

## Introduction

Scripture sometimes disrupts our expectations—not to confuse us, but to invite us into deeper honesty before God. At times, that honesty takes the form of what we might call *lamenting praise*—worship that remains relationally faithful even when the story does not resolve. Scripture gives this kind of prayer a name: **lament**. Lament is prayer that brings real pain into God's presence without pretending things are better than they are.

Good morning, church. My name is Curtis Graham, and I'm grateful to be with you this morning.

A quick snapshot of who I am: I'm a graphic designer with the Government of Alberta, and before that I spent a number of years working in advertising. Because of that background, I spend a lot of time thinking about *story*—how stories hold our attention, how they build tension, and how they resolve. Most of the stories we love tend to follow recognizable patterns: the hero's journey, the moment of breakthrough, the happily-ever-after. My last sermon used *The Princess Bride* to illustrate the Savior's love for us, so if you saw the title of today's sermon in the bulletin and wondered where we were headed, think of this as a continuation of that conversation—another look at how Scripture tells the story of faith.

If you've ever watched a really good story, you know this: we're not just invested in *what* happens—we're invested in *how* it happens. We want the tension to make sense. We want the pain to lead somewhere. We expect the story to reward our emotional investment with resolution. Even when the journey is hard, we assume the ending will justify it.

And that expectation doesn't stay in movies or books. We quietly carry it into our faith.

Over time, I've noticed something about how many of us—including myself—tend to approach faith in hard seasons. We lean toward explanations. We yearn for quick resolution. Or we quietly pressure ourselves to sound hopeful before we actually feel it. Sometimes we do this out of good intentions—we want to protect God's goodness or reassure ourselves that things will work out. But in the process, we can lose the language Scripture itself gives us for moments that don't resolve quickly.

If we're honest, we often learn this instinct in church. We learn what to say. We learn what *sounds* faithful. We learn how to edit our prayers, so they don't feel uncomfortable—either to us or to the people around us. Over time, we can begin to believe that faith means having the right tone rather than telling the truth. Scripture never calls us to dismantle faith, but it *does* call us to practice it honestly.

Have you ever read your Bible and thought, "*Why is that in here?*" Not because it's wrong—but because it doesn't fit the neat version of what you think the Bible *should* sound like?

That question surfaced for me as I began studying lament—trying to understand why God gave His people this kind of language and why it has been preserved in Scripture. As I read Jeremiah, Job, and large portions of the Psalms, I began to notice something that felt deeply familiar to life itself.

There are prayers and stories in the Bible that do not resolve the way we expect them to—at least not within the boundaries of this life. They don't move cleanly toward clarity as we tend to define it. They don't always tie things up with visible relief. And yet, Scripture preserves them, not as failures of faith, but as faithful witnesses to life lived before God.

That raised a question that sits at the heart of this sermon: *What does it tell us about God that He would preserve prayers like this?* And what does it tell us about faith that God would invite His people to pray this way at all?

What Scripture seems to suggest is this: faith does move toward clarity—but not always toward resolution in the present. Lament lives in the tension between the grief of what is now and the promise of what God has said will be. It grieves the realities of this life while refusing to let go of the hope that ultimately belongs to the next.

This is why the Bible often feels less polished than we expect. Not because it lacks hope, but because it tells the truth about life as it is. That might feel like a strange thing to say—especially right after Valentine's Day, when everything around us is pink, cheerful, and full of "happily ever after." Scripture *is* full of hope. But it refuses to pretend that hope always arrives on our timeline.

The Bible is far more honest—and far more open—about pain than we often allow ourselves to be. And that honesty is not a problem to solve. It's an invitation.

So rather than rushing to answers this morning, I want us to slow down and pay attention to how Scripture itself gives voice to pain—how it prays when life doesn't follow the patterns we expect, and what that reveals about the kind of God we're actually dealing with.

And as we do that, we're also going to let Scripture challenge what we instinctively think faith is.

(Can we just take a brief pause here?) When Scripture talks about faith most directly—most famously in Hebrews 11—it doesn't describe faith as emotional certainty or visible success. It describes people who kept walking with God even when promises were delayed, outcomes were unseen, and resolution remained out of reach. Because when the Bible reflects on faith most directly—most famously in Hebrews 11—it doesn't define faith as emotional certainty or visible

success. It defines faith as people who *kept walking with God* even when promises were delayed, outcomes were unseen, and resolution remained out of reach.

## **Section 1: When Faith Still Speaks to God**

One of the places Scripture does this most clearly is in the Psalms. Many of these prayers are laments—faithful prayers spoken from inside pain, directed toward God rather than away from Him. If you read them closely, you'll notice that many of these prayers begin in places that feel uncomfortably familiar: confusion, frustration, grief, even a sense of abandonment. They ask questions we don't often feel free to ask out loud.

