

Shame Heartwork Packet



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Shame Study: Psalm 34:1-10

Shame is an emotion that seems to only talk about you in degrading ways. It degrades you with words like dirty, worthless, unrighteous, unwanted, and unacceptable. But the subtle spiritual attack of shame can be found in how it assaults your relationship with God. It lies to you about your standing with God. Shame will use the real or perceived opinions of people as your compass for understanding who you truly are. Rather than slowing down to consider God's opinion, shame keeps our minds fixed on what someone else has said as our source of truth.

The purpose of this heartwork is to let the truth of Psalm 34 encourage you to find hope and help in God amid the shame you are experiencing. Take a moment and read through Psalm 34 and spend some time meditating on verses 1-10.

Background (1 Sam 21:10-15). The historic setting for this Psalm is a situation fraught with fear and shame for David. David was fleeing from Saul and went to King Achish of Gath. But when the King's servants recognized David, he was afraid again and began acting like a madman by making marks on the door and letting his spit run down on his beard. So departing from there, he escaped to the cave of Adullam where he could reflect on God's faithfulness amid his fear. That is likely where he wrote this Psalm.

Verse 1. The Psalm begins in verse 1 with David declaring that he wants to continually live before God in worship. Blessing the Lord at all times and continually praising him communicates that praising God's glorious grace is our true north. He doesn't say, "I will think about the opinions of others at all times, saying 'I'm sorry' will continually be in my mouth." Rather he says, "I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise will continually be in my mouth." Yet shame pulls us away from worship to set our minds on how we feel others see us.

- Think about a time recently when your heart freely worshiped God? How did it encourage and refresh your spirit?
- What types of things, other than shame, do you find pulling your heart away from God?

Verse 2-3. The next two verses show the result of living this way before God. David writes, "My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" Speaking to others will mainly be about boasting in God, not defending, explaining, justifying, or apologizing in the face of a critic.

We will never find rest by being enough for someone else. Rather, as we find the fullness of life in worshiping God, we make our boast in him and others who want to live worshipfully before him will join with you, they will become your community. That is why David says, "let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together." This should be the occupation of our community, not living to please each other but joyfully worshiping God together.

- Who in your community helps orient you toward worshiping God? Who helps you notice what God is doing around you and helps you delight in him? Who in your life, through their presence, their words, their actions, and their priorities seem to invite you to magnify the Lord?

- In times when you've felt alone, without community to encourage your faith, how has God ministered to you and lifted your head to look toward him and worship?

Verse 4-7. In these verses, David goes back and forth between personal testimony (v. 4 & 6) and gospel promise (v. 5 & 7). Both verses that deal with David's testimony include crying out to the Lord, being heard and answered, and experiencing salvation from fears and troubles. Verse 6 shows the right way to have a low view of self: "this poor man cried". Why would a king ever call himself a poor man?! It's because as he looked to God he saw his need.

We must acknowledge our sin, acknowledge our neediness and weakness, but let that fill us with a longing for God rather than fill us with condemnation and shame. Look at how that cry for help was met – God heard and saved him. Not on the basis of works, but on the simple acknowledgment of his neediness and his dependence on God's grace.

Yet even though our salvation is by grace, shame can be a false prophet that promotes fear and a works-based gospel in a believer's life. This is because it mainly talks about how wrong you are, what a problem you are, and everything you need to do to be accepted. This can lead to a fear of being known, a fear of being around others, a fear of what other people might think, a fear of never being enough. In all that fear, we take our eyes off of our salvation and keep our eyes on what we need to do.

- What personal fears stay close to your heart because of shame? What troubles are you facing right now and how do they weigh on your heart?
- What does it currently look like for you to bring your fears and troubles to God?
- What does it look like for you to seek out God's grace? What pathways of grace do you depend on in your life (e.g. studying Scripture, prayer, fellowship, etc.)? How does God's grace minister to your heart in those pathways?
- How does shame pull your heart away from enjoying God's grace and tempt you to try and justify yourself by works?

