PREACHING HOPE AND LAMENT FROM THE PSALMS

KEN LANGLEY
Senior Pastor
Christ Community Church
Zion, IL
klangley@ccczion.org

INTRODUCTION

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God. My soul is downcast with in me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan . . . Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me" (Psalm 42:5-7). Hope and lament.

Usually, the order is reversed, as in Psalm 130: "Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD," verse 1. Verse 7: "O Israel, put your hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is unfailing love and with him is full redemption." Lament and hope.

In psalm after psalm we find this pattern: the petitioner begins: "How many are my foes! How long will you hide your face from me? Why do you stand afar off? God, I don't understand, I don't like, and I'm not about to acquiesce to this current state of illness, distress, injustice, persecution, danger, loss. But—(so much Gospel in that little word!)—I trust you. I know you are faithful to your promises. I wait in hope for the LORD, he is my help and shield. I am confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Be strong and take heart all you who hope in the LORD. Lament and hope.

What homiletical significance might there be to this blending, this mix of hope and lament in the Psalms? And what homiletical significance might there be to the fact that the Psalter is not, like modern hymnals, arranged topically? Happy songs are not grouped together, sad songs are not grouped together; we do not find wisdom psalms, royal psalms, historical psalms and torah psalms grouped by mood or subject matter. If you read a psalm every day as part of your devotions (which I recommend), and if you read them sequentially (as I recommend) you'll encounter hope and lament not by deliberate choice or according to your mood but in the same way life serves up joys and sorrows.[1] As Walter Brueggemann put it, "The faith of Israel, like all human experience, moved back and forth between the polar moods of, one the one hand, deep anguish and, on the other hand, profound joy and celebration."[2]

What is the homiletical significance of the mixed way we encounter hope and lament in the Psalter? To focus on this question as I'll do in this lecture, we'll have to set aside other important and related questions:

- What was the original cultic or liturgical setting of these hymns and prayers?[3]
- How should God's new covenant people approach the subset of laments we call imprecatory psalms?[4]
- How do we explain the abrupt shift from plea to praise so characteristic of the lament form?[5]

Worthwhile questions. But so is this one: What is the homiletical significance of the mixed way we encounter hope and lament in the Psalms? That's the fourth time I've asked the question. Now let me try to answer it. I have two main propositions.

GOD WOULD HAVE US PREACH BOTH HOPE AND LAMENT FROM THE PSALMS

Is that too obvious? Do you wonder if you can get a partial refund for the conference? After all, who needs a plenary session to tell us something so basic as "God would have us preach both hope and lament from the Psalms"? Well, here's something even more basic: God would have us preach the Psalms!

If that seems obvious, good for you! It should be obvious. But it's been questioned:

- Bonhoeffer, who loved the Psalms, nevertheless wondered how human words to God can become God's words to us. Form critics said it doesn't happen.[6]
- David Buttrick, in *Homiletic*, said psalms are for singing, not preaching.[7]
- Donald Gowan said "The Psalms don't want to be preached." Pray them, sing them, but don't turn them into sermon texts. Ironically, this advice came in a book, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit*. Gowan, an Old Testament prof at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, pled with preachers to stop neglecting the Hebrew scriptures. But he didn't think we should preach from Psalms.[8]

Other scholars disagree, including, I'm glad to say, some in the Evangelical Homiletics Society.

Granted, psalms are prayer. But as Patrick Miller points out, *how* we pray and *what* we pray indicate underlying beliefs about the one *to whom* we pray and *why*.[9] What is that but theology? Granted, psalms are songs. But songs *teach*. Luther understood this. Support for this claim comes from an unexpected direction: Those who in recent decades have purged our hymnals of unfeminist and militaristic vocabulary display by that project a conviction that songs do indeed *teach*. We don't have to agree with their criteria for expunging some hymns to concur that liturgy *teaches*.[10]

