

SOUL & SPIRIT



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A DIVISION OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN COUNSELORS

Volume 4, Issue 2



Leslie Vernick

CONFERENCES! CONFERENCES! CONFERENCES!

LOOKING BACK. The Chicago conference was everything you would expect: excellent speakers, significant topics, and thoughtful discussions. Plenary speakers included Tremper Longman III, Kevin Vanhoozer, James K. A. Smith, Robert Roberts, and Leslie Vernick. Those interested in Christian psychology can still hear what they and others had to say by acquiring recordings from www.aacc.net.

LOOKING FORWARD. Plan now for the AACC conference in Nashville where you can attend the *Christian Psychology* track and hear the presentations that you expect from SCP, while also enjoying the amazing AACC conference with its activities, meetings, and huge exhibit area.

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Healing at the Point of Vulnerability: From “Alas” to “Aha!”

Hanne Baar, IGNIS

(translated by Leslie Richford)

This article was written in German and translated into British English before being submitted to Soul and Spirit. Traces of its origins will be obvious and should remind us that interest in Christian psychology is not limited to a particular geographical area.

A well-dressed middle-aged man has laid his as yet unpaid groceries on the conveyor-belt in front of the cashier's till at a supermarket. He is fidgeting restlessly with his right foot, his opened wallet in his hand. Immediately behind him, an

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elderly female customer is also waiting. She leans over a large packet of white bread and asks whether it is fresh or only pre-baked, adding that she could use a packet of fresh bread if they have it here. But before she has a chance to find out the answer, the man turns round and rebukes her angrily: "What do you think you are doing, poking your nose in my groceries?" Taken aback, the woman explains, "But I only wanted to . . ." He cuts her short and becomes louder and louder. As the woman leaves the store, he shouts indignantly, "Get out before I get really angry!"

Overreaction as an Approach to the Point of Vulnerability

Overreactions like this are indicative of "sore points" or "points of vulnerability" in our lives and offer us an avenue of approach to them. Whenever somebody becomes irritated like this without an apparent reason, we can safely assume that there has been a great deal of hurt in that person's life and that it is still waiting to be dealt with. In our example at any rate, the fact that the woman looked at a hygienically packed loaf of bread that had not been paid for does not sufficiently explain the man's bad-tempered outbreak. This cannot have been the *real* reason for his irascibility.

With overreactions of this kind, it would seem logical to differentiate between the immediate occasion (IO) and the real cause (RC).

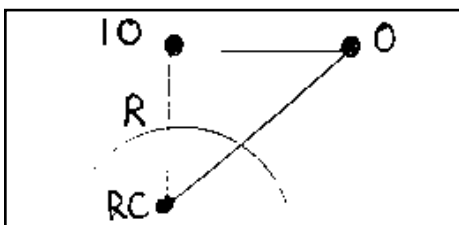


Figure 1:
IO (immediate occasion), O (overreaction), R (resistance), RC (real cause) (Daim, 1951)

Viewed from the standpoint of the immediate occasion (IO), the overreaction is "crazy", but seen from the standpoint of the real cause

(RC), it is understandable.

Because overreactions are so embarrassing, we have little choice but to ask ourselves after the event, "What was going on here?" "Why did I overreact in that way?" As long as we do not insist on explaining overreactions on the basis of their immediate occasion (IO), we can, in certain circumstances, provide a valuable means of approaching undealt-with "sore points" in our lives.

Experience teaches that the courage to be honest will be rewarded and maintained by the gift of eye-opening realisations. The man at the supermarket till might, for example, have realised that he was allergic to meddling. Yet, is it possible there is more? Is it possible that he saw in the elderly customer a representation of his mother, who nearly drove him to distraction by constantly meddling in his affairs and whom he has never been able to forgive?

Anything Except That!

Because of all the inconsistencies in our personality, we find, perhaps surprisingly, that nearly everyone has, often in early years, sworn an inveterate oath to the effect of "Anything except that!" Although the genesis of this sentence may be perfectly understandable, we make or confirm a pact with fear every time we agree with its terms.



Fig. 2: The fateful sentence: Anything except that!