The gospel promises in verses 5 & 7 really show where David drew his confidence and how his heart was set free from fear. In the first part of verse 5 notice how the Psalmist points out that those who look to the Lord are radiant. This means that beholding the light of the glory of God and understanding his loving salvation changes our very appearance in the eyes of others. We look radiant because of the beautiful light we reflect. For believers who fix their eyes on Christ, rather than hanging our heads in shame around others, we begin to radiate and reflect the beautiful light of his love. Shame would want to push us away from people because we feel that we belong to the darkness, we sense the need to hide or be separate because there is something wrong with us. But verse 5 shows that as we look to Christ our hearts can be free to reflect the light of his love, even to the most shaming people.

- Verse 5 says that those who look to God will never be ashamed. What do you tend to look at that causes shame?
- How might shame tempt you to keep your eyes on yourself rather than looking to God, seeking him, and finding hope in his care? What are the lies of shame that might tempt you to keep your eyes off of God?
- Verse 5 also says that as you look to God, you become radiant. Have you ever thought of yourself as radiant for God's sake? What might make it hard for you to see yourself as radiant because you reflect the light of the one you look to?

Bringing the light of God's love to others, even showing it to those who shame us can seem risky and dangerous. While we may need to consider wise limits on the particular ways we love and engage with those who unrepentantly sin against us, verse 7 offers additional hope to encourage us as we approach the ministry of radiating God's love to others. David shares the hope that our Lord surrounds those who fear him and delivers them.

- What do you think it means that “the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him and delivers them”?
- How does it comfort you to know that our God continually surrounds you with his care?

Verses 8-10. These three verses are filled with hope for those who fear the Lord. Paul Tripp explains the fear of the Lord this way, *“The fear of the LORD is such a reverential awe of God that grips your heart that you're willing to listen to His wisdom, you're willing to submit to His commands, you're willing to surrender your will to His will, and you're willing to rest in the awesome promises of His grace. The fear of the LORD makes you run toward Him, not away from Him and causes you to live in a way you would not live apart from Him. It's the fear of the LORD that caused David to walk into that valley of Elah and to challenge that great warrior, Goliath. It's the fear of the LORD that made Shadrach, Meshack, and Abednego unafraid of the threats of Nebuchadnezzar. And, it's the fear of the LORD that has propelled all of His saints to live as soldiers of light in a darkened world.”*

The fear of the Lord is not a passive posture, it is an active pursuit of God no matter the challenge. A believer who fears the Lord will actively taste and see that God is good, will take refuge in him, will seek him, and will discover that they lack nothing because they have God. While shame proclaims that we lack many things, the fear of the Lord directs our attention to God and we see that we lack nothing because of what we have in God.

- Take a moment and reflect on the promises in verses 8-10, how do you see these promises echoed in the gospel of grace given to us through Christ?
- Knowing that the fear of God requires us actively engaging with God and enjoying him, what are some practical ways you can lift your eyes onto God and consider him? (e.g. noticing and meditating on the promises of God's love portrayed in creation, going for walks and talking with God about various displays of his goodness to you, etc.)
- Who in your life is good at tasting and seeing the goodness of God? What areas of their lives could you imitate to grow in this area? How might you invite them to remind you of the goodness of God?

Close your time by reflecting on your answers. In the space below, write your own prayer based on Psalm 34:1-10. May God continue to grant you hope and encouragement to fix your heart and eyes on him.

¹<https://www.paultripp.com/proverbs/posts/011-fearless-fear> (accessed on 2/1/2024)

Shame Study - Psalm 25:1-3

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul. 2 O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to shame; let not my enemies exult over me. 3 Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame; they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous. - Psalm 25:1-3

These verses really depict the nature of shame:

- Shame comes from a community despising and rejecting someone. Here it is the enemies that come together and exult over David. The idea of the phrase “exult over” (e-x-u-l-t, not exalt over) – exult speaks to the joy, is a triumphant rejoicing over David’s defeat. The idea is gloating, boasting, mocking. Wrongful shame is a community project that aims to make someone low.
- Wrongful shame is silenced as we bring our souls before God and hear him speak. As we set our heart on the Lord, set our desire on him, and wait for him we experience the removal of wrongful shame. The nearness of God, the righteousness of his son, the promises of acceptance, adoption, justification, all bring us back to reality. Even if David loses a battle, he doesn’t fear being shamed, because he actively lifts his soul to God and remembers that acceptance and love that is his source of confidence and identity.
- Sin-exposing shame will come to all who wrongfully shame others. The warning in verse 3 is that sin-exposing shame is coming for all who wrongfully shame others. The truth about our sin will always be found out, and those who act this way, who willfully sin (wantonly treacherous) will experience shame. All that waits for those who shame others is a future of shame.