In any case, the Psalms are more than liturgical material. Brevard Childs, Gerald Wilson, Clinton McCann, Mark Futato, and Gordon Wenham, among others, have recovered the pre-critical conviction that psalms are Torah.[11] Their status as Scripture means that they have a *teaching* role. Human speech to God, yes, but canonized as God's speech to us, rich in theological affirmations.[12]

Granted, psalms are not easy to preach; they do not readily lend themselves to "being a text."[13] They're *poetry*, which is one reason Gowan balked at preaching these hymns and prayers: "Unless preachers have special lyrical gifts of their own, how can a sermon avoid sounding very pedestrian and dull in comparison with its text?"[14] He has a point. In the early years of my ministry I tended to not preach psalms. When I did so, I often felt that even if the sermon was theologically sound and pastorally helpful, the "poemness" of the text didn't quite make it into the pulpit. "You can see why some preachers avoid the psalms," Jeffrey D. Arthurs writes, "Their intuition tells them that we murder when we dissect."[15]

But we must make the effort to learn how to preach these poems without murdering them, because, as Elizabeth Achtemeier put it, not only *can* we preach the Psalms, we *must* preach the Psalms. They are indispensable to the life of faith.[16] How can we neglect instructing and encouraging our people from this, the longest book in the Bible, one that's been called the heart of the Old Testament, the Old Testament book cited most often in the New, a favorite of our Lord's, a book Athanasius said contains all of what we find elsewhere in Scripture.[17] As Tremper Longman and Dan Allender put it, "Nothing illuminates the ruling passions of our hearts as dramatically or clearly as our emotions. And no book of Scripture illuminates our emotions as dramatically or clearly as the Psalms."[18] I won't belabor the point. Preach the Psalms![19]

When you do, you'll encounter frequent, passionate, alternating expressions of hope and lament, an ebb and flow of hope and lament; and God would have us preach *both*.

> Where [Luther wrote] does one find finer words of joy than in the Psalms of praise and thanksgiving? There . . . you see what fine and pleasant flowers of the heart spring up from all sorts of fair and happy thoughts toward God. But on the other hand, where do you find deeper, more sorrowful, more pitiable words of sadness than in the Psalms of lamentation? How gloomy and dark it is there. . . . everyone,

> in whatever situation he may be, finds in that situation Psalms and words that fit his case, that suit him as if they were put there just for his sake.[20]

Preach Hope from the Psalms

I believe it was Lewis Smedes I first heard say "Now abide faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is hope." This was not a slip of the tongue or an attempt to correct the apostle Paul. Smedes was stressing the importance of hope.[21]

I recall a cartoon I saw in a ministry journal years ago. Above the preacher's head is a thought balloon in which he fancies himself a general, helmet and all, leading the congregational army out to do battle. "Charge!" he cries. But over the heads of the congregation is a different thought balloon: they see themselves lying on the battlefield, desperately wounded. "Medic!" they cry. Our pews are filled with people who are crushed by life, people burdened with guilt they don't know what to do with, people angry at God, people engaged in denial because they think it's unspiritual to talk about their pain. They need hope.

Don't confuse or let your hearers confuse hope with optimism: a belief in progress, a sunny disposition that always looks on the bright side. Sermons faithful to the God-centered vision of the Psalms will never say "Time heals" or "Things will work out." Not long before his death, Martin Luther King Jr. shared with his former Dexter Ave. congregation that though he still had hope he was not optimistic. He did not foresee America getting its act together, but he held on to a God who brings light out of darkness and justice to the nations.[22]

I probably don't need to take any more time convincing you to preach hope, so let me emphasize a different word in my proposal: God would have us preach hope *from the Psalms*. You can preach hope from the resurrection narratives when you get to the resurrection narratives. You can preach hope from Romans 8 when your preaching calendar takes you to Romans 8. But don't think that when you preach psalms you have to prop them up with New Testament texts. As if the hope of those poor psalmists fell so far short we need to zip ahead a thousand years in order to have something worthwhile to say to a Christian congregation.

