



Bitter Herbs

Evil and when God becomes my enemy
A Study of Four Complaint Psalms

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Introduction

- Images of prayer in our culture
- Images of prayer in the Scriptures
- A brief definition of prayer

**“Prayer is a conversation
God starts in His Word.”**

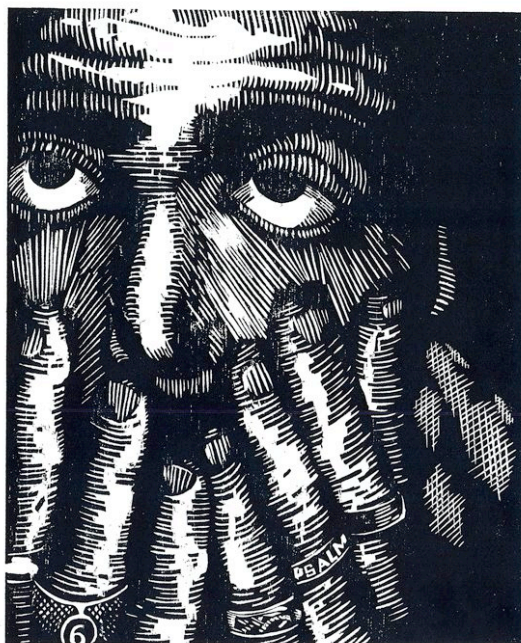
- Understanding evil
- Understanding God’s wrath and mercy

“Where do you find more miserable, more wretched, more depressing words than in the Psalms of lamentation? There you see into the heart of all the saints as into death, even as into hell. How sad and dark it is there in every wretched corner of the wrath of God.” -Luther (Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, p. 46)

- The four topics in these Psalms:

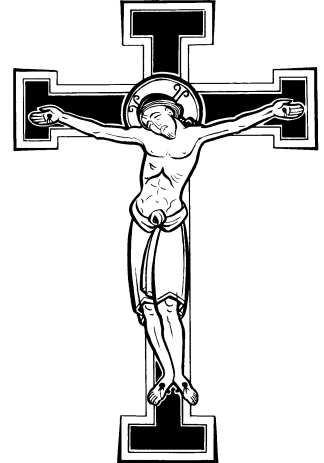
1. Sin
2. Disaster/Defeat
3. Abandonment
4. Death

**“If this is a conversation,
why isn’t God listening?”**



Session One: Psalm Six (NKJV)¹

Psa. 6:0 To the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. On an eight-stringed harp. A Psalm of David.



- Psa. 6:1 O LORD, do not rebuke me in Your anger,
Nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure.
- 2 Have mercy on me, O LORD, for I am weak;
O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
- 3 My soul also is greatly troubled;
But You, O LORD—how long?
- 4 Return, O LORD, deliver me!
Oh, save me for Your mercies' sake!
- 5 For in death there is no remembrance of You;
In the grave who will give You thanks?
- 6 I am weary with my groaning;
All night I make my bed swim;
I drench my couch with my tears.
- 7 My eye wastes away because of grief;
It grows old because of all my enemies.
- 8 Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity;
For the LORD has heard the voice of my weeping.
- 9 The LORD has heard my supplication;
The LORD will receive my prayer.
- 10 Let all my enemies be ashamed and greatly troubled;
Let them turn back and be ashamed suddenly.

Outline of Psalm²

- 1-3 a prayer for mercy
4-5 life and death
6-7 mourning
8-10 the Lord hears

Other Scriptures to consider

Romans 1:18ff.

Why is the Psalmist so afraid of being separated from God when He is so wrathful?

¹ Image from http://1.bp.blogspot.com/_9KaZGuPftS4/SlyvK_aPG-I/AAAAAAAAAEs/AQcl8as2uBk/s1600-h/Psalm6ImageOnly.jpg

² The Lutheran Study Bible, p. 850

Session Two: Psalm Forty-Four

Psa. 44:0 To the Chief Musician. A Contemplation of the sons of Korah.

Psa. 44:1 We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our fathers have told us,
The deeds You did in their days,
In days of old:
2 You drove out the nations with Your hand,
But them You planted;
You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.
3 For they did not gain possession of the land by their own sword,
Nor did their own arm save them;
But it was Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your countenance,
Because You favored them.
4 You are my King, O God;
Command victories for Jacob.
5 Through You we will push down our enemies;
Through Your name we will trample those who rise up against us.
6 For I will not trust in my bow,
Nor shall my sword save me.
7 But You have saved us from our enemies,
And have put to shame those who hated us.
8 In God we boast all day long,
And praise Your name forever. *Selah*
9 But You have cast us off and put us to shame,
And You do not go out with our armies.
10 You make us turn back from the enemy,
And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.
11 You have given us up like sheep intended for food,
And have scattered us among the nations.
12 You sell Your people for next to nothing,
And are not enriched by selling them.
13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and a derision to those all around us.
14 You make us a byword among the nations,
A shaking of the head among the peoples.
15 My dishonor is continually before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,
16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles,
Because of the enemy and the avenger.
17 All this has come upon us;
But we have not forgotten You,
Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.

18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our steps departed from Your way;
19 But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals,
And covered us with the shadow of death.
20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,
21 Would not God search this out?
For He knows the secrets of the heart.
22 Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

23 Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?
Arise! Do not cast us off forever.
24 Why do You hide Your face,
And forget our affliction and our oppression?
25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
Our body clings to the ground.
26 Arise for our help,
And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.