As you meditate on these verses, consider these questions about shame:

- Describe what it looks like for you to lift up your soul to the Lord (v.1), to trust in God (v.2) and to wait on him (v.3):
- What makes it hard to pour out your heart to God when it comes to your shame?
- When do you feel despised and rejected? Who or what tend to be the voices of wrongful shame in your life? What do they say?
- Our faith and hope in God can look foolish to the world and even invite shame as people look down on us. The very relationship that removes shame from our lives is the one that the world might shame us for. If you are faced with the threat of shame for following Christ, what temptations do you think you could face? How might you counsel your heart?

Understanding Our Shame Before the Cross

Mark 14-15; Philippians 2:5-8; Isaiah 53:2-5; Hebrews 12:1-2

1. Read the first three passages, what observations can you make about the shame Christ experienced?

2. What do you think was the purpose of the wrongful shame that Christ had to endure?

3. Christ chose to enter into shame. We see in Isaiah 53 that he came with no appearance of beauty that we would feel drawn to him at all, nothing about him was impressive at first glance. The gospels show that a shameful lineage, a shameful social circle, a shameful economic status, a shameful hometown that likely came with a shameful regional accent.

Philippians 2 shows that he left the exaltation and the majesty of heaven to embrace this shame. Here are some of the specific shameful moments in Mark 14-15: dear friends who fell asleep during his hour of need (14:40-41); the betrayal of Judas with a kiss (v.45); suffering abandonment from his disciples (v.50); the false witnesses (v.56); the spitting, mocking, and striking (v.65); the choice of freeing Barabbas over him (15:11); the crowd shouting “crucify him” (v.13-14); the crown of thorns (v.17-20); and the crucifixion (v.24).

Every step he took toward the cross in these two chapters was a step that invited shame. But as you listen to Jesus’ response to all the wrongful shaming, what do you notice? What do you think he was meditating on? (see 1Pet 2:23 [*my Father judges justly*], Heb 5:7 [*my Father will deliver me from Death*])?

4. Now take some time to meditate on Hebrews 12:1-2. What observations can you make how Christ dealt with the wrongful shame he suffered?

5. Christ calls us to run forward looking toward him, while wrongful shame demands that we to run in circles looking to someone other than Christ. What steps can you take to look to Christ? What lies of shame to you anticipate wrestling with when you start to look to him?

6. To fight shame is to look at Christ and to look at the cloud of witnesses who are all in your life and in history to help you look at Christ. [The church is this choir that helps remind us of the hope of the gospel, that helps lift our heads when we are downcast].

7. Christ did not minimize the reality of being shamed, rather he expected shame and saw something greater, the joy of obeying his Father. Jesus was able to “despise”(to think little of, to disregard) his shame because his eyes were set on the prize before him - obeying the will of his Father so that salvation could be accomplished for humanity.

Therefore, though we acknowledge the weight of shame, the fight against shame means that we shift our perspective upward and outward. First, to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who unfairly endured more shame than any other person. Then to the joy that is set before us - remembering the loving purposes that God is seeking to accomplish in us through our trials. Lastly, we remember the great cloud of witnesses that surround us, to dispel the lie shame tells us that we are rejected and alone. Shame is not eradicated from our lives completely, but when our eyes are set on the right things, we begin to despise our shame, meaning we begin to think less of it and more of Christ.

8. Listen to how John Piper describes how Jesus despised Shame in Heb 12:1-2:

“Listen to me, Shame, do you see that joy in front of me? Compared to that, you are less than nothing. You are not worth comparing to that! I despise you. You think you have power. Compared to the joy before me, you have none. Joy. Joy. Joy. That is my power! Not you, Shame. You are worthless. You are powerless.

You think you can distract me. I won’t even look at you. I have a joy set before me. Why would I look at you? You are ugly and despicable. And you are almost finished. You cover me now as with a shroud. Before you can say, ‘So there!’ I will throw you off like a filthy rag I will put on my royal robe.

You think you are great, because even last night you made my disciples run away. You are a fool, Shame. You are a despicable fool. That abandonment, that loneliness, this cross — these tools of yours — they are all my sacred suffering, and will save my disciples, not destroy them. You are a fool. Your filthy hands fulfill holy prophecy. Farewell, Shame. It is finished.