John Goldingay, in his provocatively titled book, *Do We Need the New Testament?* Takes issue with the condescending attitude many have toward Old Testament spirituality. "One's response to the account of a relationship with God that is offered in the Psalms . . . [should not be] 'If only they had the real relationship with God that I have after Jesus came,' but 'If only I had the real relationship with God that they had before Jesus came.'"[23] Maybe if Goldingay was here this morning helping us reflect on hope and lament, he'd say "If only we'd embrace the hope the psalmists had." What hope?

- God will be faithful despite our unfaithfulness.
- God will deal with the unjust and the violent.
- All nations will worship him.
- God will redeem Israel from all her sins.
- God is not deaf to the cries of our heart.
- When I awake I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness (Psalm 17:15).
- You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory (Psalm 73:24).

These affirmations are harvested not from the gospels and epistles but from the Psalter.

- The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases (Psalm 136:1).
- The sun will not harm you by day nor the moon by night (Psalm 121:6).
- The trees, the mountains and seas will erupt in praise of the Creator (Psalm 98:8).
- You will fill me with joy in your presence (Psalm 16:11).
- I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6).

This stuff will preach!

Brueggemann, commenting on Psalm 96, says that although Israel is realistic about the world being out of kilter, she ". . . meets regularly in an extreme act of liturgical hope." The LORD is King! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity. Brueggemann goes so far as to call this the "quintessential statement of the Gospel in all of Old Testament scripture, the ground of Israel's hope . . . the world will eventually be righted according to the intention of the Creator."[24]

Of course, there's progress in revelation. Of course, we know more fully than did David and Asaph and the Sons of Korah. But if we feel compelled to include New Covenant hope in our sermons on the Psalms, we should never do so in a way that sounds like "This old Jewish hope is thin gruel; fortunately we have something more nourishing in Romans."

God would have us preach hope from the Psalms. God would have us preach *lament* from the Psalms.

Preach Lament from the Psalms

If half the psalms are laments (which is true), and if half of each lament psalm is actually lament (the remainder a turn to praise), the lament material in Psalms exceeds in length any of the minor prophets and all but four books in the New Testament. How can we justify neglecting that much of God's inspired word in our pulpit ministry? Especially when people in pain (which is everybody at some point) need to hear somebody legitimize lament.

In the 1970s and 80s Brueggemann lamented (pun intended) that the lament psalms had largely been purged from the life and liturgy of the church."[25] With what results?

- People figure there must be something wrong with them because everyone else in the sanctuary seems to be in celebration mode all the time.

- They turn to psychotherapy for what they might have gotten from psalms.
- And in an essay entitled "The Costly Loss of Lament," Brueggemann noted that victims of injustice are left voiceless when protest praying is disallowed.[26]

This loss of lament has been redressed to some extent over the past few decades in papers, books and conferences. I don't pretend to have compiled an exhaustive bibliography on the subject—someone should do that—but here are some representative attempts to remedy the loss in recent years:

> ***Essays*** like Nancy Duff's, "Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church."[27] Or Calvin Seerveld's "Why We Need to Learn to Cry in Church."[28]
>
> ***Conferences*** like, well, this one, and that of the PCUSA in 2002, "Reclaiming the Text: Recovering the Language of Lament."
>
> ***Books*** like *It's OK to be Not OK: Preaching Lament from the Psalms* by Federico Villanueva (Langham Preaching Resources, 2017); *Preaching to People in Pain* by Matthew D. Kim (Baker, 2021); and *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square,* edited by Sally Brown and Patrick Miller (Westminster John Knox, 2005), in which Brown writes "Today's church needs to reclaim the voice of lament not only in its prayer but in its preaching."[29] Preachers would do well to read not only academic treatments of the subject, but works like Marva Dawn's meditations on the Psalms: *I'm Lonely, Lord – How Long?* revised edition (Eerdmans, 1983); and Michael Card's *A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005).