The sketches that I use here are taken from my book *Wie man wahnsinnig werden kann* (Baar, 2001). These sketches were drawn by a student who sought my advice

because of problems that he was having in his relationship to a girl whom he loved but whom he nevertheless attempted to keep at arm's length. He considered his own behaviour as "crazy" and sought the key to it in his early relationship with his mother.

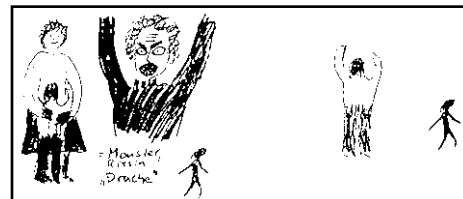


Fig. 3a: The beloved mother, at one
Fig. 3b: The "crash" time protecting, at another threatening

After a brief glance at Fig. 3a, one might reach the conclusion that it was rejection at an early age that created this discomfort. However, a closer examination reveals that the problem was not rejection at an early age but primarily the reaction to it. The problem was the "crash" (Fig. 3b), which the child experienced as an embarrassing, painful loss of personal worth through which the child also lost moral support, identity, warmth, proximity and trust. The whole was experienced as a "crash" or violent fall, something generally associated with the fear of death.

But even this is not the ultimate reason we find in our search for the cause of human maldevelopment. No, the disaster only reaches completion when an "Anything except that" oath comes into sway (i. e., when the shock jars the child so much that he or she is re-programmed towards fear and caution). For the child in question, "Anything except that" means, "From now on I will do anything to avoid experiencing *that* again." What is so damaging in this case is not the resulting caution but rather the absoluteness of this caution.

This "solution" does not solve the problem. On the contrary. *It is not the problem that is the problem but its solution* (Watzlawick, 1974). Because the fear of rejection forces a person to "perform" and to be on his or her best behaviour, it is almost

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universally followed, be it in the short or the long term, by fear of confinement and pressure. The secret threat consists in that unspoken “otherwise” (i. e., “otherwise you will be rejected.”). The resulting feelings of pressure and confinement soon become just as much an object of fear as immediate rejection. Avoidance of rejection, hatred of having one’s life determined by others, the continuous search for acceptance—these create a life lived on a tight-rope.

Seeking out early oaths of this kind and robbing them of their power is a lifelong process. We do this by relativising their absoluteness in order to achieve a normal negative, a negative that may still be firm but which still allows room for a positive, if a positive happens to be more reasonable.

Experience teaches that one way to find our point of vulnerability (our “sore point”) and the “Anything except that” oath associated with it is to ask our hearts, “What would be the worst thing that could possibly happen?”

As soon as this floods our consciousness, we experience a major turnaround. We are able to mourn, rage evaporates, disappointments stop rankling. Whereas before I was blind, now I can see. It may be that I still have my problem, but my problem no longer has me in its grip. The search for a true solution can begin, this time by asking God.

By way of summary, an “anything except that” oath in whatever shape or form is like a foreign body, as hard as granite, in one’s soft, sensitive life. At an early age, it attaches itself to our traumatic experiences and goes more or less unnoticed. As long as it is not retracted, it makes it impossible for us to take an intelligently questioning stance or to be flexible in the matter to which it refers. Overreactions are, therefore, an appropriate path by which to approach these fortresses of fear.

Confirmations from the Psychological Literature

While I was following up these interconnected ideas, I found confirmation of them in the writings of W. Daim, an astute Viennese psychoanalyst, who was, as early as the middle period of the 20th century, able to demonstrate that it is the absoluteness in our willing or not willing something which causes our thinking to become warped. Using as his basis statements by Kierkegaard *Entweder-Oder* [Either-Or], Daim emphasizes that God alone is the Absolute and that, as a

consequence, our fear demands a Redeemer (Daim, 1951, 1954). I also found that Watzlawick (1986) had stated, “Every person who submits to psychotherapy is basically saying the same thing: Anything except that” (p. 104). “*Every person,*” is what he wrote. “*Every person.*” Thus Daim provides a foundation for the supposition that it is the *absoluteness* of a decision which warps our minds, and Watzlawick for the supposition that it *always* does it.