9. How does Christ’s character in these passages encourage you to love him and turn toward him?

¹ John Piper, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-does-it-mean-for-jesus-to-despise-shame>, accessed on 4/13/2023.

Comparing Shame to Embarrassment, Social Anxiety, and Fear of Man

Shame Related Struggle	Embarrassment	Shyness and Social Anxiety	Fear of Man
Description	<p>Momentary Shame. This typically arises when a situation is perceived as uncomfortable or unexpected. It's usually connected to a minor social blunder, some small violation of a social norm. Within an hour or a couple of weeks at most you can laugh about it. But with shame you never laugh at it</p>	<p>Persistent social fear. It is more associated with the fear of shame than a true experience of shame. There can be excessive worry and even physical symptoms like sweating, trembling, and a racing heart. It's often a mix of four elements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the sinful struggle of fear of man, 2) unique temperament (creational tendencies unique to them individually), 3) anticipation of life ruining humiliation and 4) possibly past shame in a social setting connected to a continual dread of it reoccurring. <p>Someone struggle with social anxiety might experiences this struggle more closely related to a panic attack than to a sinful longing. Sironi states, "a better frame for the socially anxious is weakness or being overwhelmed, needing comfort and encouragement more than rebuke."</p>	<p>Idolizing the good opinion of others. This often can be a major part of the other shame related struggles mentioned. It is highly aware of how others view them and values the opinions of others above God's. Jon Bloom states,</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>"The person(s) whose reward of approval we desire most — whose curse of dis-approval we most fear to receive — is the person(s) we will obey, our functional god. That's why the Bible so often commands us to 'fear the Lord.'"</i></p>
Examples	<p>John 13:6 – Peter's response to Jesus bending to wash his feet. (e.g. spilling food on yourself, not dressing for the weather.)</p>	<p>Exodus 4:10 – Moses' anxiety over speaking.</p>	<p>Gal 2:12 - Peter fearing the Jews.</p> <p>Prov 29:25 – Fear of man is a snare that trusts in man rather than God.</p>
Statements	<p>"oops"</p> <p>"sorry about that"</p>	<p>"I expect suffering and rejection."</p> <p>"I am not a gifted speaker"</p> <p>"Fear is my social reflex"</p>	<p>"I need other people to admire me."</p> <p>"I want people to appreciate my effort."</p>
Questions that Expose	<p>How often do you think about what happened?</p> <p>How did other people respond to you and how significant was their response to you?</p>	<p>What does your community look like currently?</p> <p>How comfortably can you share in small group? Do you have anxious thoughts that keep you from opening up?</p> <p>How does you typically feel in social settings?</p>	<p>How often do you think about the way other people perceive you?</p> <p>Are there particular people that you long to be appreciated by? If so, how does pleasing them affect how you live?</p>

Emotions Journal

When you hear the question, “How are you feeling?”, what comes to mind? How important is this question to you? Do your emotions matter to God? Every emotion you experience is designed by God to send you sprinting to him with words that express what you’re feeling: “Help me. Thank you. You’re awesome. How dare you! Why God?” As we see in the Psalms, no feeling is meant to be excluded from our relationship with God, and every emotion is designed to turn us toward God and assist us in bringing our hearts and lives before him.

Rather than trying to minimize our emotions it’s good to find as many as we can. Understanding what we feel allows us to better understand our hearts, the lies we believe, and the truth about our situation that our emotions might be pointing out. Your anger might tell the truth about someone’s sin, but it can also tell you lies to tempt hopelessness or revenge. Your fear might tell the truth about being in a dangerous situation, but it can also tell lies about the future that paralyze you in the present. Your shame might tell the truth about a serious sin that hurt many people, but it can also lie about your identity.



As you complete this journal, take your time to reflect on what you’ve been feeling. This journal is broken down into three parts: 1) Identify your emotions with words that help you truly express what you feel to God and to others. 2) Listen carefully to what this emotion is saying and how it encourages you to interpret your world. 3) Respond to God, to others, and to yourself with greater insight into your heart.

Before you begin, it’s important to state that sometimes we don’t know how to write about what we feel and feel overwhelmed or discouraged. In those moments it’s vital to lean into the body of Christ, so please consider talking about your answers with your biblical counselor, pastor, or a mature Christian friend. Or consider going through this entire journal once or twice with a friend who knows you well before going through it on your own.