I hope this scholarly prompting is bearing its intended fruit in evangelical pulpits. I hope that pastors are taking heed and preaching lament. But I'm not sure. Decades after Brueggemann's lament, John Mark Hicks could still say "We are dominated by a liturgical style that is upbeat, perky, positive, and celebrative.[30] A lot of churches call their worship hour a "celebration service." Has anyone thought about starting a weekly "lament service," scheduled, perhaps, in the wee hours of the morning when the targeted market niche can't sleep anyway? A church in Denver is named "Happy Church." How would "Lamentations Church" go over? Not well, I'm afraid; there's too much truth in what one observer of our culture said: 'The true religions of America are optimism and denial.'"[31]

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD," says the anonymous song of ascent, Psalm 130. Has the preacher ever so preached as to let people know they can pray out of the depths? Or has the contemporary church's obsession with the positive, the upbeat, the celebratory closed off this possibility for the congregation? Here's a thought experiment for pastors: Suppose someone in your church died in a tragic accident. Would you expect to see the family in church the following Sunday, or does everyone assume they'll take a few weeks off? Honest wrestling with this question might tell you something about congregational culture as it relates to the legitimacy of lament. Do people think of church as a safe place to be sad?[32]

Preachers would do well to mull over Brueggemann's words and not hesitate to preach laments:

> The use of these 'psalms of darkness' is an act of faith. . . . it insists that all such experiences of disorder are a proper subject for discourse with God. There is nothing 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 must be *addressed to God,* who is the final reference for all of life.[33]

Claus Westermann wrote in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*:

> It is an illusion to postulate that there could ever be a relationship with God in which there was only praise and never lamentation. Just as joy and sorrow in alteration are a part of the finitude of human existence (Gen 2-3), so praise and lamentation are a part of man's relationship to God. Hence, something is amiss if praise of God has a place in Christian worship but lamentation does not. Praise can retain its authenticity and naturalness only in polarity with lamentation.[34]

"Polarity." That leads to my second main proposition: God would have us preach hope colored by lament and lament colored by hope.

GOD WOULD HAVE US PREACH BOTH HOPE COLORED BY LAMENT AND LAMENT COLORED BY HOPE

Doesn't that seem a reasonable inference from the mixed way we encounter hope and lament in the Psalms? The happy psalms we memorize and print on coffee mugs are set smack up against passionate poems of anguish. The laments, almost without exception, turn to hopeful praise. Hope and lament impact each other. Ebb and flow.

By "hope colored by lament" and "lament colored by hope," I don't mean either canceling out the other. I don't mean that we should aim at fifty-fifty balance in every sermon. I certainly don't mean that we're free to distort our psalm texts out of some preconceived notion of what a sermon should sound like. Take Psalm 74, for example. It starts with lament, moves to hope, then back to lament. We might be tempted to preach stanzas one and three together so we can get the sad stuff out of the way and end on a happy note with that middle section. But that's not true to the text, and at least some of our hearers will sense that we're not preaching honestly. The psalm departs from the normal lament pattern; its development is not tidy, but then neither is life.[35]

Another example: One of my students, preaching Psalm 73, told us in the sermon's introduction where we would end up by sermon's end—confidently orthodox, secure with God as our all-satisfying treasure. This was a mistake. The sermon could *end* that way, but it was a mistake to *begin* that way. Although the student did walk us through the poet's doubts in the first movement of the psalm, this part of the sermon lacked conviction because the he had given away the happy ending—and without a spoiler alert. During our debrief time, I pointed out that the poet arrives where he does only after honest wrestling with the prosperity of the wicked—why *do* good things happen to bad people?—and that perhaps the sermon, too, might let listeners feel this struggle a bit longer before resolving the tension. The student agreed—he'd thought about this when writing the sermon—but he was afraid to let listeners squirm for more than a minute or two with the kind of pained speech we encounter in this psalm.[36]

What I *do* mean by "God would have us preach hope colored by lament and lament colored by hope" will be clear from what follows. I hope!

Preach Hope Colored by Lament

A few weeks ago, my devotional reading plan brought me to Psalm 91: "If you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will befall you." Four days later a 23-year-old mother was shot dead a few blocks from my house. A bullet from a street rumble went through the window and into her head as she sat reading Bible stories to her seven-month-old. Our town is no stranger to crime, but this one shook the community. If I preach Psalm 91 as if bad things never happen to God's people, my congregants will conclude that I'm out of touch with reality.