The Bible, too, supports the thesis that a positive or negative judgment that is too absolute can be perfidious: “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’, ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37 NIV).

A Gradual Approach to the Point of Vulnerability

Let me give an example of an apparently banal personal experience which, in reality, sadly and typically reveals the persistence of early “warps”.

The last time I reached the end of my tether and overreacted was at Christmas. The Christmas tree and all the guests in my living-room meant that there was little space, and I felt confined. When time also got short (one of my guests had to leave to catch a train, the Christmas meal was on the table, and nobody seemed to care), I lost my emotional balance. The more or less instinctive reproach that I made at the time was this: “You are demanding something from me that I cannot do! I’m not supposed to rush anybody, but at the same time I’m expected to keep everything punctual.” Because of what I perceived to be the incompatibility of these demands, I blew a mental fuse. Between the lines, I communicated the message: “This is the limit of what I am prepared to accept” (i.e., I was saying, “Anything but this!”). The guests were shocked; the festive mood was dampened.

In such a case, one asks oneself, “Why was I not able to remain objective?” The answer I found was that the standard reproach uttered in my childhood: “You’re asking the impossible of me!” This experience pricked me at my sorest point, my point of vulnerability, and it caused a short-circuit.

Frequently, many overreactions of the same category are necessary before the “sore point” (the RC, the undealt-with disappointment) can be healed. Every time we over-react, it brings us a little nearer to this goal, but only as long as we refuse to justify

our unacceptable behaviour by appealing to the immediate occasion for it.

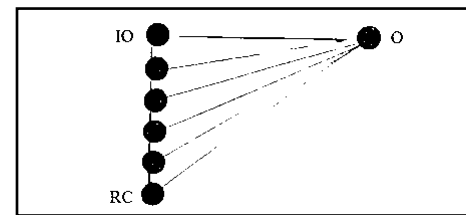


Fig. 4: The watchword is to stay on the ball and keep at it over and over again.

The “O” in the above diagram stands for “overreaction”, but it could also represent taking something amiss, discontentment, ill-mannered behaviour, rudeness or “under-reaction” (which, of course, also occurs). Each and every inadequate reaction or sin can be used, according to this scheme, as a way of approaching the “sore point” or “point of vulnerability.” As a rule, there is always an immediate occasion (IO) which is a pointer towards a more profound cause connected with it (RC). In order to be able to find this, we can, while talking to God and listening to Him, give ourselves an account of what exactly or which particular situation it is that is causing us to display irascibility, rage, fear or other negative reactions. After a while we begin to understand ourselves as we would another person. Fearfully protecting ourselves or withdrawing in inner bitterness becomes unnecessary. Fear of pain or shame is replaced by a new experience of security and nearness to God. Our prayer becomes this: Lord, keep me from getting stuck on the track from O to IO. I want to receive redemption even from the most hidden and embarrassing “sore spots” and not try to help myself by sinning.

A tortuous and health-endangering conflict ends in a natural way when a frustrated desire is at last fulfilled. In certain circumstances, it also comes to an end when a light is shone on it in conversation with God and the splinter is removed from the wound. We often have no influence over the first of these possibilities, but we can practise the second.

Worksheet

How can this process be practiced? The following worksheet (entitled *Help In Experiencing Breakthrough*) is a experientially tested instrument for exactly this purpose.

1. Examine yourself. Ask, “Is there something about which I feel discontent?” (Allow yourself time to get on the right track.)

2. Ask, "Is my discontentment an expression of any kind of reproach?" and "If so, what is it?" (That is, what am I not prepared to accept?)
3. Ask, "At whom are my reproaches directed?" (For examples, are they directed at a person, God, fate, or myself?)
4. Imagine yourself telling this person (or factor) what you do not like about the situation.
5. Consider how this person would reply. (Try to put yourself in this person's place.)
6. Are you still discontent? If so, ask, "What would be the worst thing that could happen?" Consider the mental images this conjures up.
7. Please sketch your answer (by drawing or in words) to the following questions.
 - a. What is reality (as it is in my eyes or as it threatens to become)?
 - b. How would I like things to be or to turn out?
8. Now, try to describe how you feel. (What is your mood like?)
9. Finally, what has become clear to you? Would you like to make a decision? If so, which one?

