discouragement, disorientation that comes with pain
2. David’s faith (“You watch over my way”) moved him to ask boldly.

“Truly it is well for us to know that God knows what we do not know. We lose our heads, but God never closes his eyes: our judgments lose their balance, but the eternal mind is always clear.” Charles Spurgeon - Treasury of David

1. David’s prison was a cave; ours may be despair, loneliness, fear.

“Loss can feel like a wasteland. It’s devastating. But lament helps us to rehearse biblical truth so hope will return. Despite what you see, despite what you feel, despite what you think, lament can be a supply of grace as you affirm that God’s mercies are new every day. As you rehearse what is true, hope can rise. I promise. God promises too.” Mark Vroegop, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy

1. Our personal brokenness requires that others intercede for us.

“You might think that praying with someone in pain is a small and insignificant thing, but it’s not. You’ll likely be able to ask God for help with a different level of faith than your hurting friend can muster. The boldness of your request and the confidence in your approach to the throne of grace can be a great help. You can pray with a firm belief that creates stronger faith in others. If you don’t know what to pray, consider appealing to God through the words of a lament like Psalm 13 or 22. As you echo the boldness of the psalm, it can beget boldness in a hurting friend.” Mark Vroegop, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy

1. Stephen Ministry: The ministry of presence.
2. **Choosing to trust**: We affirm our trust in who God is, what he has promised, and what he has done in our lives in the past.
3. David affirmed God’s power to save and his goodness.
4. To affirm our trust in God, we have to know his character

“Therefore, lament is rooted in what we believe. It is a prayer loaded with theology. Christians affirm that the world is broken, God is powerful, and he will be faithful. Therefore, lament stands in the gap between pain and promise. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian.” Mark Vroegop, Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy

1. We have to be able to trust God in the waiting for his timing.

Even as we cry, “How long, Lord?” we can trust the process that in the waiting, we are being strengthened, sanctified, and transformed. Even in the waiting, God is powerfully present, and that can be our source of deep, unshakable joy. Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

1. To trust God, we have to remember his promises to us.

“In the same way, calling to mind God’s promises is an act of faith in the fact that He will do what He says He will do. If we feel like God has forgotten us, then we have a great opportunity to dive into Scripture and refresh our memory of who He is and what He promises to those who follow Him.” Esther Fleece, No More Faking Fine

‘Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’ Isaiah 41:10 (NASB)

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.” Psalm 34:18

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Phil. 4:6-7

1. Journey from Lament to Joy – Joni Eareckson Tada

“He has a plan and purpose for my time on earth. He is the master artist or sculptor, and He is the one who chooses the tools He will use to perfect His workmanship. What of suffering, then? What of Illness? What of disability? Am I to tell Him which tools He can use and which tools He can’t use in the lifelong task of perfecting me and molding me into the beautiful image of Jesus? Do I really know better than Him, so that I can state without equivocation that it’s always His will to heal me of every physical affliction? I am His poem, do I have the right to say, “No, Lord. You need to trim line number two and brighten up lines three and five. They’re just a little bit dark.” Do I, the poem, the thing being written, know more than the poet?” “Friend, you may be going through a time of wounding right now and, if you are, take heart, because your heart is being set to God’s, and there is no saving work apart from pain. Your life will produce so much more fruit from it all—fruit that you probably won’t even see or know about. Every day of our short lives—even every hour—has eternal consequences for good or ill. Eternity—and the way we’ll live in it—is somehow being shaped by our moment-by-moment responses to the life we have before us to live right now.” Joni Eareckson Tada, A Place of Healing