The Hebrew poets were *not* out of touch with reality. They didn't have their heads in the sand. They'd seen young mothers die. They'd witnessed injustice, experienced pain, known aching loss. When they penned hymns like Psalm 91 (with poetic hyperbole), they weren't guaranteeing "Your best life now!" In fact, they weren't really talking about the kind of life we can expect; they were talking about the kind of God who has us in his grip. He can and does (when it so pleases him) reach down his hand to stop the bullet, or feed the hungry, or bless the barren woman with children. We can preach these hopeful psalms, and do so with joy, but with what John Piper calls *brokenhearted* joy. We won't sound like a motivational speaker. We won't overpromise. Tumors may grow, injustices might not be righted until the return of the King, and until that day, all of us will walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

Notre Dame's Mary Catherine Hilkert, one of those scholarly voices insisting that lament needs to be part of our pulpit speech, notes that the hope-filled gospel we preach, the good news our people long for must not be spoken in a way that rings hollow, disconnected with the harsh realities of life.[37]

How, practically, can we preach hope colored by lament? Three suggestions. You can probably come up with others.

- Periodically remind your people that the prosperity gospel is heresy.
- Include some sermon illustrations of unanswered prayer.
- Now and then include a comment like "The psalmist was not Pollyanna; he knew that God does not guarantee a pain-free life, even though this poem shows we have good reason for the hope that we have."

What did Westermann say? "Praise can retain its authenticity and naturalness only in polarity with lamentation." So, God would have us preach hope colored by lament. The opposite is also true.

Preach Lament Colored by Hope

It shouldn't be too hard to do this, since, as has been said, almost all the laments turn to praise.[38] In fact, as Sally Brown points out, laments are in a sense psalms of trust because the petitioner counts on God to hear and answer.[39] Even the bleakest of all, Psalm 88, begins with a *glimmer* of hope; this heart-wrenching prayer begins "O LORD, the God who *saves* me."

To baby boomers whose worship emphasizes celebration to the exclusion of lament, John Mark Hicks responds that lament is not a "downer," but an expression of faith. "Lament transforms," he writes, "Lament enables perseverance. Lament empowers. Lament gives hope, because embedded in the lament is an appeal that arises out of trust in God whose love is forever. Lament is the mode by which hope is reborn."[40] Federico Villanueva goes further: "The hope is the lament itself."[41]

How, practically, can we preach lament colored by hope? Again, three suggestions. *First*, preach whole psalms, not just psalm snippets. If you preach a lament, and don't quit half-way through the text, your listeners *will* hear hope.

Secondly, know that honest lament does not entail blurting out whatever you're thinking or feeling at the moment. Perhaps one layman went too far when he said, "I wish preachers would keep their doubts to themselves; we have enough of our own," but I don't want to dismiss his perspective too readily. Self-disclosure should always be in the service of the Word and of the people; the pulpit is not the place for the preacher to work on his "issues." The poet of Psalm 73, a worship leader, recognized that his bitter resentment was beast-like (verse 22) and that if he had spoken his thoughts in the assembly he would have betrayed God's people (verse 15).

Lastly and most importantly, "Delight yourself in the Lord." Don't just preach these poems, seek grace to *live* them, to face the ebb and flow of life with the psalmists' confidence in God, so that despite your own troubles, you can truly say "Earth has nothing I desire besides you." Your people should be able to sense that even though you do not trivialize pain—your own or theirs—you are glad in God.

Gandalf is a good example for us (and so, of course, are the psalmists). In a desperate, dark hour, Gandalf laughed, and stood beside Pippin, putting his arm about the hobbit's shoulders. "Pippin glanced in wonder at the face now close beside his own, for the sound of that laugh had been merry. In the wizard's face he saw at first only lines of care and sorrow; though as he looked more intently he perceived that under all there was a great joy: a fountain of mirth enough to set a kingdom laughing, were it to gush forth. (*The Return of the King*, chapter 1). "Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, my lips will shout with joy when I sing praise to you" (Psalm 71). "Weeping may remain for a night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30).