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INTERVIEW WITH JEFF WHITE

Jeff White is the Assistant Pastor of Care and Counseling at Park Cities Presbyterian Church in Dallas, TX area. He is working on his doctorate at Drexel University. In this interview, Soul and Spirit explores the implications of Christian Psychology for counseling in the church.

Editor: Jeff, tell me about your role as a director of a church counseling center?

JW: I primarily provide short-term pastoral counseling to people who are either members of or visitors to our church. That usually means meeting with them for one to four sessions. I have three part-time counselors who work with me, and then we refer to others counselors in the community. Thus, another part of my ministry is networking with Christians (for example, psychologists, professional counselors, psychiatrists, and clinical social workers) in the community, learning about their approach to counseling and identifying their areas of specialization.

Editor: How is it that you became interested in Christian psychology?

JW: My formal training was in an integrative approach to counseling. In the northeast, I was in a church counseling center that employed counselors some of whom were operating from an integrationist perspective and some from a biblical counseling perspective.

As part of the team, I noticed that that we often had different terminology and language. I also noticed we conceptualized things differently. We were not all together different, but the way we would sequence our approaches would be different. I kept thinking that there had to be a way to pull together the strengths of each approach—a way to think about counseling that is helpful in its use of the Bible and psychological research. I became interested in Christian psychology because I saw it offering such an alternative.

Editor: What is your understanding of Christian psychology?

JW: My understanding has changed over time. I currently would say that it is a distinct field of study and practice that is seeking to develop a form of psychology that takes seriously Christian presuppositions. In practice, I see it as a forum where people who were not trained in this field (that is, people who were trained either at some level of integration or in some level of biblical counseling) can work on developing a Christian way to counsel. These two groups often have little experience in dealing with each other. That is unfortunate because while there are differences in the two approaches, I find that they often have much in common, namely a gospel-based theory of what has gone wrong with us and our counselees and what can make us right. Christian psychology provides a forum where each can learn from the other. This helps both groups. As this dialog develops, I believe it can produce distinctly Christian ways of doing psychology and counseling. This field has much fruit to offer to the church and the world. And its offering will not simply be high quality research or helpful strategies of therapeutic practice as important as those are, but it will be much more. I really like Eric Johnson's use of the word "robust" in this context. Christian psychology offers a track toward the continued development of a robust Christian model of research and practice.

Editor: How has this understanding of psychology influenced your view of counseling?

JW: I am working on my doctorate and I think it frees me up to look into the psychological literature, to consider its assumptions, to dissect it and to evaluate it—but to evaluate it through a Christian lens. It allows me to think about

how my clients think. It does not limit me to the psychological literature and it encourages me to look at what the Scriptures say about specific, practical issues. It also allows me to develop interventions and be creative.

Editor: Can you give me an example of how Christian psychology has helped you be creative as a counselor?

Suppose a mother approaches me about an adult daughter who is having difficulties transitioning into adulthood. She wants her daughter to grow up and take responsible for herself. As she talks, it would be easy to think about this in psychological terms of the transition from adolescence to adulthood, which some refer to as "launching." Rather than thinking of this from the perspective of modern psychology, I might ask, "What are the Christian components of adulthood?" Therefore, we as counselors need to think through what are the Christian components of adulthood. In this specific example, one could be creative by identifying a need that occurs in modern culture and could also be creative in identifying specific Christian components of adulthood. Then, working along with the counselees, one could then co-construct a Christian solution to their problem.

Editor: Why do you see Christian psychology as a good approach to use as a church counselor?

I think in a church counseling center it is really important for the counselors to connect to other parts of the church. If a church counseling center is not intentionally connected to its church or if a freestanding clinic is not connected to churches in its community,

then these centers are isolated from the larger Christian community. They are disconnected.

