

Four Ways to Pray in Lament

Tear Clothes

People in the Bible used to tear their clothes to show they were really upset. This was a really public thing to do, to show those around you your grief. In those days, they didn't have many clothes either, so it was quite a dramatic thing to do.

Imagine your favourite piece of clothing or perhaps a pair of shoes; how upset would you have to be to shred them? Not only that, but then imagine wearing them publicly, all ripped and torn, so that everyone around you would know something wasn't right.

Activity: think about something that upsets you, and tear a piece of fabric while you read Psalm 13 and make it your own. When you have finished, place the cloth somewhere special to represent giving your sadness to God.

Bottle of Tears

One of the authors of a Psalm of Lament (Psalm 56) talks about God collecting all his sorrows into a bottle. He basically says, "God, you record my misery, my sadness, you collect my tears into your bottle – You make a list of all of the things that make me sad!". It's a metaphor for describing how God takes notice of all our tears, he sees the pain that sometimes no one else sees. You might have heard of a swear jar – how about keeping your own prayer of tears jar?

Activity: think about something that upsets you, and write it on a piece of paper. Read Psalm 13, or Psalm 56. Put your paper in the jar, to represent giving your tears to God.

Smash Pottery

The image of broken pottery is used in Scripture to describe something that has been destroyed, often beyond repair. It is an extreme, violent image. Usually we hope that God can heal things – but the reality is that sometimes we do experience extremely upsetting things that are not able to be fixed. The Psalmist in Psalm 31 is terribly upset; he says his body is wasting away with grief, that he is forgotten like pieces of broken pottery.

Activity: Hold a pottery vessel (op shops have many!). Notice how it has been carefully handmade with care and pride. Now pick up a hammer. Feel its weight and power to destroy. Use the hammer to break the pottery. Pick up the broken pieces and feel them. What do they feel like? How hard would it be to try to glue the pottery back together? Read Psalm 13 and reflect on broken things in our world or in your life that feel like they are beyond restoration in this life. Place the pieces before the cross to symbolize giving them to God.

Dust and Ashes

In Scripture, people would smear themselves with ash to show that they felt really sorry for doing something, or to show grief (c.f. Job 42, Daniel 9). This is called repentance – when you feel bad for doing something, and want to apologize and change your ways. Ashes from a fire are a symbol of being powerless – a fire is powerful, so if it has burnt out leaving only ashes, then there is no power left. It is also a symbol of death; after a fire has been there is no life left in the ashes that remain.

Activity: Take some of the ashes provided and touch them; smear them across your hands or across your face. Think about the things you are sorry or upset about. Imagine going out in public with ashes on yourself so that others could see, like some did in Scripture. Read Psalm 13 and when you come to the part about trusting God, cleanse the ashes off.

Four moves of Lament

Dear God...	(addressed to God)
This sucks!	(complaint, grievance)
I need...	(petition, request)
I'll trust You with this	(trust, faith and hope)

Psalm 13

How long will this go for, Lord?
Are you going to forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I struggle in my mind,
And day after day have a sad heart?
How long will my enemies make my life difficult?

Look at me and answer me, Lord my God!
Give me a light in this darkness, or else I might die,
And then my enemy will say 'I win!'
And those who don't like me will laugh when I fall.

But, even though all this tough stuff is going on,
I will choose to trust in you, God,
and in Your unfailing love.
My heart feels happy when I think about
how You make me safe.

I will sing about how awesome You are,
And how You have been so good to me.