CHRONIC JOY®

Ministering to those affected by:
Chronic Illness, Mental Illness,
Chronic Pain, & Disability

WRITING A PSALM OF LAMENT

FIVE STEPS

1. **CRYING OUT TO GOD** – Address God, crying out specifically to Him.
2. **COMPLAINT** – Tell God honestly what is on your heart and what is causing you pain. Be specific.
3. **TRUST** – Explore your understanding of who God is and what He promises mean. It's OK to wrestle with God, to question and doubt. He isn't looking for a prescribed answer, but for honest conversation.
4. **ASK** – Ask God for help, naming what you need.
5. **PRAISE** – It's important to pause here, shifting gears, and allowing yourself time to name the things you're thankful for. Write them in your concluding lines.

Let's take a look at Psalm 13 as an example of these five steps.

STEP	PSALM 13
Crying out to God	How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
Complaint	How long will you hide your face from me?
Complaint	How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?
Complaint	How long will my enemy triumph over me?
Ask	Look on me and answer, O Lord my God.
Ask	Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death;
Complaint	my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
Trust	But I trust in your unfailing love;
Praise	my heart rejoices in your salvation.
Praise	I will sing to the Lord, for he has been good to me.

TIPS TO HELP YOU BEGIN

1. Write honestly. This is a conversation between you and God.
2. Openly express your pain and struggle. No one ever has to read what you write.
3. Think in terms of emotion rather than facts – color commentary vs. play-by-play.
4. Think descriptively. Try to:
   - Describe an emotion without naming it.
   - Use color, shape, or texture to describe your pain.
   - Describe pain as an animal, attribute of weather, or an object.
   - Use your senses (touch, taste, sight, smell, hearing) to describe pain.
   - Describe pain in metaphor. (ie: My pain is a roaring lion.)
   - Describe it in simile. (ie: "...my bones burn like glowing embers.)
5. Think in terms of phrases rather than sentences.
6. Give yourself time to reflect on what you've written, to process the experience. Read through lament slowly. Read aloud if you can. Listen for the sounds as well as the meanings.
7. At **Step 5 (Praise)**, shift gears. Think about what you're grateful for and name it. Read through your lament again, adding new praises that come to mind.
8. Length of lament doesn't matter. The psalms range from two verses (Psalm 117) to 176 verses (Psalm 119).
9. Lament helps us learn to praise God in our pain, even if our circumstances don't change.
10. Side-stepping lament only increases our isolation, separating us from God and each other.

Remember that lament takes time.

Step in slowly. Sit with God. Allow yourself time and space to feel and experience your pain. When you're ready, take up your pen, and explore the precious and life-giving gift of lament.

Visit **chronic-joy.org** for more resources.

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