Identity

Read over the emotions, definitions, and verses listed below. You’ll notice two colors representing pleasant vs painful emotions. The definitions are not an exhaustive representation of that particular emotion, but are intended to help you begin to identify what you regularly feel so that you can begin to talk about it. Then write down which ones summarize what you’ve been feeling strongly this past month. Feel free to write other things you’ve been feeling that maybe aren’t listed here.

Biblical Description of Emotion

Emotion	Definition	Scripture Example
 Thankful/Joyful	<i>Recognizing God’s grace and love that fills our lives and moves us to worship.</i>	Psalm 9:1-2, I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.
 Calm/ Hopeful	<i>An awareness of God’s abiding care that invites me to rest in him</i>	Psalm 4:8, In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.

 <p>Confident/ Brave</p>	<p><i>Secure hope in the Lord's strength to supply every need</i></p>	<p>Psalm 18:28-29, For it is you who light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness. For by you I can run against a troop, and by my God I can leap over a wall.</p>
 <p>Humble/Contrite</p>	<p><i>A low and needy posture before God and others that invites grace</i></p>	<p>Psalm 139:23-24, Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!</p>
 <p>Focused/Steady</p>	<p><i>Attentive to the stewardship God has entrusted us to care for</i></p>	<p>Psalm 77:12, I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds.</p>
 <p>Amazed/Inspired</p>	<p><i>Overcome by the grandeur of God revealed through his creation, his Word, and relationships in the body</i></p>	<p>Psalm 8:1, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.</p>
 <p>Sadness/Grief</p>	<p><i>Pain over the loss someone or something you treasure</i></p>	<p>Psalm 8:1, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.</p>
 <p>Fear/Anxiety</p>	<p><i>A deep belief and perception that danger is near, threatening what I love</i></p>	<p>Psalm 22:11, Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.</p>
 <p>Discouragement</p>	<p><i>Physical and spiritual weariness and grief that few can understand</i></p>	<p>Psalm 4:8, In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety.</p>
 <p>Distress</p>	<p><i>An overwhelming mix of physical and spiritual fatigue</i></p>	<p>Psalm 77:4, You hold my eyelids open; I am so troubled that I cannot speak.</p>

 Confused	<i>Disoriented and confounded, not able to understand</i>	Acts 19:32, Now some cried out one thing, some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and most of them did not know why they had come together.
 Guilt	<i>Misery over unrepented sin</i>	Prov 32:3-4, For when I kept silent [about my sin], my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.
 Sin-exposing Shame	<i>Grieving the devastation of your sin within your community</i>	Prov 5:15, I am at the brink of utter ruin in the assembled congregation.
 Wrongful Shame	<i>Pain over wrongfully losing love and acceptance from community</i>	Psalm 88:18, You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.
 Anger	<i>An intense recognition of wrong and desire to make it right</i>	Psalm 35:7-8 For without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my life. Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it! And let the net that he hid ensnare him; let him fall into it—to his destruction!

Listen

Your emotions reveal what you treasure, love, trust, and worship. They are always talking about what you care about. So what are they talking about? What are they saying about what's important to you? What are they saying about God, yourself, relationships, and your circumstances? Emotions are terrible masters but they are wonderful servants to help us see into our worshiping hearts.

As you listen, prayerfully consider which aspects of what you are feeling are good and godly and which are destructive or selfish. David does this when he asks himself in Psalm 42:5, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" So, we need to stop and ask, "How much of what I'm feeling is a right response and where am I being tempted or drawn toward sin?"

- What do these emotions say about your life situations and relationships? Are certain individuals the object of anger, fear, or shame? Do certain people or situations stay on your mind because they promise an escape from the anxiety or discomfort you're experiencing? Consider how your emotions influence how you look at your world.
- What do your emotions say about who you are? How do they talk about you as a sufferer, sinner, and saint? Are aspects of your identity exaggerated by these certain emotions?
- What do your emotions say about God? Does he seem intimate, distant, inconsistent, uninterested? How does your heart tend to see him through the lens of your emotions?
- What actions steps are your emotions telling you to take? How might they be tempting you toward sin? How might they be encouraging you toward righteousness?
- Summarize what God is helping you understand about yourself, about your situation, and about him:

Respond

Engaging our emotions really means we need to engage with God about what we are feeling. As you saw earlier, the prayers in the book of Psalms are not about efficiency or even theological precision, they are about humble honesty. These prayers are not spiritual progress reports where we tell God all the right answers that we think he wants to hear. God is not looking for us to honor him with our lips while our hearts are far from him (Matt 15:8). And he's not looking for us to change our hearts on our own before we come to him. He wants your heart to come to him, with whatever is pressing.

