

It's an odd thing. Jesus Wept. Job Wept. David Wept. Jeremiah Wept. They did it openly. Their weeping became a matter of public record. Their weeping, sanctioned by inclusion in our Holy Scriptures, a continuing and reliable witness that weeping has an honored place in the life of faith.

But just try it yourself. Even, maybe especially, in church where these tear-soaked Scriptures are provided to shape our souls and form our behavior. Before you know it, a half-dozen men and women surround you with handkerchiefs, murmuring reassurances, telling you that it is going to be alright, intent on helping you "get over it."

Why are Christians, of all people, embarrassed by tears, uneasy in the presence of sorrow, unpracticed in the language of lament? It certainly is not a biblical heritage, for virtually all our ancestors in the faith were thoroughly "acquainted with grief." And our Savior was, as everyone knows, "a Man of Sorrows."

Christians have lost touch with our native language of lament, this language that accepts suffering and our freely expressed suffering as the stuff that God uses for our salvation. At-homeness in the language of lament is necessary for expressing our

companionship with our Lord as He accompanies us through the "valley of the shadow of death" and who leads us to be with Him in "dark Gethsemane."

It is also necessary as a witness, a Jesus-witness to the men and women who are trying to live a life that avoids suffering at all costs, including the cost of their own souls. For at least one reason why people are uncomfortable with tears and the sight of suffering is that it is a blasphemous assault on their precariously maintained American spirituality of the pursuit of happiness.

So, learning the language of lament is not only necessary to restore Christian dignity to suffering and repentance and death, it is necessary to provide a Christian witness to a world that has no language for and is therefore oblivious to the glories of wilderness and cross.

Eugene Peterson, Foreword to  
*A Sacred Sorrow* by Michael Card



Shortly after 9/11, I received a note from Calvin Seerveld in which he observed that we, in the American church, had no songs to sing in response to the horrific attack. The truth of what he wrote was self-evident. "You need to write laments, to equip 'lament teams'," he said.

Michael Card,  
*A Sacred Sorrow*

# Living Worship



February, 2012

## Lament

### Why, Lord?

#### PSALM 3

LORD God, there are so many people after me! A mass of people have set themselves up against me. So many people are saying to me, "There is no rescue for you with God!" But you, LORD God, are like an umbrella over me. **You** are what distinguishes me! Holding my head up high.

I cry out my loud cry to the LORD God,  
And God answers me from God's holy mountain.  
When I lay me down to sleep I do wake up again,  
Because the LORD God supports my waking.  
I will not be afraid of an army of ten thousand people who set themselves up against me, surround me—

Get up, LORD God! Rescue me, Oh my God!  
Yes, you can break the jaw of all my enemies.  
You smash the teeth of those who are crooked!

Rescue—deliverance—does belong to the LORD God!  
May your blessing, LORD, rest upon your people.

Calvin Seerveld,

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Daily Scripture Readings to teach us about Lament “WHY, LORD?”

# February, 2012

			1 <i>Psalm 42</i>	2 <i>John 11:17-44</i>	3 <i>Habakkuk 1:2-4</i>	4 <i>Lamentations 5:15-22</i>
5 <i>Psalm 3</i>	6 <i>Job 19</i>	7 <i>II Cor 4:7-18</i>	8 <i>Psalm 88</i>	9 <i>Isaiah 40:27-31</i>	10 <i>Psalm 71</i>	11 <i>Romans 9:14-21</i>
12 <i>Malachi 1:1-5</i>	13 <i>Psalm 4</i>	14 <i>James 5:10, 11</i>	15 <i>Psalm 74:1-17</i>	16 <i>Psalm 74:18-23</i>	17 <i>Romans 8:18-27</i>	18 <i>Jeremiah 20:7-18</i>
19 <i>Malachi 1:6-14</i>	20 <i>I Peter 4:12-19</i>	21 <i>Psalm 119:25-32</i>	22 <i>Lam 3:16-24</i>	23 <i>Isaiah 53:3-5</i>	24 <i>Psalm 25</i>	25 <i>Titus 3:4-8</i>
26 <i>Psalm 51</i>	27 <i>Hebrews 5:7-10</i>	28 <i>Psalm 22</i>	29 <i>Luke 22:39-46</i>			

The idea of bittersweet is changing the way I live, unraveling and re-weaving the way I understand life. Bittersweet is the idea that in all things there is both something broken and something beautiful, that there is a sliver of lightness on even the darkest of nights, a shadow of hope in every heartbreak, and that rejoicing is no less rich when it contains a splinter of sadness.

Bittersweet is the practice of believing that we really do need both the bitter and the sweet, and that a life of nothing but sweetness rots both your teeth and your soul. Bitter is what makes us

strong, what forces us to push through, what helps us earn the lines on our faces and the calluses on our hands.

Nearly ten years ago, my friend Doug told me that the central image of the Christian faith is death and rebirth. At the time I didn't agree. What I didn't understand until recently is that he wasn't speaking to me as a theologian or a pastor or an expert, but rather as a person whose heart had been broken and who had been brought back to life by the story God tells in all our lives.

When you've faced some kind of death—the loss of someone you loved

dearly, the failure of a dream, the fracture of a relationship—that's when you start understanding that central metaphor.

Now, ten years later, I know Doug was right. I've begun to train my eyes for rebirth, like looking for buds on branches after an endlessly long winter. So this is the work I'm doing now, and the work I invite you into: when life is sweet, say thank you and celebrate. And when life is bitter, say thank you and grow.

Shauna Niequist  
Prelude to *Bittersweet*: Thoughts on change, grace and learning the hard way.

I have come to believe and trust and hope that tears of lament are the missing door, the way into an experience with a God whose depth of compassion we have never imagined.

*The hidden face of God, Finding the Missing Door to the Father Through Lament*  
Michael Card, pg 14

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