Outline of Psalm³

1-8 God has helped in the past
9-16 Where is God now?
17-22 God's people declare their innocence
23-26 Bold prayer for relief

Other Scriptures to consider

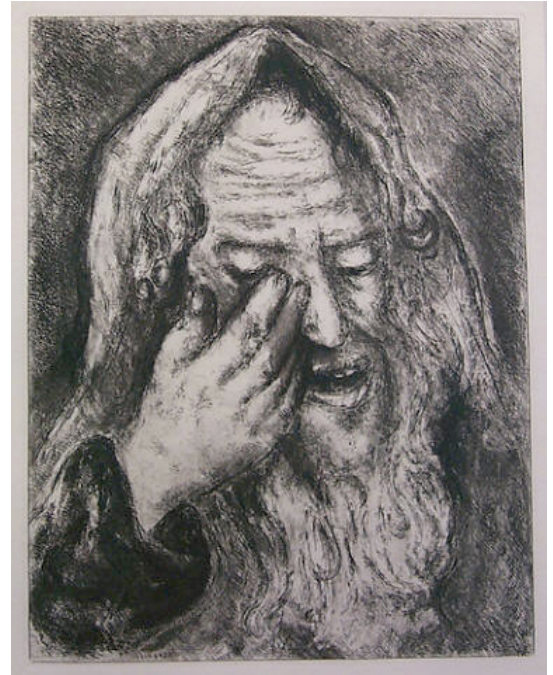
**“To live in a fully predictable world is not to be a man.” -
C.S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcom*, p. 12**

³ *The Lutheran Study Bible*, p. 888.

Session Three: Psalm Eighty-Eight (NKJV)

Psa. 88:0 A Song. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. To the Chief Musician. Set to "Mahalath Leannoth." A Contemplation of Heman the Ezrahite.

- Psa. 88:1 O LORD, God of my salvation,
I have cried out day and night before You.
- 2 Let my prayer come before You;
Incline Your ear to my cry.
- 3 For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to the grave.
- 4 I am counted with those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man who has no strength,
- 5 Adrift among the dead,
Like the slain who lie in the grave,
Whom You remember no more,
And who are cut off from Your hand.
- 6 You have laid me in the lowest pit,
In darkness, in the depths.
- 7 Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
And You have afflicted me with all Your waves. *Selah*
- 8 You have put away my acquaintances far from me;
You have made me an abomination to them;
I am shut up, and I cannot get out;
- 9 My eye wastes away because of affliction.
LORD, I have called daily upon You;
I have stretched out my hands to You.
- 10 Will You work wonders for the dead?
Shall the dead arise and praise You? *Selah*
- 11 Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?
Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?
- 12 Shall Your wonders be known in the dark?
And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?
- 13 But to You I have cried out, O LORD,
And in the morning my prayer comes before You.
- 14 LORD, why do You cast off my soul?
Why do You hide Your face from me?
- 15 I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth;
I suffer Your terrors;
I am distraught.
- 16 Your fierce wrath has gone over me;
Your terrors have cut me off.



- 17 They came around me all day long like water;
They engulfed me altogether.
- 18 Loved one and friend You have put far from me,
And my acquaintances into darkness.

Outline of Psalm⁴

- 1-2 Appeal to God to hear
3-7 depth of the pit
8-12 questions about the grave
13-18 suffering God's terrors

Other Scriptures to consider

Psalm 22

Session Four: Psalm Ninety (NKJV)

Psa. 90:0 A Prayer of Moses the man of God.

Psa. 90:1 Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

2 Before the mountains were brought forth,
Or ever You had formed the earth and the world,
Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

3 You turn man to destruction,
And say, "Return, O children of men."

4 For a thousand years in Your sight
Are like yesterday when it is past,
And like a watch in the night.

5 You carry them away like a flood;
They are like a sleep.
In the morning they are like grass which grows up:

6 In the morning it flourishes and grows up;
In the evening it is cut down and withers.

7 For we have been consumed by Your anger,
And by Your wrath we are terrified.

8 You have set our iniquities before You,
Our secret sins in the light of Your countenance.

9 For all our days have passed away in Your wrath;
We finish our years like a sigh.

10 The days of our lives are seventy years;
And if by reason of strength they are eighty years,
Yet their boast is only labor and sorrow;
For it is soon cut off, and we fly away.

⁴ *The Lutheran Study Bible*, p. 932.

- 11 Who knows the power of Your anger?
For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.
- 12 So teach us to number our days,
That we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- 13 Return, O LORD!
How long?
And have compassion on Your servants.
- 14 Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy,
That we may rejoice and be glad all our days!
- 15 Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us,
The years in which we have seen evil.
- 16 Let Your work appear to Your servants,
And Your glory to their children.
- 17 And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,
And establish the work of our hands for us;
Yes, establish the work of our hands.

Outline of Psalm

- 1-2 God's eternal nature
3-6 brevity of human life
7-11 human sinfulness causes the dismal state of the human race
12-17 prayer for wisdom and grace

Other Notes to consider

Whether we call original sin a quality or a disease, it is indeed the utmost evil, that we are not only to suffer God's eternal wrath and eternal death, but that we do not even understand what we suffer.
[LW 13:127-28]

Conclusion

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For Further Reading

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