The shift from plea to praise in the laments may puzzle scholars, but it's a gift to God's people. It demonstrates conclusively that for one who trusts God, lament is colored by hope. Let no one take this familiar feature of laments take this characteristic of lament for granted: It is unique to Israel in the ancient world.[42] The context for Israel's hopeful lament was its covenant with Yahweh.[43]

There are more laments than any other type of psalm, suggesting perhaps that lament is the dominant mood of the book. But a canonical reading of the Psalter gives us hope: The way the collection came to be a collection suggests that *praise* dominates.

There's the Hebrew title for the Psalter: "praises" (*tehillim*). There's the fact that each of the five books of the Psalter ends with a doxology.[44]

There's a shift from lament to praise not only in individual psalms, but in the collection as a whole. Without retracting the observation on which this lecture is based – that hope and lament come at us *mixed*—we also observe that the mix *is not uniform throughout.* There are proportionally more laments in the first half of the Psalter, fewer in the second, which leads to a climactic final doxology, five "halleluia" psalms.[45] It's as if the compilers were saying "the longer you pray and sing these psalms, the more you let your life be shaped by them, the more your pain will be caught up—not denied, suppressed or delegitimized, but caught up—all in good time, and after honest experience—but caught up in praise.[46]

And then, too, there's this: The Psalter preserves for the post-exilic community hopes wrapped up in a future ideal King.[47] Back in the land but under Gentile overlords, these Jews prayed and sang:

- Psalm 2 with its promise of an Anointed One, a Son who would inherit the nations and rule them with an iron scepter;
- Psalm 18 with its vision of God giving great victories to David and his descendants forever;
- Psalm 72 with its portrait of an ideal monarch;
- Psalm 110 with its hope that The LORD will extend the king's rule from Zion, crushing enemies and judging the nations.

Why did the compilers and editors of the Psalter retain and use these after the apparent demise of the house of David? Merely out of antiquarian motives, to document what Israel *used to* hope for? Brevard Childs says no: "Although the royal psalms originally arose in a peculiar historical setting of ancient Israel . . . they were treasured in the Psalter for a different reason, namely as a witness to the messianic hope which looked for the consummation of God's kingship through his Anointed One."[48]

CONCLUSION

I'm not convinced by the arguments of some scholars that the Psalms tell a story.[49] But the postexilic shaping of the Psalter does tell us that Israel's story is not yet finished.[50] I do not believe that every Old Testament pericope is *about* Jesus. But the Old Testament (including Psalms) does *point to* Jesus. Certainly, the unfulfilled hope of the Psalter looks forward to the ideal Davidic king, the Christ we gladly acknowledge as Lord of all. Lord of Israel? Yes. And Lord of the church. Lord over cancer? Yes. And Lord over COVID. Lord over everything we might lament—fire and flood, enemies and liars, persecution and failure, Satan, sin, and death—and injury.

Several years ago, the worship leader in a church I was visiting began the service with announcements, including an update on his personal crisis. A few months earlier his arm had been badly mangled in a piece of machinery on his fishing boat. He'd had several unsuccessful surgeries, and was still in constant pain despite powerful drugs. "The bottom line," he said, "next week they're going to amputate my arm. Now let's stand and sing "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." It's not often that this old preacher is at a loss for words, but I could hardly sing. My wife, too was choked up.

If that layman, a commercial fisherman, can preach lament colored by hope, so can we.

"Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I WILL YET PRAISE HIM, my Savior and my God."

