

July 27

Group Study The Shattered Crown (Psalm 89)

1. Why do you think Psalm 89 considered one of the most theologically daring psalms?
2. What do the two halves of the psalm (vv. 1–37 and vv. 38–51) reveal about Israel’s understanding of covenant?
3. How could the psalmist’s honesty about God’s perceived absence help deepen our own prayer life?
4. In what ways is lament a form of faithfulness?
5. What does it mean to bless God (v. 52) even when we don’t understand?
6. How do we wrestle with promises that feel unfulfilled?
7. How does Psalm 89 help you pray in seasons of disillusionment or doubt?
8. Many psalms of lament move from plea to praise, but this one ends in ambiguity and anguish. How does this challenge our expectations of a “happy ending” in faith and in life? What might this psalm have to teach us about ministering to those whose pain is ongoing?
9. What role does communal memory play in lament?
10. The lesson suggests that the purpose of this psalm’s lament is not to offer answers, but to give voice to the questions and hold space for doubt. What is the value of this kind of prayer for individuals and communities of faith? How can we cultivate this space in our own contexts?

Good Faith Bible Study
Kathy and Nathan Maxwell

July 27, 2025

"The Shattered Crown"

Psalm 89

<https://goodfaithmedia.org/bible-studies>

In this week's podcast we're talking about lament. We'll take a few moments to explore why lament is a biblical and necessary part of our faith.

We should probably start with a definition. Lament is a word that we've heard in church, and it's one that we've probably heard in reference to some of the psalms. A "lament" is a prayer of grief, complaint or protest that is addressed to God.

Protesting addressed to God could make us feel a little uncomfortable. Could it be appropriate to complain to God ... about God? But in the biblical texts, lament is not a lack of faith, but an act of faith. We cry out because we believe that God listens.

Many Psalms are laments, including Psalm 89. In fact, over one-third of our psalms are classified as lament psalms. Psalm 13 is one example. In the opening verses the psalmist cries out: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

Lament gives us words when the world feels broken and when God seems very far away.

Psalm 89 is a striking example of lament. The song begins with praise and affirmation of God's covenant with David (vv. 1-37). But then suddenly it turns. Beginning in v. 46, the psalmist cries out with words similar to Psalm 13: "How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever? ... Lord, where is your steadfast love of old?"

And as we'll see in the Bible lesson this week, Psalm 89 ends without resolution. There are no neat answers here.

In this uncomfortable space, the psalm reminds us that Scripture allows space for unresolved pain—God allows space for unresolved pain.

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Lament is not just personal; it's communal. The Old Testament prophets lamented injustice. Jeremiah, known as the Weeping Prophet, laments in Jeremiah 8:21-22: "For the hurt of my poor people I am hurt... Is there no balm in Gilead?"

Even Jesus himself lamented. In Matthew 23:37, Jesus cries out: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often have I desired to gather your children ... and you were not willing!" Later from the cross, some of Jesus' final words are again words of lament. "My God, my God," Jesus cries out, "why have you forsaken me?"

Lament joins us with the suffering of others. It becomes a cry for justice, for healing and for hope.

But our culture often skips grief. Grief signals vulnerability and loss. It's an acknowledgment that our lives aren't perfect. We want to rush to resolution.

But biblical faith makes room for mourning. In Ecclesiastes 3:4, the preacher knows that there is "a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."

Fuller Seminary professor Soong-Chan Rah calls lament an act of protest, and in that very protest, there is hope that God listens. Dr. Rah calls lament a "counter-narrative" that addresses the broken narratives of our society. Lament is a song of humility that counters assumptions of triumphalism and exceptionalism that are so often blind to suffering and doubt. Lament allows us to be real with God—and to expect something better.

Even though we find lament throughout the Bible, it's missing from many of our worship services today and in our own personal and communal faith practices. A lot of churches focus almost entirely on celebration—on praise, joy and victory. And while those are good and important parts of faith, they just don't tell the whole story.

When we skip lament, we leave out the real experiences of people who are hurting. People who are grieving, who suffer injustice or who just feel far from God—those people can feel out of place in a church that only celebrates. In some ways, we have trained ourselves to hide our pain from each other, from ourselves ... and even from God.

We also miss out on the full experience of covenant relationship with God. Almost 40 years ago, Walter Brueggemann wrote an essay called “The Costly Loss of Lament.” He makes a point that is worth quoting in full:

One loss that results from the absence of lament is the loss of genuine covenant interaction because the second party to the covenant (the petitioner) has become voiceless or has a voice that is permitted to speak only praise and doxology. Where lament is absent, covenant comes into being only as a celebration of joy and well-being. Or in political categories, the greater party is surrounded by subjects who are always 'yes men and women' from whom 'never is heard a discouraging word'. Since such a celebrative, consenting silence does not square with reality, covenant minus lament is finally a practice of denial, cover-up, and pretense, which sanctions social control.

Those are strong words.

A second loss is that of honestly engaging God with questions of justice. Brueggemann points out in his essay that when these questions are not asked, they eventually become invisible—we assume that they are not legitimate questions, or at least they are not questions that are appropriate to bring before God’s throne. Losing lament may mean that we, in Brueggemann’s words, “may also unwittingly endorse unjust systems about which no questions can properly be raised. In the absence of lament, we may be engaged in uncritical history-stifling praise.”

Lament gives us permission to bring our whole selves before God, not just the parts that we think are polished or acceptable. When lament is missing, so is compassion. So is honesty. And so is the hope that can only rise from naming what is broken.

As you study Psalm 89 this week, try writing or praying a lament. First, name what’s broken. Second, speak honestly to God about that brokenness. Don’t try to clean up your words or clean up your emotions. Just be honest. Third, ask for God’s presence or justice.

You might end your lament by reading Psalm 89:46: “How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?”



And as you gather with your Bible study group this week, remember that lament is not something we just do alone. We suffer as a society—as a community. And we should lament together, too.

Lament reminds us that faith is not about having all the answers. It's about trusting God enough to bring our deepest pain into the light. As we learn to lament, we make space for honesty, for healing and the hope that God is still present.

Even in the silence.