

January 26, 2020, Rev. Patricia Weatherwax, "Praise AND Lament" Psalm 27 NLT

The Lord is my light and my salvation—
so why should I be afraid?
The Lord is my fortress, protecting me from danger,
so why should I tremble?
When evil people come to devour me,
when my enemies and foes attack me,
they will stumble and fall.
Though a mighty army surrounds me,
my heart will not be afraid.
Even if I am attacked,
I will remain confident.
The one thing I ask of the Lord—
the thing I seek most—
is to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,
delighting in the Lord's perfections
and meditating in his Temple.
For he will conceal me there when troubles come;
he will hide me in his sanctuary.
He will place me out of reach on a high rock.
Then I will hold my head high
above my enemies who surround me.
At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy,
singing and praising the Lord with music.
Hear me as I pray, O Lord.
Be merciful and answer me!
My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."
And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."
Do not turn your back on me.
Do not reject your servant in anger.
You have always been my helper.
Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,
O God of my salvation!
Even if my father and mother abandon me,
the Lord will hold me close.
Teach me how to live, O Lord.
Lead me along the right path,
for my enemies are waiting for me.
Do not let me fall into their hands.
For they accuse me of things I've never done;
with every breath they threaten me with violence.
Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.
Wait patiently for the Lord.
Be brave and courageous.
Yes, wait patiently for the Lord.

INTRODUCTION

It was the fall of my 7th grade year, so I'd just turned 12. I had a King James Bible. Now I have 53 English translations and paraphrased versions, plus the ability to examine the Greek and Hebrew, for words I might still be able to pick out. And they're all on my phone or computer, with just a few taps.

I had my Bible and it had the best thing ever invented: a concordance! Presented to me in 3rd grade and used until I got my first "Modern Translation" in my teens. Some of you know and others do not know a time without friendly common English Bibles. Someone, probably several someones had taught me by then, to turn to the Bible when I had a concern. It would help me. I turned to it because I was afraid. I was going to have a little, seriously minor surgery, outpatient in the days when you got admitted for most things. Local anesthesia. No big deal, but I was afraid.

I couldn't sleep the night before the surgery. So, I turned to my Bible's concordance, looked for the word *courage*, and found Psalm 27:14. "Wait on the Lord: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the Lord". Psalm 27:14 kjv. Somehow even tweens could understand the King James English back then.

Anyway, I memorized it and it was my comfort when I was in the operating room. I had an amazing faith as a child. Those childhood years were "before", before I understood that not every problem can be solved with a direct scripture quote: "Be courageous." As a kid- being a little afraid was the worst thing I had ever known. And, it's easier to praise God when there's no big deal going on.

PRAISE

We are all **commanded** to **praise** God. To see the holiness and love and grace of God and to respond with praise- an attitude of gratitude. God is worthy of our **praise**, everywhere and all the time, from the rising of the sun to its setting= all day and everywhere (Psalm 113:3), according to the scriptures. Several columns in my current concordance, hundreds of references to giving and living praise.

Our opening music, before 10:00 isn't supposed to be literal, but could we find 10,000 reasons to sing **praises**? We could in a matter of minutes, if we did it helping each other. We each could come up with 100, and put our lists together. I checked that with a calculator. We all have unique things that we **praise** God for. Specific people, family members and friends, and the experiences and visual cues, that as individuals, bring us great joy.

Besides God's providence, the gift of grace, the promises of heaven, and our favorite people, there's all the other "favorite things". The tiny sliver of the moon on a clear morning, and fresh clean sheets. we probably *could* come up with 10,000 reasons to sing **praises**, if we ever bothered to take the time. So here we are, at Battle Creek

First Presbyterian, as instructed, praising God, Psalm 27:6- “At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and **praising** the Lord with music”.

David is cited as the author of Psalm 27, and it's filled with reasons to praise: God's: light, salvation, protection, God's reliability, the sanctity and security of this place, God's house, God's beauty, the joy that God listens and understands, shows mercy, leads, strengths in temptations, the Lord's goodness, and the hope we have. We **“Praise** God from Whom all Blessings Flow!”

Psalms highlight the special spiritual gift we have been given- to sit in God's presence, to relax and to know that we are in God's care. We also have the God-given gift of emotions and feelings and reasoning. Our feelings are not incidental to reality. It's how we are created.

“Reason and emotion are interdependent.” (M.A. Elliott, Faithful Feelings, 47). Our emotions are not illogical. We are not Mr. Spock living solely by reason. We instead live by grace alone through faith alone, not by reason, but with reason, good reason. Grace and faith equals a heart willing and able to **praise**.

We give praise and experience joy because of what we know about God.

We mourn and lament because of what we know about humanity.

Walter Brueggemann, prolific theological writer, especially on the Psalms, writes: that “This Psalmist has *past* experience of God's care that prevents excessive anxiety in the *present*.” (The Message of the Psalms, p 154).

Eugene Peterson, another prolific writer and theologian, wrote the Message paraphrase and says verse 13 this way:

I am confident *I will* see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.

We live a life that brings **praise** to God when we live a life of mindfulness. AND when we know life's all covered, past, present **and** future.