NOTES

1. John D. Witvliet speaks of "Psalms and the basic grammar of Christian worship," noting that in Psalms as in life, praise and petition ebb and flow. So praise and lament in the Psalms are "intimate partners." *The Biblical Psalms in Christian Worship* (Eerdmans, 2007), 23-25.
2. Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, edited by Patrick D. Miller (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 67.
3. Attempting even a sampling of scholarly bibliography on the original setting of the psalms is beyond the scope of this essay. Tremper Longman in *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), briefly sketches some of the festival settings proposed by scholars; he is rightfully skeptical (pp.48-49). C. John Collins contends that though psalms were used for private devotions, their primary purpose use was in corporate worship: "Always Alleluia: Reclaiming the True Purpose of the Psalms in the Old Testament Context," chapter 10 in *Forgotten Songs; Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, edited by C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 18-

24. "The Psalter is obviously and self-consciously a book of corporate worship. Those who penned, edited, and collected the Psalms clearly expected them to be used by God's people gathered in his presence. To preach them is to say, 'Let's take a closer look at these songs we sing and these prayers we pray. What is God saying to us in these words we say to him?'" (Kenneth J. Langley, *How to Preach the Psalms* [Fontes, 2021], 146).
4. William A. Holladay writes about "censored texts" in *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 304-315. Book-length treatments of imprecatory psalms from an evangelical perspective include James E. Adams, *War Psalms of the Prince of Peace* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1991), and John N. Day, *Crying for Justice* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), which includes a discussion of the various "solutions" to the problem of imprecation and a fairly extensive bibliography.
5. "Among the crowded field of interpretive alternatives attempting to explain the transformation of pain into praise in the Lament Psalms, no single option has been able to win the day." (Daniel J. Estes, "The Transformation of Pain into Praise in the Individual Lament Psalms," chapter ten in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, edited by Andrew J. Schmutzer and David M. Howard, Jr. [Moody, 2013], 153).
6. David G. Firth, "The Teaching of the Psalms," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 160.
7. J. Clinton McCann, Jr. and James C. Howell, *Preaching the Psalms* (Nashville, Abingdon, 2001), 15.
8. Donald Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (John Knox, 1980), 146.
9. Patrick Miller, "The Psalter as a Book of Theology," in *Psalms in Community: Jewish and Christian Textual, Liturgical. And Artistic Traditions,* edited by Harold W. Attridge and Margot E. Fassler (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 87-98.
10. Gordon Wenham, "The Ethics of the Psalms," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 176-177.

11. Mark Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms* (Kregel Academic, 2007), 183: the primary purpose of the Psalter is in one word, instruction. See, too, Gordon J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Songs Ethically* (Baker Academic, 2012); Gerald Wilson, "The Structure of the Psalter," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 96-98; and J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).
12. John Goldingay asserts that "Theologically, the Psalms are the densest material in the entire OT. There is a greater concentration of statements about God here than anywhere else." *Psalms, Volume 1*, (Baker, 2006), 69.
13. Walter Brueggemann, "Psalms in Narrative Performance," in *Performing the Psalms*, edited by Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 9.
14. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit*, 146.
15. Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 39. Ellen F. Davis says she preaches from Psalms more than any other book of the Bible, but recognizes why many steer clear of the book: preachers don't know what to do with poetry (*Wondrous Depth* [Westminster John Knox, 2005], 17). Thomas G. Long includes a chapter on genre-sensitive preaching of psalms in his groundbreaking *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Fortress, 1989). His chapter on Psalms builds on the first two chapters, which are must reading for preachers who would let the form of the text help shape the form of the sermon.
16. Elizabeth Achtemeier, "Preaching from the Psalms," *Review and Expositor* 81:3 (Summer, 1984), 443.
17. Harry P. Nasuti, "God at Work in the Word: A Theology of Divine-Human Encounter in the Psalms, in Rolf Jacobson, ed., *Soundings in the Theology of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011), ix. Martin Luther called the Psalter "a little Bible." In the preface to his 1528 translation he wrote, "I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble himself to compile a short

