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Making the Psalms Your Personal Lament

“Turn the Bible into prayer...this is the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray.” Scottish pastor Robert Murray M’Cheyne

Inspiration: Tim Keller sermons: “Praying our Tears” and “Praying our Fears.” These sermons provide a wonderful background for how the Psalms provide a framework for handling our emotions.

Two helpful exercises:

A. Write your own psalm.

- In his book, *Side by Side*, Ed Welch gives a model to allow us to write our own psalm:
 1. Pour out your complaint before the Lord
 2. Review God’s promises and faithfulness
 3. Find our rest and comfort in Jesus
 4. Let others know that they too can find rest and comfort

B. Rewrite a psalm in your own words, using the Psalms as a writing prompt.

- If it is difficult to start from scratch, you can also take one of the Psalms and write it in your own words.
- Read the whole Psalm one time and decide whether to write a portion or the whole thing.
- Next, read a few verses at a time until you think that you begin to understand what he is saying.
- Personalize the Psalm by using first person pronouns and by making the ideas personal (ex. When David talks about his enemies he probably means Saul and armies that are against him. But we have different enemies. Think of your enemies, are they fear? Worry? Anger?)
- Don’t overthink this. It is okay if you don’t know the meaning of the passage. You might be able to get an idea from the imagery. And if you come to a part you don’t understand, skip it. Here is a difficult verse I encountered with 9th graders;

*There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells. Psalm 46:4*

Without further study, we didn't know what it meant, but it sounded peaceful to us so we wrote: "Help us know the peace that is in your presence."

Here is an example that my friend, Nancy Gray, wrote from Psalm 130:

From the dark, dry desert I look for you but cannot see you through the clouds. Can you see me even when I can't see you? Can you hear me even when I can't hear you? Will you offer me mercy even when I have no words to ask for it?

Lord, if you held me accountable for all my wrong doings, I would be nothing but dust. Although I don't deserve it nor do I accept it most of the time, I stand in awe that you grant forgiveness of sins to a person like me.

In the darkness I wait for you, Lord. Through the long darkness, I wait and I put my hope in the Lord until the dawn will once again break through the clouds.

I must trust that if I keep my hope in You, Your everlasting love will redeem me from the darkness and will redeem me from all my sins that cannot be redeemed otherwise.

Just get started! You will be surprised what comes pouring out of you when you start to write! The Holy Spirit will reveal things about God and about your own heart.