When you prepare to pour out your heart before God, the primary goal is not to change how you feel. Changing your feelings is never your biggest goal. Instead, you want to move forward with a greater awareness of your heart. Knowing your own heart better frees you to love God and love others with an awareness of yourself.

- **Respond to God:** Take time now to re-write a Psalm that you believe captures what you have been feeling. Populating the text with your own cares and experiences. As you write, pour out your heart and use the psalmist's focus on God to be your own window of hope as you write (Ps 62:8).
- **Respond to others:** Imagine if every member of your church thought they shouldn't share about how they are feeling. The church would be a very unhealthy place, unable to see suffering or bear one another's burdens. The Psalms should remind you to say things like, "I can't sleep, I have trouble eating, I'm stressed, I'm doubting, I'm addicted, I'm weak," within trusted relationships. Those phrases are all in the Psalms and we need to share like that both with God and with each other. Take time now to consider who you can go deeper with, who can you invite to help care for your heart?
- **Respond to future emotions:** Hopefully you've seen how important it is to value what God values, and he values you as a whole person, emotions and all. He loves you completely as his child, so please honor the joys and cares in your heart by taking time to acknowledge them, listen to them with discernment, and talk about them with God and with others.

Empathy & Prayer Map

- 1. This exercise is designed to help you see another individual more completely as God sees them. As you better understand this person, you will better know how to pray for them, honor them and seek their highest good (Philippians 2:3-4, Romans 12:9-21)



- 2. Journal about where you see sufferer, sinner, and saint

<p>Sufferer (John 16:33) Where do you see suffering in their life?</p> <hr/>	<p>Sinner (1 John 1:8) Where do you see them struggling with sin?</p> <hr/>	<p>Saint (Galatians 2:20) Where do you see God's grace at work in their life?</p> <hr/>
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- 3. Write a prayer for this person and for your relationship with them based on your answers to the questions above.

Learning to Lament

Suffering often drifts into our lives like a painful fog. It's a fog that isolates and tells you there is no hope. But lament is a gift our Father gives us in the fog to find our way back to him. Lament is how Christians talk honestly with God in the valley of the shadow of death and experience him restoring their souls. Below is an exercise to help encourage the practice of lament. Read through the four elements of lament listed below and then end by writing out your prayer. As you write your prayer of lament, feel free to use just one element or any combination of these four elements of lament.

1. Pray Honestly

Example from Psalm 55:12-16 (ESV), *“For it is not an enemy who taunts me— then I could bear it; it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me— then I could hide from him. But it is you, a man, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend. We used to take sweet counsel together; within God’s house we walked in the throng. Let death steal over them; let them go down to Sheol alive; for evil is in their dwelling place and in their heart. But I call to God, and the Lord will save me.”*

In lament you are moving toward God with an honest story of pain. It will take faith to move towards God with your pain, especially if he doesn't feel real or safe and you feel weak and out of control. But he wants every part of your life to come before him. He wants your pain, questions, feelings, confusion, and doubts. So, as you tell your story honestly to him, talk freely. To help you pray in this way, consider these two questions:

- What parts of your story do you want to hide from people?
- Can you put the experiences that have shamed you into words and speak those words to your Heavenly Father?

2. Protest

Example from Psalm 13:1-2 (ESV), *“How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?”*

A second element of lament is protest. In this step of lament, use your knowledge of the character of God to specifically protest against what He is allowing that goes against His character. Billings writes, “Writers of laments and complaints in the psalms often seek to make their ‘case’ against God, frequently citing God’s promises in order to complain that God seems to be forgetting his promises. They throw the promises of God back at him.”¹

Protest speaks to the question, “If our sovereign God is really good, loving, righteous and just why does he allow pain, innocent suffering, evil and injustice to happen?” We don't need to minimize our pain or try to just “suck it up” because God invites our prayers of protest. To help you pray in this way, consider these two questions:

- What parts of your story do not make sense in light of who God is?
- What attributes of God do you struggle to understand in this situation?