Bible . . . so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would have anyway almost an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book" (*Luther's Works*, volume 35 [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960], 255-256).
18. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (NavPress, 1994), 25.
19. Someday I'd like to research the history of preaching the Psalms. A starting point would be the brief overview in McCann and Howell, *Preaching the Psalms*, 20-32.
20. Martin Luther, "Preface to the Psalter," in *Luther's Works*, vol. 35 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960) 255-256.
21. The remark has also been attributed to Augustine and Jaroslav Pelikan.
22. McCann and Howell, *Preaching the Psalms*, 76-77.
23. John Goldingay, *Do We Need the New Testament?* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015),100. For the record, Goldingay says "Of course we need the New Testament" (page 7).
24. Walter Brueggemann, "The Psalms as Limit Expressions," in *Performing the Psalms*, edited by Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 45-47.
25. Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 84.
26. The title of chapter 5 in *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 98-111.
27. Nancy J. Duff, "Recovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church," in *Lament*, edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 3-14.
28. Calvin Seerveld, "Why We Need to Learn to Cry in Church: Reclaiming the Psalms of Lament," chapter 10 in *Forgotten Songs; Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, edited by C. Richard Wells and Ray Van Neste (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 139-157.
29. Sally Brown, "When Lament Shapes the Sermon," in *Lament*, edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 35.
30. John Mark Hicks, "Preaching Community Laments," in *Performing the Psalms*, edited by Dave Bland and David Fleer (St. Louis: Chalice, 2005), 69.

31. James L. Mays, *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 16.
32. Kenneth J. Langley, *How to Preach the Psalms*, 80.
33. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Fortress, 1984), 52.
34. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, translated by Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 64ff.
35. Kenneth J. Langley, *How to Preach the Psalms*, 39-40.
36. Langley, *How to Preach the Psalms*, 127
37. Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 2000), 109, 116-118.
38. Exceptions are Psalms 44, 74, and especially 88, the darkest of them all.
39. Sally Brown, "When Lament Shapes the Sermon," in *Lament*, edited by Sally A. Brown and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 31.
40. John Mark Hicks, "Preaching Community Laments," in *Performing the Psalms*, 79.
41. Federico G. Villanueva, *It's OK to be Not OK: Preaching the Lament Psalm*s (Langham Preaching Resources, 2017), 123.
42. Harvey Guthrie, *Israel's Sacred Songs* (New York: Seabury, 1966), 145-147.
43. Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*, 95.
44. In a couple of cases the doxology follows immediately after a pained petition, presenting a jarring contrast if you read the doxology as part of the poem.
45. David Howard argues that the fifth book of the Psalter actually concludes with Psalm 145:21 as its doxology, and that Psalms 146-150 are to be viewed as a conclusion to the entire collection.
46. As Emily Dickinson put it, "Pain—is missed—in praise." Poem #18, also known as "Unto my books so good to turn," *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickenson* (Little, Brown, and Company, 1924), 74.

47. James Hely Hutchinson, "The Psalms and Praise," in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 96-98.
48. Brevard Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Fortress, 1979), 517. David Howard, too, thinks that when we pay attention to the shape of the Psalter, we will be encouraged by its eschatological hope. "The Psalms and Current Study," *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, edited by David Firth and Philip S. Johnson (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2005), 40.
49. Scholars who think efforts to discern a story line or comprehensive unifying structure in the Psalter are unconvincing include John Goldingay (*Psalms, Volume 1*, [Baker, 2006], 36-37), and Tremper Longman ("From Weeping to Rejoicing," chapter 15 in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*, Andrew Schmutzer and David M. Howard, eds. [Moody Press, 2013]), and Norman Whybray (see note 50 below).
50. Norman Whybray, though unconvinced that there's an intentional editorial over-all arrangement in the Psalter, agrees that the presence of royal psalms shows that the compilers still hoped for a revival of the David dynasty (R. Norman Whybray, *Reading the Psalms as a Book*, JSOTSup 222 [Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 94-98). In "The Return of the King: Book V as a Witness to Messianic Hope in the Psalter," Michael K. Snearly summarizes his doctoral dissertation in which he argues that Book 5 of the Psalter, in particular, is purposefully arranged to signal a renewed hope in the royal/Davidic promises (chapter 14 in *The Psalms: Language for All Seasons of the Soul*).