To be effective, the center must be aware of the attitudes and perception that lay people and ministers have of counseling. These perceptions may be extreme. Counseling may be seen as something that is for and from the world. For that reason, a Christian psychology approach is comforting for the people. People need to know that what happens in the counseling room is not separate from what we talk about in sermons and Bible lessons. They need to know that what we are doing in counseling is not coming from a secular context. It is not worldly, but is distinctly Christian. They need to know it is related to that which has been in existence from the beginning of the church. Here, I have been able to work with a diverse

group of counselors. I have created a situation like the one I had in the northeast, but here that choice is intentional. I want people who are trained differently to learn from one another. This helps them “translate” all they do so that it fits consistently with the context and role of the church.

Editor: Do you have any suggestions for how one might develop a view of counseling that builds upon the foundation of Christian psychology?

JW: This may not be what you’re asking, but I am ABD and I have limits on what I can do with my dissertation. From my dissertation experience I have concluded that people are interested in are trying to prove or disapprove something. Thus, people seem interested in

quantitative research. Yet, I wonder whether we know enough about Christian psychology to evaluate some aspect of it with quantitative research. Instead, I think we who are interested in Christian psychology could use qualitative research. I would like to know what those interested in Christian psychology are actually doing when they counsel. This qualitative approach might then provide the basis for quantitative research in the future. This could help us build a research based approach to counseling that reflects a Christian psychology.

Editor: Thanks for your time and for your helping us think about Christian psychology from the point of view of counseling in a church context.

WRITING LAMENT PSALMS AS A THERAPEUTIC EXERCISE

Mike McGuire, SWBTS

The counselee wore little makeup, dressed as modestly as possible, and did not make eye contact.¹ The counselee was a female, an adult survivor of sexual abuse that began in childhood and was repeated by others as she grew up. She slowly told her story. She felt dirty and somehow responsible for what had happened, even for things forced on her as child. She had recently come to faith in Christ, knew God loved her, but wondered why all of this humiliation had been thrust upon her. She wanted help but was reluctant to talk about the abuse. With head down, she explained that she could pray to God, but knowing that grumbling was condemned, she could not talk to God about her abuse.

So, here was a dear sister in Christ, damaged by the sins of others, needing to be connected to God in a way that would bring comfort, but fearing that she might grumble against Him and bring His wrath upon her.

One of the great curiosities of the Bible is this: while God condemns grumbling (Phil 2:14), God appears to embrace lamenting. His Bible includes one book entitled Lamentations, many of other prophets recorded their writing in the form of laments, and the book of Psalms includes more lament

than praise psalms. Even our Lord, on the cross, quoted two lament psalms. God clearly approves of lamenting.

So, how can God approve of lamenting, while disapproving of grumbling? If He opposes complaining, then one would think that He would oppose all complaining. If these are different, then what makes them different?

While both are complaints, they are different. In every situation where God criticizes grumbling, several items characterize those complaints. The people are disrespectful to God. Their complaint causes them to withdraw from God, whom they begin to view as untrustworthy. Their grumbling undermines their faith in Him and undermines the faith of others. When they withdraw themselves from God, they necessarily withdraw themselves from life, truth, righteousness, and hope. They cannot withdraw from one with withdrawing from the other. These who have withdrawn from God then organize themselves into groups. These groups then criticize both God and His followers. Thus, God condemns grumbling for it is very destructive to appropriate worship and to His redemptive plan for a

fallen and cursed world.

Laments are different. Although the complaints are distressing and the complainer is often very unhappy with God, the laments remain respectful of God, often calling Him Lord. They are voiced by those who fear God. Thus even laments arising from a disorienting emotional pain express a struggling faith. Laments are painful expressions of faith, but they are expressions of faith. They thus encourage the lamenter, and having been read or sung in public, they encourage those hearing the lament to take their problems to God. The lament encourages the hurting child of God to turn to the Father. The lamenter is worshipping God in the midst of and often in spite of the pain. This turning to God is a turning to life, truth, righteousness, and hope. That which is broken, twisted, and mutilated is brought to the One who repairs, makes things straight, and heals. Laments promote the worship of God and accomplish God’s redemptive plan. Laments encourage humans in a fallen, cursed and sinful world to turn to Him for help.

