

EFCA One: Forum on Expository Preaching

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Preaching Laments

What to look for and
What to echo

Key disciplines in *faithful* preaching

- Careful observation (what to look for)
- Thorough interrogation (what to ask)
- Skillful replication (what to echo)

What to look for

- Clues that this passage is a lament
 - “Why?” (Given Yahweh’s steadfast love (dsx) how could this happen?)
 - Crying, tears, mourning
 - Bitter complaint
 - Inconsolability
 - confession
 - Petitions
 - VOWS

What to ask: the basic questions

1. What is this text functionally?
2. What is its dominant subject?
3. What is the author saying about this subject?
4. What is the response this passage seems designed to elicit in the first hearers and us?
5. How does this text elicit this response?
6. How does this text fit into the drama of redemption?

What to ask: Targeted Questions

- Is this an individual or corporate lament?
- To whom is the lament addressed?
- What triggers the lament?
 - The psalmist's or the nation's sin
 - Hostility toward the psalmist or Israel
 - Enemy action including a menacing threat or actual defeat
 - Something else

Targeted Questions

- What does the future look like to the psalmist if God does *not* act to deliver?
- What are the word pictures for lament?
- What specifically does the psalmist ask God to do?
- How does the psalmist appeal to God to act?

Targeted Questions

- What are the turning points in the lament? Note especially when petitions are seen as granted.
- Is the complaint resolved? If so, how?
 - Acceptance of the circumstances
 - Repentance
 - faith
 - Comfort
 - Joy
 - hope

Targeted Questions

- What attributes of God does the psalmist recall? How is God addressed?
- What history of God's faithfulness is recited?
- How is the psalmist's faith described?
- What sort of deliverance does the psalmist envision?
- What does the psalmist vow once deliverance takes place? Does this have corporate impact?

Targeted Questions

- Where in the psalm does the psalmist praise God? Does he praise him for different things in these instances?
- Is God's character and faithfulness contrasted with others?
- If the lament seems unresolved, why does this seem to be the case?

Skillful replication: what to echo

- The aim: let the text itself shape the content, intent, and tone of your message.
- Place yourself in the sandals of the first hearers.
- Postpone transposition to the present until you thoroughly identify with the original situation.
- Think canonically but don't be an impository preacher.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Structure the sermon to echo the structure of the psalm.
- Recreate the tones of the text. In laments there are almost always at least two: despair and relief.
- Linger in the pain.
- Think corporately even in the case of Davidic psalms.
- Think theologically concerning resolution.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Let the context inform your exposition but not eclipse it.
- Preach inductively to avoid announcing the resolution before you draw your listeners into the lamentable problem.
- Beware of equating your listeners' problems with those addressed by the psalm. This almost always trivializes the original issues.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Beware of prematurely using contemporary labels that have overtones that would be foreign to the original situation. E.g., "selfhood", "powerlessness". I.e., know when as well as how to bridge to the contemporary situation.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Do not assume that laments are unidirectional from lament to praise.

Psalm 6: the basic questions

1. What is this text functionally?

a plea, a confession, an imprecation, a prediction; an example

2. What is its dominant subject? A

troubled weary soul pleading for the Lord to turn from rebuke and discipline and in grace and mercy to heal, deliver and vindicate.

Psalm 6: the basic questions

- 3. What is the author saying about this subject?** My soul is troubled and weary but God has heard my plea for reasons related to his character and reputation and therefore all my enemies will be shamed.
- 4. What is the response this passage seems designed to elicit in the first hearers and us?** Supplication based on the character of God (4) and the fact that he hears prayer (9) and vindicates his children (10).

Psalm 6: the basic questions

- 5. How does this text elicit this response?** Vivid descriptions of the weary, troubled soul, the pleading supplications offered, the richly theological reasons the Lord can be asked to act, and the sense of assurance that the psalmist experiences.
- 6. How does this text fit into the drama of redemption?** It anticipates ultimate deliverance and judgment.

Psalm 6: Targeted questions

- Is this an individual or corporate lament?
- To whom is the lament addressed?
- What triggers the lament?
 - The psalmist's or the nation's sin
 - Hostility toward the psalmist or Israel
 - Enemy action including a menacing threat or actual defeat
 - Something else

Psalm 6: Targeted questions

- What does the future look like to the psalmist if God does *not* act to deliver?
- What are the word pictures for lament?
- What specifically does the psalmist ask God to do?
- How does the psalmist appeal to God to act?

Psalm 6: Targeted questions

- What are the turning points in the lament? Note especially when petitions are seen as granted.
- Is the complaint resolved? If so, how?
 - Acceptance of the circumstances
 - Repentance
 - faith
 - Comfort
 - Joy
 - hope

Psalm 6: Targeted questions

- What attributes of God does the psalmist recall? How is God addressed?
- What history of God's faithfulness is recited?
- How is the psalmist's faith described?
- What sort of deliverance does the psalmist envision?
- What does the psalmist vow once deliverance takes place? Does this have corporate impact?

Psalm 6: Targeted questions

- Where in the psalm does the psalmist praise God? Does he praise him for different things in these instances?
- Is God's character and faithfulness contrasted with others?
- If the lament seems unresolved, why does this seem to be the case?

Skillful replication: what to echo

- The aim: let the text itself shape the content, intent, and tone of your message. *Text's Aim?*
- Place yourself in the sandals of the first hearers. *David's desire for himself?*
- Postpone transposition to the present until you thoroughly identify with the original situation.
- Think canonically but don't be an impository preacher.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Structure the sermon to echo the structure of the psalm. *Parts?*
- Recreate the tones of the text. In laments there are almost always at least two: despair and relief.
- Linger in the pain. *How?*
- Think corporately even in the case of Davidic psalms. *Corporate implications of Ps. 6?*
- Think theologically concerning resolution.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Let the context inform your exposition but not eclipse it. *Context of Ps. 6?*
- Preach inductively to avoid announcing the resolution before you draw your listeners into the lamentable problem.
- Beware of equating your listeners' problems with those addressed by the psalm. This almost always trivializes the original issues.

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Beware of prematurely using contemporary labels that have overtones that would be foreign to the original situation. E.g., “selfhood”, “powerlessness”. I.e., know when as well as how to bridge to the contemporary situation. *What are the comparable lamentable issues this Psalm brings to mind?*

Skillful replication: what to echo

- Do not assume that laments are unidirectional from lament to praise. *Where does lament lead in Psalm 6?*

A sample of Lament Psalms

Some	Lament	Psalms
3	27	
6	28	
10	31	
12	35	
13	86	
22	89	

Individual Laments

- Amy Cottrill lists 52 of these:
- Pss. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 77, 86, 88, 89, 94, 102, 109, 120, 130, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143.

Bibliography

- C. C. Broyles, "Psalms of Lament," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry, and Writings* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 2008), 384-399.
- Amy Cottrill, *Language, Power, and Identity in the Lament Psalms of the Individual* (New York: T & T Clark, 2008).
- Rico Villanueva, *The Uncertainty of a Hearing: A Study in the Sudden Change of Mood in the Psalms of Lament* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).
- Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).