Take a psalm like Psalm 13. It opens with a question many of us recognize immediately:

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?"

The question beneath these words is not merely *when* God will act, but *whether God is still near*. The repetition—*How long... how long... how long...*—creates a sense of suspended time, a life caught between promise and experience.

What's striking is that the psalmist does not retreat into silence. He does not conclude that prayer is pointless or that God has abandoned him. Instead, he speaks—directly, honestly, repeatedly—to the Lord.

This is what lament looks like at its beginning. Not answers. Not clarity. But honest speech before God. Faith speaks because relationship still matters.

For many of us, this is harder than it sounds. Silence can feel safer than honesty. Speaking openly can feel risky. We worry about saying the wrong thing. We wonder if our questions are too sharp, too emotional, or somehow unfaithful. So instead of speaking honestly, we edit ourselves. We soften our language. Or we go quiet altogether.

But the Psalms remind us that silence is not the safer option. Faith does not begin when we find the right words; it begins when we refuse to stop speaking to God. Before anything changes, before any request is answered, faith takes its first step.

Faith speaks because God is still present.

If that feels simple, that's because it is. Scripture repeatedly shows us that faith begins not with composure, but with direction—turning toward God rather than away from Him, even when we don't yet understand what He's doing.

This is already pushing us toward a biblical definition of faith that may feel different from the one we're used to. Hebrews 11 famously tells us that faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen—not because believers *feel* confident, but because they continue to orient their lives toward God even when they cannot yet see how the story will end.

## **Section 2: When Faith Still Asks God to Act**

After naming the ache, Psalm 13 moves into a plea:

“Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.”

Lament does not stop at naming pain. It moves toward asking God to act within it. Once the pain is named, the next question rises quickly: *What will God do about this?*

This is often the point where many of us feel most at home in prayer. We know how to ask. We know how to plead. We know how to bring our requests before God. Asking feels active. It feels faithful. It feels like we're doing something.

The psalmist does not hesitate. He believes God can intervene, restore, and protect. And yet there is a tension here. The prayer is bold, but it is not controlling. He asks without dictating outcomes. He pleads without demanding timelines.

That distinction matters. Biblical faith does not require certainty about results. It requires confidence in God's rule.

There are two extremes we often fall into at this point. One is trying to control outcomes—treating prayer like leverage, as if saying the right words might force God's hand. The other is passive resignation—assuming that asking doesn't matter at all because God will do whatever He wants anyway.

Lament resists both. It asks boldly, not because outcomes are guaranteed, but because God is still sovereign. Prayer remains meaningful because God still reigns over what comes next, even when the outcome is unclear.

Faith asks because God is still sovereign.

That sovereignty does not mean God is cruel or indifferent. It means our suffering is not meaningless or abandoned. Asking God to act is an act of trust precisely because God still reigns—even when we do not yet see how He will use what we are facing.

That pattern shows up again and again in Hebrews 11. God's people ask, obey, and move forward without guarantees. Faith there is not portrayed as having answers, but as trusting the One who reigns over outcomes they cannot yet see.

### Section 3: When Faith Still Remembers God's Goodness

Psalm 13 ends with a turn:

"But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation."

At first glance, this feels like resolution. But notice what actually changes. The circumstances are not described as different. The enemy has not disappeared. The questions have not been erased.

What has changed is the psalmist's point of reference.

He looks backward—toward God's character, God's history, God's steadfast love. Praise here is not denial of pain; it is an act of remembrance in the middle of it.

Throughout Scripture, God's people are repeatedly called to remember—not as nostalgia, but as a discipline. Israel retells the story of the Exodus again and again. Stones are stacked as markers. Songs are sung so future generations won't forget. Remembering is not pretending the present is easy; it is anchoring trust in what God has already revealed about Himself.

This is the form of faith we often celebrate because it feels stable and reassuring. Remembering who God has been becomes a way of holding onto trust when the present feels uncertain.

But Scripture also prepares us for something harder: not every faithful prayer reaches this point within this life.

Faith remembers because God is still good.

Hebrews 11 reflects this same posture by naming people like Abraham—who waited, obeyed, and trusted God without seeing the promise fulfilled in his lifetime. Faith remembers not because the present is easy, but because God has already shown Himself faithful.

Hebrews 11 reflects this same posture by looking backward and forward at the same time—remembering God's past faithfulness while trusting Him for a future still unseen. Faith, in Scripture, is never mere optimism; it is trust rooted in who God has already shown Himself to be.