Unlike irritable humans, it is not the complaining that God dislikes. It is the disrespect, the destroyed relationship, the

lack of trust in Him of which He disapproves. He opposes everything that undermines His work in the lives of humans. Laments are not offensive to God. They are not sinful. They provide a God approved approach to bring one's pains to Him. Therefore, laments are perfectly designed to allow the Christian adult survivor of sexual abuse to express her compliant to God while drawing her to the God who hears and heals.

To return to the therapeutic example above, the counselee reported that she enjoyed journaling and writing poems. The counselor thus suggested she read and meditate upon some lament psalms, as examples of the journals and poems of others. As she read these psalms, she recognized how they expressed her pain, and the questions arose whether she could write her own lament psalm. Clearly, if they were beneficial to those who wrote them long ago, this practice might prove beneficial for a contemporary counselee.

Yet, this question raised another issue: how can a contemporary westerner understand this ancient literary form? Short of having this counselee study enough graduate level Hebrew that she could handle Hebrew poetry, how could she learn enough so that psalm writing might be assigned as a therapeutic exercise?

The counselor began by asking if the counselee would be willing to read and meditate on Psalm 13, the shortest lament psalm (only 6 verses) which has the simplest of the lament structures (only 3 pericopes). As she meditated on the psalm over several weeks, she came to realize that the psalm moved the lamenter from a painful complaint to God (vv 1-2) to a heartfelt request of God (vv 3-4) to a sincere affirmation of Who God is (vv 5-6). Both the counselor and counselee noted that the complaint, though full of pain, was respectful (e.g., referring to God as Lord). As therapy progressed, they observed that the lamenter gave God a reason to answer him (v. 4). They noted that the affirmation (vv 5-6) was an affirmation of who God is (at times, the affirmation section in laments reflect upon God's answer to the request, but in this psalm it simply affirms God's attributes since it is not clear that God had answered the request).

The counselor helped her observe that, while the psalm was a type of poetry, it did not repeat similar sounding words, but repeated similar ideas. This repetition of similar ideas (e.g., "how long" in vv 1-2) communicate complex feelings as the writer expresses a

theme (e.g., a complaint) in slightly different ways.

One can observe how the authors of the psalms described their suffering poignantly and figuratively so that the complaint was in some sense universalized. Thus hurting listeners can thus join in the complaint, the request, and the affirmation of God's character. In the temple worship, the psalmist, the singers of the psalm, and the listener would thus be connected to God in the midst of their pain.

After this time of meditating on and exploring the therapeutic elements of the lament psalms, the writing of a lament psalm was assigned. Having some experience journaling, she was able to write her own lament psalm. In this psalm, the counselee's pain was poured out in ink. It began with her painful, heartfelt, but respectful complaint. She managed a fairly accurate reproduction of Hebrew couplets (the "rhyming of ideas"). This allowed for expression of complex emotions in simple language. The broad, figurative language in voicing the problem allowed for the expression of the complaint while eliminating the embarrassing details. Similar to Psalm 13, her lament called on God to hear her lament and answer her and it gave scriptural reasons for Him doing so. Since she had not reached a resolution to the pain, the psalm ended with an affirmation of God's faithfulness.

After looking over it, the counselor asked her to read it to God. She hesitated and then read it aloud. At the end, she paused for a moment, and for the first time a gentle smile crossed her face and her eyes glistened with tears. Worship and pain were conjoined. God was good and the world fallen. She had been able to connect with God in the midst of her pain and abuse.

Counseling lasted for several months, but this appeared to be a turning point. Confirmation occurred a year after counseling was completed, when the counselee dropped by to say thank you and hand the counselor copies of approximately 50 handwritten psalms.

Was this apparent benefit merely happenstance? Can this be repeated by other counselors? These techniques were developed in the early to mid 1990s with a variety of counsees, many of who were adult survivors of abuse. They appeared helpful. This technique was presented to approximately 20 counselors in the fall of 1996. Anecdotal reports from several of

those counselors, sometime occurring many years after the conference, affirmed that this exercise appeared helpful to those counselors. These appear promising.

So how might lament psalms work in helping counsees who have experienced abuse? Psychologically, they appear to successfully reverse the natural (and unproductive) behaviors of hurting people and appear to encourage more appropriate behaviors.

