

FOLLOWING THE “MAN OF SORROWS” - JESUS’  
PATH TOWARD OPENHEARTEDNESS:  
A REFLECTION ON EMBODIMENT  
AND THE PRACTICE  
OF LAMENT

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A heart that is broken is a heart that is open.

“Cedarwood Road” U2

Some of the most famous words Jesus ever spoke were beautifully woven into the opening lines of Matthew’s magisterial sermon of Jesus, the “Sermon on the Mount” (5:3-5):

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Poverty of spirit, mourning, and meekness are interrelated dispositions of the ideal disciple. While there are a variety of ways to understand the Beatitudes, one thing is clear: those who follow Jesus are to be those who exhibit a disposition like this. This disposition has an obvious concrete expression. Scot McKnight in his recent commentary on the Sermon makes the point that Jesus radically proclaimed the offer of the kingdom to those who had no power or position, in his words, “the most unlikely of people.”<sup>1</sup>

Also, and perhaps as a consequence, there is deep resonance with the Lament Psalms of the Hebrew Bible. The disposition of the poor in spirit (all the more Matthew’s version seems to point in this direction), the mournful and the meek characterize those who sing lament songs (cf. Psalm 109). It is those in a place of “disorientation,” to use Walter Brueggemann’s language, who are readily able to embrace a “new orientation.” As counterintuitive as it may seem, and the crucifixion-resurrection paradigm makes this point dramatically, it is the vulnerability of life, indeed the death of life, that leads to new life.

It is important to notice that this position of “disorientation” has eschatological significance in these statements. The kingdom is the

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *Sermon on the Mount* (eds. Scot McKnight, et al., 2013), 31.

disciples' ("theirs") now, but the comfort and the inheritance are yet future ("they will"). For Jesus' disciples, the "disorientation" is both a state of being and an existential ebb and flow of personal experience. So both in the day-to-day affairs of living as well as in our state of being this side of the consummation of the age, disciples are to be characterized as lamenters. Scott Ellington refers to this as the "vocation of lament."<sup>2</sup> And Rebekah Eklund recently wrote:

As a Christian eschatological practice, lament is a liminal practice. It is 'shaped by the incongruities between what is and what should or might be'; It is an instigator and sustainer of liminality. Those who lament stand on the boundary between the old age and the new and hope for things unseen. In the New Testament, lament is a practice for the *now*. It is a practice that makes sense not only because there is a God who hears and who redeems but also because there is a *not yet* . . . blessed are those who lament.<sup>3</sup>

This instinct to read the beatitudes as Jesus' path of discipleship is confirmed, surprisingly, by a passage in Revelation. In Revelation 6, the seals are opened, and in the midst of Evil's havoc on the world throughout history, the suffering church is pictured as a lamenting body:

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they maintained. They called out "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (6:9-11).<sup>4</sup>

The refrains "How long?" and graphic imaginative language like "avenge our blood" is the vernacular of the Psalms of lament. Lamentation, or to use a more common expression, *grieving*, is the path of discipleship to openheartedness.

I'm using the idea of "openhearted" as a catch phrase to represent in-the-process-of-being-restored, healthy human existence in the times between the times, in the time between Jesus' ascension and parousia. It is a place where we experience the extremities of both joy and pain. The Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Ware calls this "repentance:"

Filled with grief yet at the same time filled with joy, repentance expresses that creative tension found at all times in the Christian

<sup>2</sup> Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 190.

<sup>3</sup> Rebekah Ann Eklund, *Jesus Wept: The Significance of Jesus' Laments in the New Testament* (515; London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015), 171.

<sup>4</sup> "In Scene 2 [Seals of ch. 6 (esp. 6:9-11)], the church is assured that she will suffer, though her final safety will never be a question. But she is not accepting the suffering meekly. She is calling for vengeance on those who cause it. And lest we should imagine that this is a merely human prayer, which in the stress of the moment has lost sight of the divine command to pray for (not against) one's persecutors, we are shown in Scene 3 [Trumpets of ch. 8] that God hears . . ." (Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation: I Saw Heaven Opened* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1975], 73, 91); see also Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth*, 171-73.

life on this earth . . . As a life of continual repentance, our Christian discipleship is a sharing at one and the same time in Gethsemane and the Transfiguration, in the Cross and the Resurrection. St. John Climacus sums the matter up by saying: "If you put on blessed and grace-filled mourning as a wedding robe, you will know the spiritual laughter of the soul."<sup>5</sup>

In their album *Songs of Innocence*, the Irish band U2 points out the path to this openheartedness in a song called "Cedarwood Road." In the chorus lyric, Bono sings:

Northside just across the river to Southside  
That's a long way here  
All the green and all the gold  
The hurt you hide, the joy you hold  
The foolish pride that gets you out the door  
Up on Cedarwood Road, on Cedarwood Road

"Cedarwood Road" is the street where lead singer Bono (Paul Hewson) grew up on the north side of Dublin, where violence was a common experience in his teenage years. This is every bit a lament. The lyrics name, that is render in poetic speech, the difficulty of living on the other side of childhood trauma. U2 poetically put into words the truth of the harm that that adult boy still carries around.

Sleepwalking down the road  
Not waking from those dreams  
'Cause it's never dead it's still in my head  
It was a warzone in my teens  
I'm still standing on that street  
Still need an enemy  
The worst ones I can't see  
You can... you can . . .

If the door is open it isn't theft  
You can't return to where you've never left  
Blossoms falling from a tree they cover you and cover me  
Symbols clashing, Bibles smashing  
Paint the world you need to see  
Sometimes fear is the only place we can call home  
Cedarwood Road

"Cedarwood Road" is the path to open heartedness as the last line of the song captures it: *And a heart that is broken is a heart that is open.* "Cedarwood Road" represents the necessity to name what is true and in our present to embrace the "fear we call home." It is only in this naming

<sup>5</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom: Volume 1 of the Collected Works* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2000), 56.

and embracing and ultimately relinquishing will we live. This is how David Fricke of Rolling Stone described the song:

Bono's lyrics are striking in their specific, personal history. In "Cedarwood Road," . . . the singer remembers the fear and unrequited anger that drove him to music and to be heard—and which won't go away. "I'm still standing on that street/Still need an enemy," he admits against Clayton and Mullen's strident, brooding rhythm and the enraged stutter of the Edge's guitar.<sup>6</sup>

As Fricke intonates, the musical composition reflects the embodied dialectic of brokenheartedness and openheartedness. The music is imaginative and powerful because of its embodiment expressions of tension and extremity. The melodic verses jarringly interrupted by the gritty rock rhythms of the chorus represent the discordant experience of real life and expresses bodily the difficulties of living in a fallen world.<sup>7</sup>

Another way of framing openheartedness is what Brueggemann calls the "second naïveté:"

The second naïveté is postcritical, not precritical. The second naïveté has been through the pit and is now prepared to "hope all things" (1 Cor. 13:7). But now hope is after the pit. It now knows that finally things have been reduced and need be reduced no more. It knows that our experience is demystified as it must be. But it knows that even in a world demystified and reduced, grace intrudes and God makes all things new. The ones who give thanks and sing genuinely new songs must be naïve or they would not bother to sing songs and to give thanks. *But it is a praise in which the anguish of disorientation is not forgotten, removed, or absent.*<sup>8</sup>

To put it simply, *the path to an open heart is walking into the brokenness of our lives.* This is because: (1) we are embodied creatures and our bodies have stories, (2) we are sophisticated embodied creatures whose bodies learn to avoid pain at an unconscious or pre-conscious level, and so (3) we carry stories of trauma, neglect, abuse, failure, and disappointment – the vulnerability and fragility of living in this world – "in our bones" which then powerfully influence and shape our being in the world. And all of this under our cognition.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/albumreviews/u2-songs-of-innocence-2014-0911#ixzz3GQO7TbM4>, last accessed October 17, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Some critics don't have the imagination required to capture the intentional discordant elements of the song. Consider this review by Mark Schiff of AXS: "The song's intro sounds a bit nostalgic, before a surprisingly sludgy riff disrupts the mood. However, like some of the other songs, the various parts don't quite fit together, with the verse retreating to something lighter. There are some compelling elements to the song but it doesn't coalesce into a meaningful whole" (<http://m.axs.com/news/keep-it-or-delete-it-a-track-by-track-review-of-u2-s-surprise-new-albu-19249>, last accessed October 17, 2014). His view is "delete it".

<sup>8</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms in the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 25, emphasis added.

If we are to regain (this is for most of us), and then maintain, openheartedness as weathered survivors we must, in agreement with the recent work of James K. A. Smith, do something.<sup>9</sup> But what?

I will argue in this essay that we must imaginatively name the harm Evil has done and continues to do to us, and to our loved ones, and to the communities of faith of which we are apart, and to the wider world around us. We must render into imaginative speech, moreover, our state of complete vulnerability, our real powerlessness in the face of everything significant we are asked to do as humans, in spite of our every attempt to pretend otherwise.

This proposal, however, is not a new one. It is an attempt to reclaim the liturgy of lament God has gifted to believers, one that purposes through regular bodily practice to lead us to render into imaginative speech our body’s harm and vulnerability, and so to move us into a state of brokenness where open hearts live in the world with relational presence and empathy – in Smith’s language, the “habitus”, the disposition and character of “the man of sorrows.”

#### I. MY BODY HAS A STORY—“INTIMACY MAKES ME GIGGLE”

“Where do you feel that in your body?” Scott, my therapist, asked. “Where do I feel it in my body? What kind of question is that!” I thought to myself. “I have just shared with you a memory from my childhood; it’s coming from my head.”

At that point, I didn’t see any connection between what I shared and my body; I was completely unaware conceptually and experientially of body memory. But this just goes to show the problem: what I shared, if it had been portrayed on screen in a film, would have been offensive and emotionally disturbing. But I had no bodily sense of it. I paused for what seemed like a long time trying to discern my body on the register of my mind. And after several seconds, which felt like minutes, I had to admit: “I don’t know. I can’t feel my body. I don’t feel anything.”

The experience reminds me of the time I was having physical therapy not long ago for a neck injury. The PT was trying to teach me an exercise to build my core. It required that I rock my pelvis forward and backward. Humorously to him and a little embarrassingly for me, I could not get my head to communicate with that part of my body. I don’t know if I had ever even tried to consciously get those particular muscles to do something. Obviously, my subconscious communicates with my pelvis all the time, but initially, I couldn’t consciously communicate. After several attempts, I finally got a neuron-pathway created, but only after several days of practice did the exercise become an easy movement to call up. It is profound fact that one can be so disconnected from one’s own body. Such bodily fragmentation is not the way we first address the world as children; watch a 7-year old boy for awhile if you need proof!

<sup>9</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation* (vol. 1; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009); James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (vol. 2; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

Back to the session with Scott. He responded, "That is interesting. Because your story and your present experience clearly point to the fact that your body is communicating, and loudly. The question is not whether your body is speaking, but rather, are you paying any attention." Scott sent me away from that early session of the therapy with only one task, "Joel," he said, "I want you to pay attention to your body this week. Take note of what it is telling you. Pay attention." It was that day, not much more than a year ago, that my mind reintroduced itself to my body.

During this year, I've been taking notice of my body and, you know, it has had a lot to say. I've come to realize personally what Andrew Schmutzer noted, "The body is a profound participant in meaning, an astute scribe that also records life's horrific experiences."<sup>10</sup> Schmutzer puts the emphasis on the traumatic experiences our bodies remember, and this is useful because it is the negative, painful experiences that are our body's best teachers. Reference to the proverbial hand on a hot stove is enough to make the point.

What is more, it is the wounded body that acts out its knowledge in ways that make impossible the open heart we have been discussing. Often, despite our best cognitive intentions, our bodies sabotage holiness before God and deep connection with others. Christian psychologist Dan Allender stresses the point: "your neurons never forget." In the realm of sexual abuse, which is something of the angle of this essay, Joy Schroeder has said:

Memories of sexual abuse can be integrally bound up with the body. Some victims have visible scars, permanent injuries, chronic pains, sexually transmitted diseases, and pregnancy. For others, the scars are not visible, but *memory of the abuse remains lodged in the psyche and as body memory.*<sup>11</sup>

What I have come to learn is that my *body* has a story. It is a story that affects my being in the world, and it is a story of which I was largely unaware. It is not that I repressed the story of abuse as is the experience of some. Rather, it is that I had only dealt with it on the register of my mind. My body was still waiting attention.

I have wondered about why this is the case. Why didn't I know that my body along with my mind required participation in the process of healing? The problem cannot simply be reduced to one or two things, but I think two factors have significantly contributed to this weakness in our discipleship practice: (1) the general lack of theoretical (philosophy) and practical (physiological) awareness about the bodily nature of childhood trauma, and (2) a Christian evangelical tradition trapped by the cognitivist philosophical spirit of the age.

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<sup>10</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, "Spiritual Formation and Sexual Abuse: Embodiment, Community, and Healing," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2, no. 1 (2009): 73.

<sup>11</sup> Joy A. Schroeder, "Sexual Abuse and a Theology of Embodiment," in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused* (ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 193, emphasis added.

Recently, Bessel van der Kolk has described the sea-change in psychiatric approaches to trauma that has taken place in the last three decades. He writes:

When I began my psychiatry rotation, however, I was struck by the contrast between the incredible complexity of the mind and the ways that we human beings are connected and attached to one another, and how little psychiatrists knew about the origins of the problems they were treating.<sup>12</sup>

He credits the recent developments in the areas of neuroscience, developmental psychopathy, and interpersonal neurobiology as the sources for the new view that:

Trauma produces actual physiological changes, including a recalibration of the brain’s alarm system, an increase in stress hormone activity, and alterations in the system that filters relevant information from irrelevant. We now know that trauma compromises the brain area that communicates the physical, embodied feeling of being alive. These changes explain why traumatized individuals become hypervigilant to threat at the expense of spontaneously engaging in their day-to-day lives. They also help us understand why traumatized people so often keep repeating the same problems and have such trouble learning from experience. We now know that their behaviors are not the result of moral failings or signs of lack of willpower or bad character—they are caused by actual changes in the brain.<sup>13</sup>

The bodily impact of trauma goes a long way to explain my divided self. As is true for many, if not most, who have experienced the trauma of abuse, the unconscious bodily strategy is to disassociate.<sup>14</sup> In order to live with the abuse, the survivor ejects out of her body to her mind. She intellectualizes everything finding safety there from being in her body. Anyone who has suffered abuse can relate to the sense of wanting to be anywhere but in their own skin. Such a person has unconsciously, precognitively really, formed a way of being in the world that is divided and fragmented.

But I put some blame on my Christian tradition that ignored the constructive role the body must play in spiritual formation. Because the body, if addressed at all, was viewed negatively, as something wild and sinful, it needed to be controlled through discipline of the mind. As budding adolescents, all we heard about our bodies was it could get in the way of holiness. We needed to tame the body to be “good Christians.” So,

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<sup>12</sup> Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2014), loc. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *Body*, loc. 184.

<sup>14</sup> Heather Davediuk Gingrich, “The Role of Disociation in Sexual Abuse,” in *The Long Journey Home: Understanding and Ministering to the Sexually Abused* (ed. Andrew J. Schmutzer; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 528-38.

I was not disciplined to grieve over the harm Evil inflicted. I was not invited to consider how that “wildness” of my body related to my brokenness.

This is in fact one of the main contributions of James K. A. Smith’s work. In my estimation, he rightly critiques the Western Protestant tradition, of which fundamentalism and evangelicalism are part, for its reduction of the human person to the mind. I find Smith’s image of a bobble head appropriate.<sup>15</sup> The bobblehead approach to spiritual formation is captured well even today in a sign posted on the outside of a prominent evangelical church near where I live: “Think Right, Live Right.” While there is certainly truth in the slogan, the preoccupation with “right thinking” has not been able to deliver on its promise. The “take two verses and call me in the morning” prescription has not been transformative for many earnest believers, including me, and at worst it has further wounded.<sup>16</sup>

This is not however only a “body lesson” of the sexually abused. This is a common “go to” strategy for children no matter the trauma, be it divorce, betrayal, abuse, or bullying. Or violence on Cedarwood Road. It is how a child “makes it on their own”. They don’t know any better. They are resource-less. While these survivors’ minds mature into adulthood, and may even be able to rationally put the trauma in a theological perspective with the “God works all things together for good” (Rom 8:28), or “what you meant for evil God meant for good” (Gen 50:20), the neurons remember. Allender very concretely asks, “How will you care for the neurons that hold chemically and electrically the charges of your childhood memory?”

In my first appointment with Scott, I told him four things that had led me to his office that day: (1) Emotionally disconnected, (2) surprising fits of rage seemingly from nowhere, (3) a struggle with sexual sin I couldn’t beat and (4) an obsession with accomplishment driven by an imposter syndrome. Each of these “presenting problems,” as it turned out, was actually a signpost of the life of God. They are photo negatives of the “Land of Promise”; they were my “Egypt” – the oasis and house of slavery. And each one points to the plotline of my body’s story, to its narrative meaning.

So I began the hard work of entering into my story. Allender refers to it as “incarnating into your story.” It is the process of going to the ground, into the dirt of the detail, in contrast to taking a more general 10,000 feet flyover approach, remembering the details of the plot of the story to the degree that the heart is pierced deeply, and intense anger and grief come. This is an imaginative process given the nature of memory. Memory studies have shown that perceptions immediately shape past events. Memory taps our imagination since we don’t remember mere facts, we remember *story*. The story we remember is not “what actually happened,” but how our imaginations have *storied* the past. But this potential “inaccuracy” matters

<sup>15</sup> “We could describe this as ‘bobble head’ Christianity, so fixated on the cognitive that it assumes a picture of human beings that look like bobble heads: mammoth heads that dwarf an almost nonexistent body.” (James K. A. Smith, *Desiring* 42-43).

<sup>16</sup> Andrew J. Schmutzer, “Sexual Abuse,” 73.



little in this process because what is most important is how the story we remember forms the script our body enacts.

According to Allender, a way of recognizing the presence of healing is the dissolution of ambivalence: the presence of a new passionate hatred for evil and the desire to wage war with it on behalf of others. This is transformation of the heart from death to life. It is the result of God’s transformative kindness syncing the body with the mind. For me, it is a work that continues.

I have set about the process of naming “the vows” my body made in my early adolescence in order to survive. One of the most significant lessons, given its impact on my marriage and relationship with my kids, is my disdain for intimacy. I have named the fact that when I am in intimate moments, my body screams, “Eject! Eject!” It looks for the nearest exist and leaves. If I’m unable to physically leave, my body makes me cynical of the intimacy. When I look in the eyes of my wife in an intimate embrace, for example, I can’t keep a straight face. I start to giggle like a schoolboy. Why? Is it because I haven’t thought rightly? I’ve not yet been fully convinced of an idea? I haven’t applied a verse to the situation? No, it is because my body is “dumb,” and it needs the help of my mind to name and to grieve the harm it carries.<sup>17</sup>

Through that therapeutic process, I discovered a lesson which has since been confirmed by my study of James K. A. Smith’s work as well as that of other phenomenologists, the most important being Maurice Merleau-Ponty on whom Smith depends. Additionally, the work of the Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann on the Psalms of Lament has also proved useful. The lesson: *the way to openheartedness is through the imaginative and incarnate naming of the harm Evil has done*. What I didn’t know at the start of this process, but I have since learned, is that, first, imagination is the organ of the heart/body – if you want to reach the body you’ve got to engage the imagination; second, the incarnation demands that as Christ assumed full humanity to save us wholly, we must seek by grace to assume our whole selves—body and spirit—in that redemption; and, third, lament is God’s gift to believers of an imaginative, incarnated practice of prayer for the naming, submitting and relinquishing of our bodily wounds. Lament is what Smith calls “the church’s performative response” to evil.<sup>18</sup> It is to these issues of anthropology, theology and biblical lament that I now turn.

In the rest of the essay, I will continue to make the case that brokenness is the path to a discipleship of openheartedness by describing three resources from which pastoral theology can draw to foster openhearted discipleship first in ourselves and then in the people we pastor as we follow after “the man of sorrows” who is “acquainted with grief”: (1) embodied anthropology, (2) embodied theology and (3) biblical lament.

<sup>17</sup> This description is something like what Smith describes in his introduction when he has to explain using cognition to undermine cognition with the words of Proust: “. . . it is intellect we must call on to establish this inferiority” (see James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, xiii).

<sup>18</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring*, 194.

## II. THE HUMAN CREATURE – “WE DO NOT MERELY HAVE, BUT ARE OUR BODIES”<sup>19</sup>

My understanding of the human as an “embodied narrative animal” and my inclination of the importance of imagination in the process of healing have been significantly helped by Smith’s recent works.<sup>20</sup> It is not an exaggeration to say that his work has been transformative by opening up a philosophical world of which I had not previously been aware. It was really God’s providence that brought me to engage Smith’s work at the time I did.

In *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom*, Smith draws on a wide range of intellectual resources to make his arguments, from phenomenology, philosophy of religion, and science. Smith is most dependent on the phenomenologies of French philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu.<sup>21</sup> I was unaware of both until reading Smith. And, subsequently, Smith’s introduction sparked my interest in existentialist phenomenology and has led me deeply into Merleau-Ponty’s work. I’ve also become familiar with other more recent work being done on the topic of our body’s role in forming our knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

The primary target in Smith’s work is the “distorted understanding of worldview that dominates current models” of Christian Education, and by extension, Christian formation, which “assumes a rationalist, intellectualist, cognitivist model of the human person.” The problem is “it fails to honor the fact that we are embodied, material, fundamentally desiring animals who are, whether we recognize it or not (and perhaps most when we don’t recognize it), every day being formed by the material liturgies of other pedagogies—at the mall, at the stadium, on television, and so forth.”

Smith does not address the topic, but an obvious implication of his argument is the deformative effect of the pedagogy of abuse and trauma has on the body. Smith argues that “[current models of Christian formation] fail to form us for the kingdom precisely because they are inattentive to the centrality of embodied, material, liturgical practice for such formation.”<sup>23</sup>

In these conventional models the disembodiment of person inherent within them means the elimination of our “temporality.” In Smith’s words, “If humans are conceived almost as being without bodies, then they also

<sup>19</sup> Smith (*Imagining*, 19, n. 44) quoting Alasdair MacIntyre. Originally Marcel.

<sup>20</sup> This section primarily interacts with Smith’s work on phenomenology because the paper was originally given at the 2014 CPT’s Fellowship which focused on Smith’s two books. Jamie was present at the Fellowship and responded to the papers. I am thankful for his input.

<sup>21</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception, and Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (transl. Donald A. Landes; New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> See for example, Shaun Gallagher, *How the Body Shapes the Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring* 33.

are portrayed as creatures *without histories*.<sup>24</sup> This is important because an account of being human that cannot explain the way our bodies have memory, cannot then account for the way our bodies influence our living, an influence out of sight of our cognition. Smith’s embodied anthropology supports the thrust of this essay: bodies must be allowed to process what they know in ways that bend them toward God. This account of anthropology and the role of body in both our deformation and formation I find convincing intellectually, but more so, experientially.

Although introducing his “liturgical anthropology” in *Desiring the Kingdom*, it is in *Imagining the Kingdom* where Smith engages the French phenomenologists, specifically Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Pierre Bourdieu, in order to put his “Christian phenomenology”<sup>25</sup> (or a “phenomenology of embodiment”<sup>26</sup>) on firm footing philosophically. He provides an account of the importance of “the kinaesthetic [“bodily basis of meaning”] and the poetic [“imagination”].” These concepts help to recognize and explain the “intertwinement of the body and story as the nexus of formation that ultimately generates action.”<sup>27</sup>

Smith describes how “the body carries a kind of acquired, habituated knowledge or know-how that is irreducible and inarticulable, and yet fundamentally orienting for our being-in-the-world.”<sup>28</sup> An embodied anthropology, according to Smith, “(1) recognizes the nonconscious, pretheoretical ‘drivers’ of our action and behavior . . . (2) accounts for the bodily formation of our habituated orientation to the world; and thus (3) appreciates the centrality of story as rooted in this ‘bodily basis of meaning’ and as a kind of pretheoretical compass that guides and generates human action.”<sup>29</sup>

Phenomenology explains a person’s actions to be the result of unconscious, prereflective motivations or inclinations that are hardly ever brought to the level of conscious reflection. What’s more, phenomenology describes those motivations as emanating from bodily meaning—as opposed to cognitive meaning—acquired through practices and reflected in paradigmatic, but largely unconscious, stories we live by. “Those stories and narratives that prime and orient my very perception of the world tap into the deep wells of my embodied unconscious. I learn these stories with my body.”<sup>30</sup> Smith writes:

Most often, and most fundamentally, there is an unarticulated (and inarticulable) set of dispositions and inclinations that are activated immediately upon perceiving a situation—because that perception is already an evaluation, a “take,” a construal that is “seen” emotionally..

<sup>24</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Desiring*, 47 (emphasis added).

<sup>25</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 21.

<sup>27</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 16.

<sup>28</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 45.

<sup>29</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 13-14.

<sup>30</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 39.

That emotional perception of a situation is not merely a hardwired, biological reflex; it is an acquired habit.<sup>31</sup>

Smith's employs phenomenology to reimagine Christian formation to take sufficient account of the influence of bodily meaning and its attendant elements of story and imagination, on the human being. Smith states:

Having fallen prey to the intellectualism of modernity, both Christian worship and the embodied Christian pedagogy have underestimated the importance of this body/story nexus—this inextricable link between imagination, narrative, and embodiment—thereby forgetting the ancient Christian [and Jewish] sacramental wisdom carried in the historic practices of Christian worship and the embodied legacies of spiritual and monastic disciplines.<sup>32</sup>

Smith uses the term “imagination” to “name a kind of faculty by which we navigate and make sense of our world, but in ways and on a register that flies below the radar of conscious reflection, and specifically in ways that are fundamentally aesthetic in nature.”<sup>33</sup> He says, “I am regularly ‘making sense’ of my world on a register that has nothing to do with logic or even ‘knowledge’ as usually defined.” In this way, Merleau-Ponty surmises, “I navigate my world with an ‘intelligence’ that has nothing to do with intellectualism.”<sup>34</sup>

The implication of this idea is far-reaching. The habitual movement of our bodies in a particular direction forms the way we see reality. The way we reason about the reality we perceive is not objective or unmediated. Our minds do not directly engage the world. Our minds engage the world through our bodies. The body becomes the unrecognized and imperceptible pane on the world and on our understanding of self. If that pane is tinted and warped, then we see a distorted world, but we might never know it. To make matters worse, Christian formation that aims only at the renewal of the mind, however biblical, will prove to be only marginally effective.

We learn five important lessons about embodied anthropology from the phenomenologists like Smith and Merleau-Ponty: (1) Our current model of Christian formation insufficiently accounts for the human being, and is, therefore, ineffective. And this is because (2) humans relate to the world first and primarily bodily not cognitively. Thus, (3) we are formed as much or more by our bodily practices and experiences than by our thinking. This means: (4) our bodies have “know-how” and intelligence that developed precognitively through the doing of things and things done to us and this know-how is both irreducible (it cannot be re-expressed otherwise), and out of the grasp of our consciousness, at least unless we intentionally focus our cognition on it. And (5) the human

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<sup>31</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 39.

<sup>32</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 39.

<sup>33</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 51; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

faculty through which our bodies and minds find unity is the imagination because of its ability to speak through our mind to our heart by story. “The way to the heart is through the body, and the way into the body is through story.”<sup>35</sup>

Below, I hope to show that biblical lament gets our bodies involved in processing its story of trauma. And the primary way it does this is through activating our imaginations in prayer.

### III. THEOLOGICAL RESOURCES— “WHAT IS NOT NAMED”

In reclaiming our bodies in theology, Beth Felker Jones has very recently reminded us:

In a world influenced by Plato and Descartes, a dualist concept of what it means to be human has creeping roots buried deep within us. Our default understandings of human being, therefore, are often more Platonic, Cartesian, or gnostic than they are Christian. We speak all the time as though the really important part of who we are is an immaterial, spiritual, or even purely cognitive thing.<sup>36</sup>

Here is how Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it eloquently and forcefully in 1933 when he reflected on the account in Genesis 2:

Even Darwin or Feuerbach would not use stronger language than is used here. Humankind is derived from a piece of earth. Its bond with the earth belongs to its essential being. The “earth is its mother”; it comes out of her womb . . . It is God’s earth out of which humankind is taken. From it human beings have their *bodies*. The body belongs to a person’s essence. The body is not the prison, the shell, the exterior, of a human being; instead the human being is a human body. A human being “is” body and soul . . . What is to be taken seriously about human existence is its bond with mother earth, its being as body.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, it is often Christian doctrine itself that is in fact the problem; remember the aforementioned sign: “Think Right, Live Right.” But the incarnation of Messiah Jesus demands an *embodied* theology.<sup>38</sup> There has been significant work done on the subject in the last couple of decades. And most recently, there’s recognition that the body is a fulcrum

<sup>35</sup> James K. A. Smith, *Imagining*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), loc. 1961-65.

<sup>37</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Exposition of Genesis 1-3* (3; ed. Douglas S. Bax; trans. John W. De Gruchy; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 76-77.

<sup>38</sup> James B. Nelson, *Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1979); Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *I Am My Body: A Theology of Embodiment* (New York: Continuum, 1995); Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds: Gender Politics and Bodily Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Joy A. Schroeder, *Sexual Abuse*,

of brokenness. Beth Felker Jones has made the point well: “The theology of the body is important because real bodies are broken, beaten, raped, tortured, and killed.”<sup>39</sup>

I will make the particular point that embodied theology centered on the incarnation of the Messiah in the already-not-yet invites us to name that which we hope to have healed. So the incarnation teaches us something about God and something about ourselves.

*First about God.* In recent years, I have become something of a fan of Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the founder of the modern Moravian movement. The Brethren revival of the late 18th century on Zinzendorf’s German estate, called Herrnhut, led to the modern missions movement. It is largely forgotten that both John and Charles Wesley were influenced by Zinzendorf at the early stages of the Methodist movement. About 5 years ago, I became enamored with the Christian history of the Czech lands. I have had the privilege of doing significant ministry there over the course of the last half-decade. Czech has a long history of faith, though that has all but been eroded in the last century from wars and occupations, Nazism and communism. Nevertheless, even today the legacy of leaders like Jan Hus, John Comenius, and Zinzendorf remains; the bronze statue of Hus stands as a centerpiece in Prague’s Old City center.

Zinzendorf’s Christology has been particularly influential on me. Zinzendorf is both praised and criticized for his preoccupation with the concrete suffering of Jesus. His language, in both sermons and hymns (he composed over a 1000 hymns), borders on the grotesque, with its concrete emphasis on the wounded God—a theme that has been reinvigorated by others more recently. Unfortunately, Zinzendorf has provided little resource to those attempting to rethink theology through Jesus’ crucifixion. Scan the indexes of these recent works and Zinzendorf is absent.<sup>40</sup>

In particular, Arthur J. Freeman, in what is the most comprehensive presentation of Zinzendorf’s theology in the English language, notes the importance of John 20 for Zinzendorf’s “wounds of Jesus” theology. For Zinzendorf, “the significance of the incarnation was continued in Christ’s post-resurrection existence. He takes his wounds and his humanity with him to heaven, where he remains wounded for us, the one who loves us with a gentle and patient love. There is no other God than the wounded one. God never leaves the wounds behind.”<sup>41</sup> For Zinzendorf, Jesus’ suffering forever defines God. The God we worship and serve is the “God of wounds.” “The wounds of Christ are his identity.”<sup>42</sup> Scott Ellington

<sup>39</sup> Beth Felker Jones, *Marks of His Wounds*, 11.

<sup>40</sup> See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Richard J. Mouw and Douglas A. Sweeney, *The Suffering and Victorious Christ: Toward a More Compassionate Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> Arthur J. Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Bethlehem; Winston-Salem: Moravian Church in America, 1998), iv.

<sup>42</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 92.

aptly writes, “God’s suffering is integral to his nature and expressions of his mercy, wrath, forgiveness, and judgment are shaped and qualified by his pathos.”<sup>43</sup>

Glenn Pemberton asks, “Do we envision a God who weeps over us as his heart breaks, suffering with us . . . Do we worship a God incarnate in Jesus, the suffering man of sorrows who knows our grief, or only the Christ in triumphal entry?”<sup>44</sup> His questions reveal an important fact: the degree to which we do envision a God who knows suffering and suffers with us is the degree to which we practice lament. Given where the church is theologically in the West, it is not surprising that the practice of lament has been all but lost.

We must capture a vision of the savior who, in the recent words of Richard Mouw and Doug Sweeney, “suffered for us” uniquely and historically, but who also “suffers with us.” In their book, *The Suffering and Victorious Christ*, Mouw and Sweeney reflect from the Reformed tradition on “divine empathy” in order to offer a “more compassionate Christology.” They state, “we are convinced that we need to give much more attention than our traditions historically have to the ways in which God’s plan of the incarnation arose in large part from his desire to enter into the frailties, fears, and agonies of the human condition in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>45</sup>

Nicholas Wolterstorff painfully and redemptively describes how his grief for his the premature death of his son revealed that the truth contained in the incarnation is the truth of God’s own suffering. Desiring some satisfying answer from God about his suffering, God was silent. Wolterstorff writes, “We strain to hear. But instead of hearing answer we catch sight of God himself scraped and torn. Through our tears we see the tears of God.”<sup>46</sup>

A great mystery: to redeem our brokenness and lovelessness the God who suffers with us did not strike some mighty blow of power but sent his beloved son to suffer like us, through his suffering to redeem us from suffering and evil.<sup>47</sup>

To this end, I have been captured of late by the lyrics of that old Hymn: “Man of Sorrows,” which presents the compassionate Christology of Wolterstorff and Mouw and Sweeney providing the content for a theological reimagination:

“Man of Sorrows!” what a name  
For the Son of God, who came

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<sup>43</sup> Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth*, 186.

<sup>44</sup> Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God: Learning to Lament with the Psalms* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2012), 194-95.

<sup>45</sup> Richard J. Mouw and Douglas A. Sweeney, *The Suffering and Victorious Christ*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 80.

<sup>47</sup> Wolterstorff, *Lament*, 81.

Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
"Full atonement!" can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;  
"It is finished!" was His cry;  
Now in Heav'n exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew His song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

*Now about us.* Gregory of Nazianzus, the fourth-century Greek father has said famously: "What is not assumed is not healed." He said this in response to the Christological debates raging at the time. Against those who wished to deny Jesus full humanity, Gregory argued that to the extent Jesus was human is the extent that humanness can be saved and healed. For if Jesus was only partially human, then only that of which he was a part can be saved and healed. But because he became fully human, all of our humanness can and will be healed.

But there is a dilemma. There is a limit to our healing in this life on two accounts. First, there is a limit to the healing because while Jesus was both fully human and fully divine, we are not. We are becoming divine, in the language of Athanasius, but that work is yet fully realized this side of eternity. The reality of the eschatological overlap of the ages places a limit on the extent of healing in this body in this time. The Apostle Paul points to this reality in Romans 8:23: "And it is not only creation. We ourselves who have the Spirit as the first crop of the harvest also groan inside as we wait to be adopted and *for our bodies to be set free.*" There is "bentness" in our bodies that may very well not be straightened until God "makes all things new."

In addition, even if it were theoretically possible to be fully healed, fully saved, fully divine here and now, we have a significant role to play in the process. There is then another side to Gregory's statement: Not only is what is not assumed is not healed, but also *what is not named is not healed.*



Until we *name* the evil and harm done, until we bring to our immediate and direct consciousness what *Evil* has done, and our allying with Evil, as did the first humans (Genesis 3), and until we repent of our cooperation with Evil, we will not experience a level of healing in this life. Dan Allender has said, “You’ll never address the issues of abuse until you have named the abuse . . . you have to name what is true . . . Freedom will grow to the degree that you grieve and are angry about what has happened to you.”<sup>48</sup> Equally expressive of this point is Walter Brueggemann:

It is the key insight of Freud that until there is an embrace of honest helplessness, there is no true gospel that can be heard. Until the idols have been exposed, there is no chance of the truth of the true God. It is telling that these psalms use the words “pit/Sheol/waters/depths,” for in therapy, one must be “in the depths” if there is to be new life. Freud has seen that the utter abandonment of pretense is a prerequisite to new joy.<sup>49</sup>

The benefits of and the condition for naming evil is captured well by M. Scott Peck in his classic work on evil: “To name something correctly gives us a certain amount of power over it . . . Knowing its name, I know something of the dimensions of that force. Because I have that much of a safe ground on which to stand, I can afford to be curious about its nature. I can afford to move toward it.”<sup>50</sup>

The grace and kindness of God when meditated upon in the context of a healing community of faith gives us the courage to move toward the harm Evil has done and name it with blushing detail. The painful process leads to a connection with the person who experienced the wound. Individually, it is that part of our person with whom we’ve spent little time—the “inner boy or girl:” that 5-year-old boy who found his mother dead in the bathtub; that 13-year-old girl who was sexually molested by her uncle for 3 years—that part of ourselves we’ve compartmentalized and have largely only contempt toward. Corporately, the naming of Evil connects us to other communities in our neighborhoods and cities and in the wider world, communities that are under assault by Evil. Grieving over their experience of Evil produces compassion and solidarity.

The connection doesn’t crack open the heart automatically however. This leads me to another theological resource prized by the Desert Fathers of the Eastern Church: the “gift of tears.” Bishop Kallistos Ware writes:

The gift of tears . . . has an important place in the spiritual tradition of the Christian East. The “theology of tears” plays a particularly significant role in the teaching of St. John Climacus, St. Isaac the Syrian, and St. Symeon the New Theologian . . . St. Isaac regards tears as the crucial boundary between the “bodily” and the “spiritual state,” as the point of transition between the present age and the

<sup>48</sup> Dan B. Allender, “The Wounded Heart.”

<sup>49</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms in the Life*, 21.

<sup>50</sup> M. Scott Peck, *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (London: Arrow Books, 1983), 76.

Age to come, which may be entered by anticipation even in this life. The newborn child weeps as it is born into the world; similarly, the Christian weeps as he is reborn into the age to come.<sup>51</sup>

While there is a difference that must be observed carefully and discerned between sensual tears and spiritual tears, according to Ware, there is not a “radical and clear-cut division between these two types of tears.” Ware explains: “Natural or sensual tears may sometimes have a positive and purifying effect . . . Grace cooperates with nature and builds upon it; and so natural tears when purged of sinful self-centeredness and of disordered emotionalism, can lead us to the threshold of spiritual weeping.”<sup>52</sup>

This idea of the “gift of tears” is personally significant. I cannot produce the tears. It’s not that I’m unemotional, something of a stoic personality. In the past, I’ve chalked it up to personality. But I see the emotion coming out sideways: in anger, lust, and a drive to accomplish. I’ve stopped reducing it to a question of personality. I became curious about the mixed messages my body was giving: on the one hand passionate, on the other dead.

My ambivalence around issues of woundedness, as I’ve already noted, is so deep—my heart so calloused by my precognitive tactics of survival—that I am numb. I have often bemoaned to my therapist, “When will the dam of emotion burst? I want to weep. I want to feel.” The tears, while they have come, they have come only in drops. I want a flood. I want restoration and healing. So I wait. But patience is hard fought. I want to live in the kingdom of heaven now, in the words of Augustine, “before the appointed time.”<sup>53</sup>

The “theology of tears” teaches me that they are a gift. They must be received. They are not, however, a gift only for the most devout. They are a basic gift of the Spirit. They are a gift my heavenly Father has and wants to share with me. I mentioned to my therapist the idea of the “gift of tears.” The waiting, he agreed, also says something about just how precious those tears really are. They are not discovered quickly. They aren’t at the surface.

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<sup>51</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, 56; cf. also: Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 101; Douglas Burton-Christie, *The Word in the Desert: Scripture and the Quest for Holiness in Early Christian Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 185-90; William Harmless, *Desert Christians: An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 239-40

<sup>52</sup> Bishop Kallistos Ware, *The Inner Kingdom*, 56.

<sup>53</sup> “Since it is necessary in this life that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven should be subjected to temptations among erring and impious men, that they may be exercised, and “tried as gold in the furnace,” we ought not before the appointed time to desire to live with those alone who are holy and righteous, so that, by patience, we may deserve to receive this blessedness in its proper time” (Augustine of Hippo, “Letters of St. Augustine,” in *The Confessions and Letters of St. Augustine with a Sketch of His Life and Work* [ed. Philip Schaff; trans. J. G. Cunningham; vol. 1; A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series; Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886], 1553-554, emphasis added).

Those tears have been buried deep into the heart. They are connected to something so precious and sacred they will only come with time.”

As a liturgy, lament attends to my body, and therefore the heart by placing my body into postures that open it up to receive God’s gift. Lament invites God’s people to tell the stories of personal and corporate woundedness. Lament engages the heart through imaginatively entering into those stories. The practice of lament fosters bodily grief and by doing so draws out what is deeply buried in the heart. Scott Ellington rightly affirms the necessity of lament for the wounded: “The prayer of lament remains a resource for all who experience a suffering that diminishes the fullness of life . . . lament is first and foremost the province of the foreigner, the widow, the deformed, and the destitute.”<sup>54</sup>

#### IV. LITURGICAL PRACTICE OF LAMENT— “EMBODIED IMAGINATIVE PRAYER”

Walter Brueggemann has done much to help us understand the Psalms; nowhere is that truer than with the Psalms of Lament. Brueggemann named the Lament Psalms, psalms of “dislocation” and “disorientation” which reflects something Paul Ricoeur, someone greatly influenced by Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology, developed in his “interpretation theory.” Ricoeur observed that the movement between disorientation and reorientation characterizes human life. What’s more, Ricoeur’s sympathetic interaction with advocates of the “hermeneutic of suspicion” such as Marx and Nietzsche, but especially Freud, led him to look for a way to hold in tension the opposing hermeneutic of “re-presentation,” the approach that recaptures the fullness of meaning in the old realities on the other side of necessary deconstruction. Brueggemann writes, “Ricoeur argues that these two hermeneutics are both essential and must be seen in a dialectic of displacement and recapture.”<sup>55</sup> What use does displacement or suspicion have in the life of faith? Brueggemann makes the case that:

It is precisely the dispossession of false and deceptive positions that can lead to the recovery of powerful symbols. Thus, the two works that must both be carried on are (a) the criticism of idols, and (b) heeding the true God who will make all things new.<sup>56</sup>

Dan Allender calls this “disillusionment.” This is the necessary first step in repentance. And it is inextricably linked with sadness, grief, and sorrow. Allender writes:

Sadness opens the heart to what was meant to be and is not. Grief opens the heart to what was not meant to be and is. Sorrow breaks the heart as it exposes the damage we’ve done to others as a result of our unwillingness to rely solely on the grace and truth of God . . . Grief does not regain what was lost, but it breaks the tendency to

<sup>54</sup> Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth*, 191.

<sup>55</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms in the Life*, 18.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms in the Life*, 18.

resort to self-hatred to resolve the anguish of the loss. Grief exposes the hardness of the contemptuous heart and replaces it with supple tenderness and vulnerability ... sorrow unto life moves from grief over our own victimization to an acknowledgment of the damage we have done to others as a result of our choice to live dead and dormant.<sup>57</sup>

Brueggemann argues that it is just this displacement that the Psalms of Lament give voice to. And it is a liturgy that can lead us out of false illusion and into openheartedness. Lament is the “Cedarwood Road.”

“Lament,” Glenn Pemberton defines, “is a structured, controlled language that by its methodical cadence helps restore a modicum of structure in times of disorientation ... Like the ritual actions of a wedding or funeral, these movements of lament enable us to negotiate the liminal space of pain with words that communicate to our God within a controlled setting. In a way, lament itself begins to restore some sense of order in the midst of chaos.”<sup>58</sup>

Lament is “the language of suffering, the voicing of suffering.”<sup>59</sup> And the semantics of lament is at times uncensored, raw, and very real. Particularly in the sections of imprecation the speech is aggressive, imaginative, and vicious. Brueggemann comments:

This is the voice of resentment and vengeance that will not be satisfied until God works retaliation on those who have done wrong ... While we may think this ignoble and unworthy, it demonstrates that in these psalms of disorientation, as life collapses, the old disciplines and safeguards also collapse. One speaks unguardedly about how it in fact is. The stunning fact is that Israel does not purge this unguardedness but regards it as genuinely faithful communication.<sup>60</sup>

Lament also functions at the level of our imagination more than our intellect. Using poetic verse, engaging memory, and employing evocative and creative language, the elements of lament are the work of imagination. The songs function to evoke and form new realities that did not exist until, or apart from, the actual singing of the song. Thus, the speech of the new song imaginatively recognizes both what is given, and also evokes it, calls it into being, and forms it.<sup>61</sup> Through the speech of lament, the wildness of our imagination meets the level of our hurt.

Finally, Brent Strawn has very recently noted the “therapeutic” nature of the Psalms generally. He reflects on the nature of the Psalms from

<sup>57</sup> Dan B. Allender, *The Wounded Heart: Hope for Adult Victims of Childhood Sexual Abuse* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2008), 205-06. See also Scott A. Ellington, *Risking Truth*, 185.

<sup>58</sup> Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God*, 65.

<sup>59</sup> Nicholas Wolterstorff, “If God is Good and Sovereign, Why Lament?,” *CTJ* 36 (2001): 42.

<sup>60</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 55.

<sup>61</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Message*, 55.

both a liturgical and psychological point of view. The liturgical says “from whom no secrets are hid” while the psychological observes “we are only as sick as our secrets.” Combining the two, Strawn suggests that “the biblical psalms are ultimately *therapeutic*. They exist for our healing and for the healing of the world, or yet further, as Brueggemann would no doubt have it, for our healing for the healing of the world.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, he writes:

The Psalms witness to a place where no secrets are hid from God, where it is, in fact, *impossible* to hide secrets from God. But the Psalms do not simply attest to such a place: insofar as they function as models of prayer that can be re-uttered—or, in Brueggemann’s terms, “reperformed”—the Psalms themselves *disclose* such a place. In the process of praying these ancient prayers, that is, every time we re-utter and reperform them, the Psalms realize and manifest in us who pray them full disclosure. In this way, the Psalms not only model the practice of disclosure but also become the very way we disclose everything, even and especially our deepest secrets, before God.<sup>63</sup>

In the practice of lament, then, there is a redemptive and circular process of learning, practice, and transformation.

We learn

... how to use imagination to grieve and to hope  
 ... that the God to whom we speak is one of “sorrows, acquainted with grief”  
 ... what is a properly embodied human and faithful reaction to the harm Evil has done  
 ... that the appropriate place is before God in a community who understands God’s kindness

We practice

... imaginative speech in the truthful naming of our harm  
 ... vulnerable address to God in the midst of a community that knows the goodness of God  
 ... physical postures of humility like fasting

We are transformed

... into openhearted worshipers

In Brueggemann’s prescient words: “Such daring honesty, at God’s throne of mercy, is the only route to transformative well-being. That is the secret of the laments that cannot be hid.”<sup>64</sup>

I will illustrate the elements and nature of a lament by providing a brief commentary on Psalm 109. The elements are not static and in their

<sup>62</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Brent A. Strawn, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid: Introducing the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), xiii

<sup>63</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Brent A. Strawn, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, xiii.

<sup>64</sup> Walter Brueggemann and Brent A. Strawn, *From Whom No Secrets Are Hid*, 92.

use vary widely through the sixty lament Psalms in the Psalter. Still, the forms of the lament are recognizable and distinguish them from other types of Psalms.<sup>65</sup> I have chosen Psalm 109 because it, along with Psalm 88, is the most graphic and raw lament in the Psalter. I wish to show the extent of the Bible's imaginative embodied prayer.

A. Address (v. 1a)

<sup>1</sup> My God, whom I praise,

The first step of the liturgy of Lament is an address to God. Notice the personal nature of the address: "my God"; the one "whom I praise." This liturgy, far from revealing faithlessness, is an expression of bold faith. The personal address represents the fundamental assumption of Lament liturgy: the problems and disorientation I face in my life, are, in fact, God's problems—it has to do with him and his governance of this world. What is more, the personal nature assumes that the God addressed is "pro me."<sup>66</sup> Brueggemann states this eloquently:

[Lament] insists that all such experiences of disorder are a proper subject for discourse with God. Nothing is out of bounds, nothing precluded or inappropriate. Everything properly belongs in this conversation of the heart. To withhold parts of life from that conversation is in fact to withhold part of life from the sovereignty of God. Thus these psalms make the important connection: everything must be *brought to speech*, and everything brought to speech must be *addressed to God*, who is the final reference for all of life.<sup>67</sup>

Lament's first step is a confession of relationship. God you are *my* God.

B. Complaint (vv. 1b-5)

do not remain silent,

<sup>2</sup> for people who are wicked and deceitful  
have opened their mouths against me;  
they have spoken against me with lying tongues.

<sup>3</sup> With words of hatred they surround me;  
they attack me without cause.

<sup>4</sup> In return for my friendship they accuse me,  
but I am a man of prayer.

<sup>5</sup> They repay me evil for good,  
and hatred for my friendship.

<sup>65</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 57.

<sup>66</sup> Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord*, 60.

<sup>67</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Psalms in the Life*, 28.

The next step of the Lament is a complaint. The complaint naturally flows from the firm faith of the previous address. “You are my God, so...” The complaint is *indirectly* a protest against God (“do not be silent *anymore*”) and *directly* against a group of antagonists who have harmed the lamenter.

“Do not be silent” reverberates with a sense of abandonment and absence in a time of need. It names the ambivalence felt by a victim in which God is both present but also absent. He is present because it is his world; he is absent because the harm was done. Behind it lay all the questions of presence: “Where were you God?! How could you let this kind of thing happen under your watch?!” The complaint gives space to say what is most deeply wounding, in a world where God is king what happened, should not have happened.

The lamenter, however, devotes the complaint to the crux of the matter: the harm was done by those whom he had showed *love*. The NIV translation captures it well with the concept of “friendship.” The depth and insidious nature of evil is seen in the irony: those who *should* have been loving were those who abused. The wound was inflicted by someone who should *not* be wounding.

The complaint is a place to name the harm done in all its insidiousness: “my stepbrother sexually molested me;” “my father walked out on my family and left me with no hero;” “my sister’s illness robbed me of my childhood;” “my teenage neighbor was shot dead in the street by one charged with the duty to protect.” Those who should have been *for* me were *against* me. The complaint is the most important part of the lament because it is where we bring to God our harm. It’s the space to imagine the depth and extent of the harm and to put it into speech in the presence of the community of faith. We confront God with the details, not in general, but in *all its specificity*.

### C. Requests & Motivations (vv. 6-29)

#### (1) Request #1 (vv. 6-15)

<sup>6</sup> Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy;  
let an accuser stand at his right hand.

<sup>7</sup> When he is tried, let him be found guilty,  
and may his prayers condemn him.

<sup>8</sup> May his days be few;  
may another take his place of leadership.

<sup>9</sup> May his children be fatherless  
and his wife a widow.

<sup>10</sup> May his children be wandering beggars;  
may they be driven from their ruined homes.

<sup>11</sup> May a creditor seize all he has;  
may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.

<sup>12</sup> May no one extend kindness to him

or take pity on his fatherless children.

- <sup>13</sup> May his descendants be cut off,  
their names blotted out from the next generation.
- <sup>14</sup> May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord;  
may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.
- <sup>15</sup> May their sins always remain before the Lord,  
that he may blot out their name from the earth.

(2) Motivation #1 (vv. 16-20)

- <sup>16</sup> For he never thought of doing a kindness,  
but hounded to death the poor  
and the needy and the brokenhearted.
- <sup>17</sup> He loved to pronounce a curse—  
may it come back on him.  
He found no pleasure in blessing—  
may it be far from him.
- <sup>18</sup> He wore cursing as his garment;  
it entered into his body like water,  
into his bones like oil.
- <sup>19</sup> May it be like a cloak wrapped about him,  
like a belt tied forever around him.
- <sup>20</sup> May this be the Lord's payment to my accusers,  
to those who speak evil of me.

The content of this first set of requests will make most church ladies blush. And it is hard to imagine a context of worship today where such pleas to God would be seen as appropriate. But perhaps this is largely the problem. It is necessary to be reminded that the Psalms were the worship book of Israel and so also for the church. In spite of attempts to marginalize or theologize these imprecatory lines from the life of faith, they express a necessary side of our communication with God. They guide the worshiper to put into speech their disorientation. What's more, the graphic and imaginative nature of the pleas give a voice to our body.

The pleas are directed toward God it must not be forgotten. There is a posture of humility and trust, which was set at the opening of the Psalm and continues throughout. And in light of the space created by the trust, the Psalmist can let his imagination run the whole length of his hurt.

(3) Request #2 (v. 21)

- <sup>21</sup> But you, Sovereign Lord,  
help me for your name's sake;  
out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.



## (4) Motivation #2 (vv. 22-25)

<sup>22</sup> For I am poor and needy,  
and my heart is wounded within me.

<sup>23</sup> I fade away like an evening shadow;  
I am shaken off like a locust.

<sup>24</sup> My knees give way from fasting;  
my body is thin and gaunt.

<sup>25</sup> I am an object of scorn to my accusers;  
when they see me, they shake their heads.

Two important aspects of the Psalmist’s attempt to cause God to act are noteworthy. First, the state of the worshiper is described in the parallel lines of 109:22 with the terms: poor (‘āniy), needy (‘ebyon), and wounded of heart (leby halal). The terms “poor” and “needy” are synonymous. Put together, they emphasize the depth of the experience. The parallelism with the second line is either developmental or synonymous: either we are to understand them as saying the same thing, or the second line offers a further element. In either case, the point is clear. And in connection to 109:25, the Psalmist is shamed and humiliated. This verse comes close to Jesus’ statement recorded in Matthew: “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:5).

The second element noteworthy here is also another connection to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. Psalm 109:24 states, “My knees give way from fasting, my body is thin and gaunt.” The translation (and the NIV is not alone) obscures *the focus on fasting* which is in both lines and puts the emphasis of the lines in the wrong place. Literally the lines read: “my knees buckle from fasting, my body thins from the oil [of fasting].” I have added “of fasting,” which is implied. Interestingly, it coordinates with Jesus’ teaching about fasting in Matthew 6:17: “put oil on your head” when fasting. The lines are in synonymous parallelism, meaning the second *restates* the first. The focus then is on *fasting* and, particularly, on the length of fasting. The worshiper is registering the fact that he has been fasting over this for a very long time, long enough that he’s physically broken down and thin. The point: this guy has been pleading with God over this issue for a long time.

Fasting is a constitutive element of lament. It is perhaps the most bodily element of lament. Fasting is to lament what relaxing, curling up, and lying down is to sleeping. Merleau-Ponty observed that we “invite” sleep that comes to us not by an explicit conscious willing on our part but not entirely without our participation either.<sup>68</sup>

## (5) Request #3 (vv. 26-29)

<sup>26</sup> Help me, Lord my God;  
save me according to your unfailing love.

<sup>68</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 166-67.

- <sup>27</sup> Let them know that it is your hand,  
that you, Lord, have done it.
- <sup>28</sup> While they curse, may you bless;  
may those who attack me be put to shame,  
but may your servant rejoice.
- <sup>29</sup> May my accusers be clothed with disgrace  
and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.

The Psalmist makes essentially one general expressed here and earlier in 109:21: "Help me," "save me", "deliver me." These three imperatives are grounded in his relationship to a God whose lovingkindness is "good." The worshiper holds on to this truth in spite of the truth of his life experience. It is the very reason he offers this lament at all.

#### D. Praise (vv. 30-31)

- <sup>30</sup> With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord;  
in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him.
- <sup>31</sup> For he stands at the right hand of the needy,  
to save their lives from those who would condemn them.

The structured nature of the lament leads the worshiper to a new orientation, eventually. This is clearly not a straightforward movement. One does not simply go through the steps of the lament and come out of it singing praises. The very content of the lament here speaks against such a mechanical understanding.

Lament is not a five step process through which a person may move at a brisk pace; life is not so simple nor is the relinquishment of pain so easy . . . While the crux of lament is hope over despair, it is not a matter of optimism in which we believe "everything will get better" . . . "the spine of lament is hope."<sup>69</sup>

However slight the grip may become, lament sustains a hold on hope. It moves forward through disorientation to a new orientation, a matured naiveté.

Lament creates openheartedness because it gives a place for our bodies to grieve the harm Evil inflicts. And it keeps the worshiper from cynicism because it fosters an abiding hope. Lament, on the one hand, treats evil *appropriately*. It is realistic about its nature and its affect on both our body and our world. Lament fosters the proper response. On the other hand, lament processes the Evil before and with God and consequently sustains hope and ends ambivalence.

<sup>69</sup> Glenn Pemberton, *Hurting with God*, 72-73.

V. THE HABITUS OF LAMENT—  
"EMPHATIC PRESENCE"

Zion is the most openhearted person in my life. Of course, he is seven. We all started openhearted. It is the quality of being a child—in fact it is surely related to Jesus' statement about the necessity to become childlike to enter into the kingdom. Zion's openheartedness sometimes is breathtakingly demonstrable. Recently, we had some students over for a cookout, and one of them, Ryan Lownsberry (pronounced like "Clownsberry" he once told me when I mis-pronounced it) played with Zion all afternoon. We finally rescued Ryan for time of reflection around the fire. Zion was not very happy about this, even though he was allowed to watch cartoons while we chatted. Right before Zion had to go to bed, Ryan played with him again. But it was short lived; it was late, and there was school in the morning. Zion was undone. He was devastated that the happiness he was experiencing with Ryan had to come to an end. It was the heights of happy to the depths of sorrow in the matter of seconds. So connected. I walked Zion up to his bed as he sobbed, protested, argued. We got his pajamas on and tucked in; still fighting, still undone. I asked him what he was so upset about. He said, "I want to keep playing." I said, "Zion its time to go to bed." "No!" he shouted. I sat with him. Eventually, he was able to talk; he accepted the fact that he was going to bed.

I told him that what he was feeling was totally right. It is very sad that happiness is so fleeting in this life. I told him that God made us to live in perpetual happiness. We were meant to enjoy happiness always. It is what our hearts long for. And yet there is nothing more fleeting in this life than a moment of happiness. Happiness is something that cannot be held. It comes quickly and leaves faster. I told him, "This is *something* to be really sad about." In that moment, his sadness was so right. It was fully human. It was revelatory. I felt sad for him, and I noticed in his sadness my own; a sadness I had never grieved. I too know the reality of the extreme brevity of happiness, but it has not been something over which I've grieved. But I should. And it is why the hope of heaven is so meaningful—to be that openhearted, to be able to experience intense joy and deep sorrow.

Because I have begun to grieve what Evil has done in my own life, I was able to lead Zion through his experience of lament. We lamented what Evil has done to God's good creation. We named it. We brought it to conscious expression and put creative language to it. We felt the sadness of it. And we proclaimed the hope of heaven together. As his father, I grieved with and for Zion.

Here is what this essay all comes down to: God's grief connects him to me; my grief connects me both to God and to others. This is openheartedness. This is *the pattern of life* following in the way of the "Man of Sorrows."