¹ J. Todd Billings, *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Pub Group, 2015), 19.

3. Make Bold Requests

Example from Psalm 109:1-4 (ESV), *“Be not silent, O God of my praise! For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer.”*

This third element of lament calls upon God to act according to His character and past faithfulness. Here you can ask boldly and confidently for God to be who He has promised to be. As you make our requests based on who God is, your focus is encouraged to shift from “Why is this happening?” to “Who is God in the midst of this?” To help you pray in this way, consider these two questions:

- What bold requests do you want to bring before your God?
- How do you long to see God act in the midst of your suffering?

4. Move Toward Trust and Praise

Example from Psalm 13:5-6 (ESV), *“But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”*

By taking this step of trust and praise, you are remembering your identity and re-centering your life on Christ. Vroegop writes, “While there may be painful circumstances beyond our control, our waiting can be spiritually productive as we intentionally follow the pathway to trust. That is why trust is active patience. We keep trusting by lamenting.”²

The enemy wants to use all your suffering to move you away from Christ by making your past or present circumstances the center of your life. But as you exalt Christ, you will discover once again the hope and freedom that can only be found as you worship and adore your Savior. In the midst of the struggle, the deepest victory comes when our hearts are able to move toward trusting God and praising Him. To help you pray in this way, consider these two questions:

- Can you say to God, “Lord, I believe you more than I believe anyone, including myself”?
- What promises do you already know in the gospel that speak directly to how you feel?

Take time now to write a prayer of lament to God. Again, feel free to just use one element or any combination of these four elements of lament. Journal your lament below or include it in a prayer journal.

² Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 75.

Understanding Our Identity Biblically: How does God see us and relate to us?

One of the constant realities we face in life is the temptation to believe lies that our hearts or other people say about us. So, to rightly see ourselves we need to first consider the ways we frame our self-understanding that go against God's view of us. It's hard to calculate just how influential our community is in guiding how we see ourselves. But our identity isn't something that we discovered through a private moment of enlightenment; we slowly built our self-knowledge through the way our community taught us to see ourselves.

Our family, friendships, churches, and culture are spheres of influence that reflect on life with us, that brings a worldview and interpretation for how we should relate to God, to situations, and other people. These can be places that help us see ourselves as God sees us through the way they teach Scripture, through the way they talk about us, or the way they talk about other people. But sadly, they can also greatly distort our view of self.

John Calvin in his Institutes begins by saying "our wisdom, insofar as it ought to be deemed true and solid Wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves." And he goes on to explain how intimately tied these two perspectives are. If we see God rightly, we will see ourselves correctly, and if we see ourselves correctly that means we will see God as we should. Calvin calls the answer those two questions "the sum of true wisdom." But if our view of ourselves has been greatly distorted, that also means our theology is distorted.

For example, if my community primarily talks about my life through a lens of accusation and condemnation, I might mainly relate to God through confessing sin and live with guilt and shame. Additionally, if my community primarily talks about life through the lens of mocking those who are different or legalistically avoiding things like movies, certain styles of music, certain clothes, or hair styles, then I might relate to God through a lens of pride and self-righteousness like the Pharisee who prayed about how good he was and looked down on the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). The body of Christ is meant to be filled with pathways of grace, light from God's word that illuminates the beauty of God so that we see our-selves in the light of his grace. But when cultural traditions, expectations, and idols pollute these pathways, then our identity gets distorted.

To begin our study, let's take some time to consider our identity through the lens of God's view of us as sufferers, sinners, and saints and what he wants for us by giving us a relationship with us.