- Hurting people tend to withdraw from God. Laments draw hurting people back to God.
- Hurting people argue with God. Laments interrupt arguing with God.
- Hurting people often do not find ways to adequately express their pain. Laments express deep, heart wrenching pain effectively.
- Hurting people may be tempted to say belittling things to and about God (i.e., they grumble). Laments emphasize respect for God and substitute for grumbling.
- Hurting people may be tempted to doubt if God is faithful. Laments affirm God's faithfulness.
- Hurting people may be tempted to stop worshipping God. Laments encourage people worship God in the midst of their pain.
- Hurting people undermine their own faith. Laments build their faith.
- Hurting people undermine the faith of others. Laments, if shared with others, build their faith.
- Hurting people are tempted to disconnect themselves from God and seek help elsewhere. Laments help people connect with God.
- Hurting people often stop worshipping God. Laments encourage appropriate worship in the midst of pain.

Obviously, writing one's own lament psalm is not a substitute for reading divinely inspired ones. They do, however, appear to

be a potentially useful technique for helping Christian counselees take their pain to God in a way that the counselee can be confident that God will listen to them and in a way that helps them avoid grumbling.

In considering the use of lament psalms, it might benefit us to meditate upon the fact that our Lord quoted two lament psalms while he was upon the cross. One passage expressed his complaint, “My God, my God,

why hast thou forsaken me?” (cf. Ps 22:1 with Mt 27:46 and Mk 15:34). The other passage expressed an affirmation of trust, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit” (cf. Ps 31:5 with Lk 23:46). Thus, Israel’s ancient laments were drawn into the context of the Passion Story and thereby drawn into Christian experience. Even now, we groan (Rom 8:18-25) waiting for the manifestation of the kingdom when every tear will be wiped away (Rev 21:1-6).

As we wait, if we Christians are to imitate our Lord, then we are to lament by taking our pain to God and affirming our trust in Him.

¹The description of this “counselee” represents a composite of various counselees who wrote lament psalms as therapeutic exercises.



Book Briefs:

Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament

Elliott, Mathew A. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006. 301 pp. \$21.99 paperback

Are we able to read the New Testament (NT) without reading our view of feelings into it? Are those who write academic commentaries able to comment on the biblical text without reading in their views on feelings? Matthew Elliott (Ph.D. University of Aberdeen) asks these questions in his *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament*.

Elliott thus challenges the reader to consider carefully how feelings are portrayed in the NT. He begins by asking, “What is Emotion?” he considers the NT cultural context (both the Greco-Roman World and

Jewish Culture), he carefully examines select emotions (i.e., love, joy, hope, jealousy, fear, sorrow, and anger), and then he draws conclusions about how well or poorly we have read the NT concerning feelings.

This book will challenge the reader to think carefully about how emotions are portrayed in the NT. It cautions the reader not to read foreign views into the text. It will help encourage discernment when reading NT commentaries. This is a helpful book for those interested in developing a biblically based Christian psychology.

OTHER VOICES

“But people are born to trouble, as surely as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7, NET)

“The sufferings of life, which are the result of the entrance of sin into the world, are also included in the penalty of sin. Sin brought disturbance in the entire life of man. His physical life fell a prey to weaknesses and diseases, which result in discomforts and often in agonizing pains; and his mental life became subject to distressing disturbances, which often rob him of the joy of life, disqualify him for his daily task, and sometimes entirely destroy his mental equilibrium. His very soul has become a battle-field of conflicting thoughts, passions, and desires. The will refuses to follow the judgment of the intellect, and the passions run riot without the control of an intelligent will. The true harmony of life is destroyed, and makes way for the curse of the divided life. Man is in a state of dissolution, which often carries with it the most poignant sufferings.” Berkhof, L. (1941). *Systematic theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 259.

“Inability to empathize with others is a major consequence of sin. Being concerned about our personal desires, reputation, and opinions, we see only our own perspective. We cannot step into the shoes of others and see their needs as well, or see how they might understand a situation in a somewhat different way. This is the opposite of what Paul commended to his readers: ‘Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus’ (Phil 2:3-5).” Erickson, M. J. (1998). *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 636.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth (1 John 3:16-18, RSV).

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