## **Section 4: When Faith Still Has No Resolution**

Up to this point, Psalm 13 has given us a pattern that feels familiar. Questions. Requests. Remembered trust. It's a movement many of us recognize—and one many of us expect.

But Scripture refuses to be tidy.

Not every prayer in the Bible follows this arc. Not every lament turns the corner. Not every story resolves before the final line.

Psalm 88 is one such prayer.

“O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you.”

The psalmist speaks as if God Himself is involved in his suffering:

“You have put me in the depths of the pit... your wrath lies heavy upon me.”

To modern ears, this can sound accusatory. But within Israel's covenant worldview, the greater danger was not that God was involved in suffering—it was that God might be absent from it. A suffering world without God is a world with no one left to cry out to.

So the psalmist refuses to place his pain in a God-free zone. He would rather wrestle with God than imagine a universe where God no longer reigns.

Psalm 88 ends with these words:

“My companions have become darkness.”

That unresolved ending is not a mistake. God preserved it.

Faith that stays here is not blind faith. It is faith that remains when **resolution is withheld**—when relief does not come in this life, when deliverance is delayed, when the story does not turn.

Job's story echoes this truth. Job is not rebuked for his honesty, but his friends are rebuked for trying to tidy up suffering with explanations. Faithfulness is not found in answers, but in staying oriented toward God.

At the center of our faith stands Jesus Himself.

(Can we slow down here for a moment?) Jesus does not merely join us in lament as an example of endurance. He enters suffering in order to carry it through death and resurrection—securing the future hope that lament points toward, even when that hope is not yet visible.

On the cross, Jesus cries out the words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” These are not the words of unbelief. They are the words of faithful lament. The Son addresses the Father in the darkness—and the prayer is not immediately answered.

Jesus does not remain in the dark because He misunderstands God. He remains because obedience sometimes means trusting the Father when resolution is withheld.

Faith stays because God is still God—even here.

This is where Psalm 88 quietly aligns with Hebrews 11. Hebrews tells us that many of God's people lived and died without receiving what was promised, yet they were commended for their faith. Psalm 88 gives us the prayer language for that same kind of faith—the kind that does not walk away simply because the promise has not yet arrived.

## Section 5: When Faith Still Stays Together

Lament was never meant to live only in private prayer. These psalms were written, preserved, and sung in community.

That matters.

Because one of the quiet dangers of suffering is isolation. Pain convinces us that we are alone—that our questions are unwelcome and our grief is inconvenient.

Lament pushes back against that lie. It creates space for those who cannot yet sing songs of celebration. It allows the body of Christ to carry faith together—so that when one person cannot speak hope, another can speak it on their behalf.

This does not mean we fix each other. It means we stay present. We resist easy explanations. We learn how to sit in the dark together.

The ultimate hope of the Christian faith is not that every story resolves in this life. Our hope is that God Himself has entered our suffering in Jesus Christ and promised that darkness will not have the final word.

Some prayers are answered with healing. Some with endurance. Some are carried forward into the life to come.

All of them are heard.

Faith that stays in the dark is not ignorant faith. It is the kind of faith Hebrews 11 describes—faith that continues in relationship with God even when the fulfillment of hope lies beyond this life, unseen but not abandoned. It is faithful endurance when resolution is withheld. And in that staying, relationship with God itself becomes praise.

If you're feeling the weight of this, that's understandable. Scripture is not trying to crush us here—it is refusing to lie to us.

This is not weak faith.

This is biblical faith.

Faith does not require a happy ending—it requires a God worth holding onto.

If all you can do right now is stay—stay in prayer, stay in relationship, stay oriented toward God—Scripture calls that faith.

And what all of this has been showing us is not a God who demands tidy prayers, but a God who invites honest ones. A God who would rather be wrestled with than avoided. A God who stays in relationship with His people even when the story does not resolve.

## **Benediction**

So if today you find yourself in lament...

if your prayers feel heavy...

if faith feels more like holding on than standing strong...

hear this:

The Gospel is not that you must climb out of the darkness to reach God.

The Gospel is that God stepped into the darkness to reach you.

Jesus did not avoid sorrow — He entered it.

He did not silence lament — He prayed it.

And He did not abandon us to suffering — He carried it through death into resurrection.

This is our hope:

Not that every question will be answered...

Not that every pain will vanish today...

But that nothing — not grief, not silence, not even death — can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

So go in peace:

Holding faith even when you cannot feel it.

Lamenting honestly.

Trusting deeply.

**Hebrews 12:1-2**

...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses... let us run with perseverance...

fixing our eyes on Jesus... who for the joy set before him endured the cross...

And may the God who meets us in the dark be your light, your strength, and your hope.