

# Why Biblical Heroes of Old Would Find Modern Christianity Jarring

“Lament” is one of those words we don’t use very much today. It’s not a regular entry in our vocabulary, even with us church people. I was in my late 20s before I really even knew what this word meant, despite growing up in church and staying connected to a Christian community in my early adult years. When everything hit rock bottom, it was my counselor who was the one to first explain it to me.

To lament, he said, is simply to express honest emotions to God when life is not going as planned. Whether we’re hurt, frustrated, confused, betrayed, overwhelmed, sad or disappointed, lamentation is the language God has given us to talk to Him right in the middle of life’s messes. It’s real talk with God when you’re hurting, when all you can do is cry out for His help. It’s a prayer that says, “God, I’m hurting—will You meet me here?” And as such, it is a prayer to which God always responds.

This is not a prayer for the super spiritual. Lamentation is a prayer for all of us.

Not everyone experiences prosperity, but everyone we know will experience loss and grief. Each and every one of us will experience setbacks, letdowns, failures and betrayals. Every one of us will encounter change that is hard, lose loved ones before their time and see relationships fail with people we counted on.

So what do we do when everything is not fine? Why are we shooting for the easy-street, pain-free life anyway? Where did we come up with the idea that we should be happy all the time? We all need do-over days, and sometimes we will wake up, eat a

bowl of ice cream for breakfast, and head straight back to bed. This should not surprise us, as Scripture tells us we will go through different seasons—not all of them pleasant.

Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, the only home they'd ever known. The Israelites wandered the wilderness for 40 years before they entered the promised land. The prophets ripped their clothing, grieved in the streets and warned God's people to repent and return. Jesus died the most gruesome death the Romans could come up with. And the early church faced persecution of all kinds.

I don't see many easy-street lives in the Bible. And I certainly don't see God demanding we keep a stiff upper lip through hard times.

In fact, D.A. Carson, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, writes, "There is no attempt in Scripture to whitewash the anguish of God's people when they undergo suffering. They argue with God, they complain to God, they weep before God. Theirs is not a faith that leads to dry-eyed stoicism, but to a faith so robust it wrestles with God."

So where do all the clichés and false hopes we use to explain suffering come from? Not the Bible, and certainly not from God Himself. My insistence that I have a nice, easy, "fine" life was not only unbiblical, but it was also an unrealistic expectation that ended up making me feel disengaged from God and disappointed in Him. I thought I was suffering because I had done something wrong. I had fallen for clichés, which only increased my pain.

For so much of my life, I thought sucking it up and "faking away" the pain showed true strength. But real strength is identifying a wound and asking God to enter it. We are robbing ourselves of a divine mystery and a divine intimacy when we pretend to have it all together. In fact, we lose an entire vocabulary from our prayers when we silence the reality of our

pain. If questions and cries and laments are not cleaned up throughout Scripture, then why are we cleaning them up or removing them completely from our language?

Scripture doesn't tell us to pretend we're peaceful when we're not, act like everything is fine when it's not, and do everything we can to suppress our sorrow. God doesn't insist that we go to our "happy place" and ignore our sadness, yet so many of our churches preach that we will have peace and prosperity just by virtue of being Christians. Scripture, in contrast, tells us that as followers of Christ, we are called to serve a "man of sorrows" who died a gruesome death. Until we identify ourselves with our Savior and acknowledge, as He did, just how painful life can be, we won't be able to lament or overcome. And if we silence our own cries, then we will inevitably silence the cries of those around us. We cannot carefully address the wounds of others if we carelessly address our own.

The fact is, God does not expect us to have it all together, so it is a real disservice when our Christian communities create this expectation. We will be unsuccessful at sitting with hurting people if we have not allowed ourselves to grieve and wail and mourn and go through the lamentation process ourselves. God understands that life is full of pressures, hurts and stings. He took on flesh so He could relate to us in both our joy and pain. He wants us to feel and express every emotion before Him and not minimize a thing. There is no "fake it till you make it" in Scripture. When we fake fine, we fake our way out of authentic relationship with God, others and ourselves. {eoa}

**Esther Fleece** is an international speaker and writer recognized among Christianity Today's "Top 50 Women Shaping the Church and Culture" and CNN's "Five Women in Religion to Watch." Esther shares her story in her first book, *No More Faking Fine: Ending The Pretending*. Stay in touch with Esther and share your own lament on her website at .