AND

Anne Lamont, modern author says it this way: (Blog: *12 Things I've learned*) “the first and truest thing is that all truth is a paradox. Life is both a precious, unfathomably beautiful gift, **and** it's impossible here, on the incarnational side of things. It's been a very bad match for those of us who were born extremely sensitive. It's so hard **and** weird that we sometimes wonder if we're being punked. It's filled simultaneously with heartbreaking sweetness **and** beauty, desperate poverty, floods **and** babies **and** acne and Mozart, all swirled together. I don't think it's an ideal system.”

This Psalm writer was all over the place, a lot like Anne Lamont. There's quite a turn in verse 4-9. I'm lifted up, joyful. I'm in desperate need and lost.

My heart has heard you say, “Come and talk with me.”

And my heart responds, “Lord, I am coming.”

Do not turn your back on me.
 Do not reject your servant in anger.
 You have always been my helper.

AND, AND YET. Christ-followers live in that unsteady place of “already right with God, and life’s not yet perfect”. There are lots of words we use to differentiate, similar to **AND** that come out of Psalm 27. Why? Even if. When. I will, Though. I am. The Lord will, I will. Wait.

The word wait is a whole lot like the word **AND**. Something is going to change, something different will happen. Like Michigan weather, just wait, **and** change will come.

We give praise and experience joy because of what we know about God. and We mourn and lament because of what we know about humanity.

When we study the Psalms we are given the tool of **AND**. Yes, we praise God. The amazing gifts of creation and salvation and consolation. Triune God, Hallelujah. **But, and yet**, praise is balanced with lament. Yes, life is beautiful, sometimes. I wrote my daughter’s obituary that her life was: “awesome *and* fun *and* sweet, except when it wasn’t”.

Except, but, and, even if, because. Because; we all know that we need to praise God, but sometimes we need to lament the hard times. I didn’t want to ask Jodine for another request, besides “Blessed be the Name”, but **AND** is pivotal, like in the Casting Crowns song:

“You’ve never left my side **and** though my heart is torn-
 I will praise you in this storm.”

Yeah but, excuse me, **and** because, even though, **and** still, it’s right to praise. *Yet*. **And** it’s not wrong to **lament**.

LAMENT

So what about negative feelings? The Psalm-writer certainly felt comfortable writing them down. Some suggest this Psalm comes from David’s diary (or journal, which sounds more mature). Then was it meant to be scrutinized for 3,000 years? It’s a good way to express **lament**- to journal in prayer, expressing honest, thoughtful statements of fact. Why not? God knows and understands our human struggles..

Because **lament**, emotion is real. I told Jeff once, I have only one sermon: “life is hard. God is with us”. The Psalm writer preached that, too: “Even if mother and father abandon me, God will hold me close” verse 10. Even if we have to face change, and face hard facts head on, and deal with life and death, God will hold us close.

We praise God for giving us the ability to **lament**, to have strong feelings, even to have strongly negative feelings. Our theologian, Message writer, Eugene Peterson

pushed us to acknowledge when we want to lament. Except lament is a nice church word. In other contexts we *complain*. Expressing negative emotion is **lament**. Peterson wrote:

Just as hurt is the usual human experience that brings us to our knees praying for help, provoking the realization that we need God, so hate is frequently the human experience that brings us to our feet praying for justice, catalyzing our concern for the terrible violations against life all around us. Hate is often the first sign that we care. ...

And he goes on to say that expressing negative feelings:

When prayed, they are the first steps into the presence of God where we learn that he (God) has ways of dealing with what we bring him that are both other **and** better than what we had in mind. But until we are in prayer, we are not *teachable*. (Peterson, Answering God: the Psalms as Tools for Prayer. P 99-100)

The **laments** we find in Psalm 27 are about scary things real or assumed, danger, enemies, war, troubles, depression, rejection, spiritual dryness, sin, family issues, violence, fear, false information. Feeling abandoned by God- for me, that's the scariest thought ever.

It's hard to trust, sometimes. It's sometimes hard *not* to **lament**. Peterson says: "The Psalm is a profound and beautiful text on trusting the LORD." So maybe we need to trust and show it with our **lament**?

Don't "push down" or ignore your emotions. They are not going to be denied. Discounting our pain blocks the presence of God from healing us. We are emotional and spiritual creatures created with emotion and blessed with the Spirit's discernment. The best, truest **lament** ever spoken, was from the father of a troubled son: "I believe, help my unbelief" (Mark 9:24).

***We give praise and experience joy because of what we know about God.
We mourn and lament because of what we know about humanity.***

The News? There's always bad news. What's the Good news? "For God so loved the world", "Nothing is impossible with God", "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and he will direct your path" (John 3:16, Matthew 19:26, Proverbs 3:5-6).

We can't run from God, and God refuses to abandon us. So, do we need to **lament**? Start with praise. Next **lament** your heart out! Complain, admit to God just how hard life is. And then express confidence, like the Psalmist:

Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living.

Prayers of **praise AND lament** create energy and relationship, not vacuum and distrust. Open yourself to hope, to see some goodness, now, in this life. "In the land of the living" that's here and now! We can **lament**, we will. We should.

Yet I am confident I will see the Lord's goodness
while I am here in the land of the living."

Oh, Lord Jesus, how long, how long before we hear your good news, again??

Hear me as I pray, O Lord.

Be merciful and answer me!

My heart has heard you say, "Come and talk with me."

And my heart responds, "Lord, I am coming."

Do not turn your back on me.

Do not reject your servant in anger.

You have always been my helper.

Don't leave me now; don't abandon me,

O God of my salvation! ...

Hold me close (Psalm 27:7-10). Amen