I. Reflecting on how God sees us.

Meditate on the following passages and answer the questions for each identity category:

Sufferer — How does God see me and relate to me amid my suffering? As you read the following passages, meditate and journal about the themes of God's presence, power, and care amid suffering: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 41:10, Matt 11:28-30

Sinner— How does God see me and relate to me in my struggle with sin? In the following passages, meditate and journal about the themes of forgiveness, compassion, and sympathy in the following passages: Psalm 103:12-13, 1 John 1:9; Romans 8:1; Hebrews 4:15-16

Saint— How does God see and relate to the good in my life? In the following passages, meditate and journal about God's desire to work in and through us to display his grace so others would know him: Psalm 16:2, Matt 5:16, Eph 2:10, Phil 2:13, Heb 13:16, 1Tim 6:18-19

○ **II. Contrasting God's truth about us with lies we hear.**

To further clarify what God has said about us, let's take some time now to contrast God's word about us as sufferers, sinners, and saints with unbiblical counsel presented in Scripture and that you may have experienced. Meditate on the passages and then take time to answer the following questions:

Sufferer —

- How does God counsel in my suffering differ from the counsel Job received during his suffering? Job's friends consistently imply that his suffering must be due to some hidden sin or wrongdoing on his part. They argue that God is just and only punishes the wicked, thus concluding that Job must have sinned to deserve his suffering. However, the broader narrative of the Book of Job reveals that Job's suffering is a test of his faith and righteousness, not a punishment for sin. Consider these passages: Job 4:7-8; 5:17; 15:4-6
- Who else in my life would stand in contrast to God's counsel and who faithfully represents' God's counsel to me as a sufferer?
- Who else in my life would stand in contrast to God's counsel and who faithfully represents' God's counsel to me as a sufferer?

Sinner —

- How does God counsel my sin differently from what Satan would say to me (Rev 12:10 vs. Psalm 103:2-4)? We must recognize that both Satan and the Holy Spirit can point out the same wrong but the way they will address what is wrong will be completely different. Satan points out a wrong and stands over you as an accuser, condemning you, your heart joins in deceiving you with mental punishments about your sin. The Holy Spirit points out a wrong, convicts us of sin, but is our comforter, he is the lifter of your head, lifting your eyes to see the cross, to remember mercy, to find hope, and helps you fix your eyes on Christ.

- What deceitful words in my heart and in my community stand in contrast to God’s counsel and what are these saying about my sin? What do people say that helps me hear God’s counsel and what are they saying?

Saint —

- How does God’s counsel differ from what a legalistic culture might say about our good works (Gal 5:22-25 vs. Matt 15:7-9)? Biblically everything good in us is designed to help others worship and glorify God and to remind us that his grace is working in and through us as ambassadors of his love. Yet certain families, churches, and cultures will see good works as a requirement for acceptance. And not just the good works that are found in the fruit of the Spirit, but whatever the culture dictates as necessary to be presentable and acceptable within the community.
- How have outside voices or my own heart evaluated my good works in ways that would go against God’s assessment? What have I heard that frees my heart to see my good works as God’s kind work of grace rather than a performance that earns acceptance?

○ **III. Relating to God in light of how He sees us.**

Because our identity is not just about how we think about ourselves, but defines how we relate to God, take time now to write prayers relating to God in these three areas. We’ve included some prayers from the Psalms to help guide you, but feel free to put it into your own words how you would pour out your heart to God through prayer in these areas.

Sufferer — Psalm 25:15-20.

Notice the themes of humble dependency on God for help, honest assessment of being wronged by others, and hope in God’s delivering love.

Psalm 25:15–20 (ESV) — 15 My eyes are ever toward the Lord, for he will pluck my feet out of the net. 16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. 17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses. 18 Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins. 19 Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me. 20 Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.

Write your prayer here:

Sinner — Psalm 25:6-11.

Notice the themes of humble confession of sin, genuine request for mercy, and hope in the Lord's steadfast love.

Psalm 25:6–11 (ESV) — 6 Remember your mercy, O Lord, and your steadfast love, for they have been from of old. 7 Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for the sake of your goodness, O Lord! 8 Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way. 9 He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way. 10 All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies. 11 For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Write your prayer here:

Saint — Psalm 18:31-39

Notice the themes of humble confession of sin, genuine request for mercy, and hope in the Lord's steadfast love.

Psalm 18:31–39 (ESV) — 31 For who is God, but the Lord? And who is a rock, except our God?— 32 the God who equipped me with strength and made my way blameless. 33 He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights. 34 He trains my hands for war, so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 35 You have given me the shield of your salvation, and your right hand supported me, and your gentleness made me great. 36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip. 37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and did not turn back till they were consumed. 38 I thrust them through, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet. 39 For you equipped me with strength for the battle; you made those who rise against me sink under me.

Write your prayer here:
