

From Overwhelm to Overflow: Reclaiming Lament as Covenant Speech

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Psalm 42 & 43:

- Scripture reading: Psalms 42 & 43 (ESV)
 - Originally one song in ancient Coptic Bible, later divided into two psalms
 - Written by Sons of Korah, not David as commonly attributed
 - Genre: Maskil - contemplative, slow jam, dirge-like song with didactic wisdom
 - Repeats key refrain: “Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Put your hope in God”
- Central theme: Moving from overwhelmed to overflow through lament
- Context: National crisis moment where “so many things have been going on all at once”

Sons of Korah Background

- Descendants of Korah who rebelled against Moses in wilderness
 - Korah questioned Moses’ authority: “Who said you get to speak for God? Does not God speak to all of us?”
 - Used influence to incite rebellion, led 200 people to death
 - Ground literally opened up and swallowed Korah - visible, severe judgment
 - Generational story: “My granddad got... the ground opened up and ate him”
- God’s mercy tempered severity - spared Korah’s descendants unlike typical Old Testament judgment
 - Usually God would “wipe out you and your whole family and all your kids and your sons and daughters and your greasy granny”
 - This time showed restraint, visited judgment only on Korah himself
- Became Levitical priests, doorkeepers, sanctuary dwellers
 - Prophet Samuel descended from this line
 - Understood both God’s severity and mercy firsthand
 - Had “right perspective of God” despite generational trauma
 - Wrote songs from vantage point of complex generational story
- Hebrew concept of hesed: steadfast love of God remaining despite generational rebellion

Understanding Lament

- Definition: Language of soul refusing to go silent in dissonance

- Believing God while life doesn't reflect that belief
- "Sadness of an expectation that God was going to move, and he didn't move the way you thought he would, and he didn't move in the timing that you thought he would"
- Heart trying to make sense while needing honesty about feelings/experiences
- Walter Brueggemann: "Lament is covenant speech"
 - When we don't lament, we forget we're in relationship with covenant-keeping God
 - Says "because I belong to you and you belong to me, this is not supposed to look like this"
 - "But if I hold on to you and I believe that you are who you say you are, you're gonna make this right. So I won't let go"
- Expression of people who belong to God, refusing to go silent
- Not absence of faith - "faith refusing to let go even when it feels like everything is falling apart"

The Hero's Journey Pattern (Monomyth Cycle)

- Joseph Campbell's monomyth: orientation → descent → return
- Walter Brueggemann's theological framework: orientation → disorientation → reorientation
 - Orientation: Life makes sense, God feels near, familiar patterns intact
 - Disorientation: Life breaks down, God feels distant, everything feels unfamiliar
 - Reorientation: Something new begins forming, not because everything resolved but because something in us has been "reordered, rearranged, shaped, formed in the image of Christ on the inside of us"
- Movie examples demonstrating pattern:
 - Lion King: Circle of life celebration → Mufasa's death/Scar's deception → Simba's return after seeing himself in river
 - Lord of the Rings: Bilbo's 111th birthday celebration → dangerous journey to Middle Earth → saving the Shire
 - Superman: Planet Krypton origins → Earth challenges → heroic emergence
- Spiritual formation implications:
 - Not just story pattern but "pattern of faith"
 - God forming/shaping us during disorientation phase
 - Making us "more into his image, more like him, more that we look like him and live like him"
 - Reorientation comes through inner transformation, not external resolution

Current Application

- National crisis requiring songs, not silence: "Now is not the time to not sing. Now is the time to sing"
- The "Over 50" perspective: "I don't know that I've ever experienced a time in my lifetime where so many things have been going on all at once"
- Questions arising: "Where's Christ? What is the gospel? Who is the church?"
- Psalmist's emotional swinging between hope and despair

- “God, how can you be so close and yet feel so far?”
- Remembering good times, acknowledging present pain, hoping for future simultaneously
- “Everything that feels familiar feels distant”
- Trying to understand “how things change so quickly” and “what has shifted for me”
- Common disorientation experiences:
 - “I remember when our family was whole and intact, but then an affair happened”
 - “I remember our house and loving the home we created, but then I got laid off and I had to move”
 - “I remember when we were so excited about becoming parents... but now our kids don’t even talk to us”
 - “I remember that we used to take walks every night, but then the cancer diagnosis came”
 - “I remember how house felt so full, but now I feel so empty”

The Soul’s Thirst

- “As deer pants for water” - Mediterranean context of extreme heat and scarce water
 - Without water, deer will die - gut level raw honesty of needing God’s touch
 - “God, if you don’t refresh my soul, I’m not going to make it”
 - Expression of hunger and thirst in the soul when “your soul feels dry”
- Psalmist’s multiple crises:
 - Crisis of presence: “When shall I come and appear before you, God?”
 - Likely in exile, very far from sanctuary where they once served
 - “There are moments when you just feel the nearness of God... and there are moments that life feels so hard that you’re like, Lord, where are you?”
 - Enemy taunts: “Where is your God? Why won’t he come and save you? You gave your whole life to live for him. Why are you dealing with this illness/ rebellion/children treating you this way?”
- Crisis of position: “I used to lead the crowd of God in the house of God”
 - Shift from influence to isolation
 - “I used to be at the front of the line when the parade was coming... and now I’m somewhere far from the temple, far from God and alone with no one to lead”
- Crisis of proximity: “Why have you forgotten me? Why have you rejected me?”
 - Experience of distancing relationship with God
 - Feeling abandoned despite covenant relationship

Jesus as Companion and Answer

- Garden of Gethsemane connection: “Very sorrowful” in Septuagint translates directly to “Why are you downcast, my soul”
 - Jesus experienced sorrow, despair, pain, longing
 - “Crashing waves of grief over his soul”
 - Hebrews: “High priest tempted at all points yet without sin”
- Jesus as companion in disorientation:
 - Present with us when life doesn’t make sense

- Understands our experience of disorientation firsthand
- Not distant observer but fellow sufferer
- Jesus as answer to reorientation:
 - Greater than the temple - “the place that we long to be back in”
 - Word of God made flesh - presence of God in flesh
 - Living water that we thirst for
 - Hope of glory, light shining in darkness
 - Makes reorientation possible through his presence and work
- Timing vs. completion perspective:
 - “Sometimes we’re thinking about timing and Jesus is thinking about completion”
 - God forming us during disorientation rather than just resolving circumstances
 - Focus on inner transformation over external resolution

Disciplined Hope

- Seven-year-old boxer cousin example:
 - Won championship in his division, takes training seriously
 - “I’m great. I just had dinner and now I’m doing my push-ups before I go to bed”
 - Believes in Rocky Balboa as real person, disciplined in pursuit
 - “When nobody’s looking, I’m going to be disciplined and make sure that I’m getting my reps in”
- Spiritual discipline application:
 - “You got to get your reps in. Your reps of song, your reps of expectation. Your reps of joy”
 - Consistent practice when circumstances don’t support hope
 - Building spiritual muscle through repetition and commitment
- Two-year-old Shiloh’s self-soothing example:
 - Never used pacifier or bottle, only nursed
 - Developed humming pattern as self-soothing mechanism
 - Same tune repeatedly when wanting mom, resisting bedtime, or distressed
 - Natural instinct to create song for comfort
- Key questions for application:
 - “What song can you write about the goodness and faithfulness of God that would help you self soothe?”
 - “What song can you write to allow yourself to hope in the faithfulness of God?”
 - “It’s not about whether you can sing... It’s about whether or not you have a song”
- Psalm refrain as model: “Why are you downcast, oh my soul. Put your hope in God”
 - Disciplined return to hope despite circumstances
 - Self-coaching toward faith and expectation
 - Writing songs while still in despair, in middle of story
 - “For the believer... that’s the middle of the story. The end of the story is God is good and good is coming”