She sat quietly… in the midst of them… and she wept. No one saw the tears, of course, for they were streaming down the inside of her soul, not the outside of her face. Nonetheless, tearlessly, she wept… The burden of the moment was just too overpowering. For it was in *that* moment that she realized how *completely* separated from God she had become, how *severely* she *longed* to feel God’s presence again. Though “the sons of Korah” claimed them, the words of the psalm being read were hers:

**As a deer *craves* streams of water, so my soul craves you, God.**

**My soul *thirsts* for God, for the living God.**

**When will I go in and appear before the face of God?**

**My tears have been my food *day* and *night*,**

**while they say to me *all day*, “*Where* is your God?”**

As the words poured over her, she couldn’t help but wonder: where *was* her God? Where *had* God gone? And *what* was *wrong* with her? She used to be so… *full*. Full of the Spirit. Full of life… Of joy… Of God. Yes, as it was read, she realized the next verse fit too:

**I remember these things as I pour out my soul within me:**

**I used to pass through the throng;**

**I used to lead them in procession up to the house of God**

**with a noise of joy and a voice of thanksgiving,**

**a multitude celebrating a pilgrimage festival.**

Yes, she used to mingle easily with the people of God… She *used* to be filled with the noise of joy and the voice of thanksgiving… She *used* to lead the multitude of God’s people in worship… She *used* to… She *used* to…

But that time of *“used to”* had long since… faded away, and she was left in the here and now. with nothing but her bitter, disappointed tears to fill the emptiness inside… And though—or was it *because*?—that emptiness was *so vast*, she *longed* for it to be filled. Yes, she was starving for hope, ravenous to once again possess real *life*, *craving* the true sustenance of God’s presence. Yet all she knew right now… was famine.

**So *many* of us can identify with this experience of spiritual famine.**

We’ve felt the emptiness that this woman of our story felt. Like her, many of us have gone through days, weeks—months or years, even—with no spiritual sustenance but the watery soup of our own tears. And slowly we waste away…. Oh, yes, we can vividly *remember* the times of plenty that we *once* knew, but those times most definitely are no more. For whatever reason—hardship, busyness, complacency—they’ve disappeared. And rather than finding ourselves seated at the lavish banquet table of the King—the one we anticipated when we signed up for this whole “faith thing”—we find ourselves… hungry. Continuously. With no Jesus banquet in sight.

Knowing there’s no nourishment to be found in our own glaringly empty cupboards, we begin to look elsewhere. We make the rounds of all the spiritual food pantries we know of—worship services, daily Bible reading plans, church retreats—searching for even a small morsel to sustain us for the moment, hoping against hope that… somehow… something… will change for us… someday. When that route fails us, we may take to wandering about begging… looking to be fed by other philosophies, other religions, other ways of life. For surely our own God has neglected us… perhaps another would be better? Or maybe we just give up altogether, resigning ourselves to the inevitable spiritual death that we know will come as a result of our famine.

Yes… many of us know this spiritual famine. Let’s be honest here—it happens… even among ministers. Perhaps *especially* among ministers, for often when we ministers *do* have spiritual food, we’re so busy passing it out to the hungry ones around us that we neglect to take anything but perhaps a crumb for ourselves or our families. And over time we find ourselves wondering, along with this weeping woman, how did we become so spiritually *emaciated*? And, more importantly, *where* is our *God*? Surely God has left us.

**But despite how we may feel, church, we are *not* God-forsaken.**

Oh, I *know* that it doesn’t feel that way. It feels like God’s left us, abandoned us completely…. Or worse yet, maybe it feels like God’s the one who’s *causing* all this turmoil. Maybe God gets some kind of sick joy out of seeing us squirm… watching us writhe….

Yes… in the midst of our struggle it can be *extremely* *hard* to believe that God even cares, much less that God is present and at work. The psalmist felt that doubt too. As the chaotic waters of God’s calamities overwhelm him, he accusingly exclaims to God, “Why did you forget me? Why will I go about mourning, afflicted and oppressed? Why have you cast me off?”

But you see, church, as real as it may *seem,* our feeling of forsakenness does *not* reflect reality. *Hear that again*: we may *feel* deserted by God, but that’s not what’s actually happening.

*How can I say that*, you wonder? When everything points to the possibility that God’s given up and left us on our own, how can I claim that that’s not the case? Even this *psalm* doesn’t provide evidence of God’s rescue! … That’s right. Look at it again. There’s no happy resolution here. Instead it leaves us with the psalmist pleading for God’s grace and holding on to his desperate refrain: “Wait for God, for I will still praise him, my salvation and my God.” In this psalm, as in our lives, we are left with no resolution, only adversity and loneliness.

But I maintain that it’s true nonetheless: God hasn’t abandoned us to spiritual starvation and death. Because that’s not who God is. You see, like us, the psalmist can only see part of the picture. And the other, *crucial* part of that picture is this: The same God whom the psalmist calls on in desperation is the God who wouldn’t abandon Adam and Eve when they sinned but rather sought them out…. This is the same God who was always faithful to covenant with Israel, no matter how many times they were unfaithful in return…. And if those reminders of God’s love and faithfulness aren’t enough, don’t forget that this is also the God who took on flesh and uttered the words of Psalm 42 himself: “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death…. I am thirsty…. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

But Jesus was not forsaken… Neither were the Israelites…. Nor Adam and Eve…. And neither are we. God’s got a perfect track record, and God *will* provide for us. Though we may not know how and when, God *will* bring us out of the spiritual famine we feel trapped in. And we can wait on God, for we cling to this truth: God will never abandon us.**And as we wait on God, church, we can act in faith by letting God *hear* our laments.**

Our *laments*, you see, are our statement of faith in God.

I realize that that claim may seem a bit illogical to many of us, though. *Here’s what I mean:*

If the psalmist *truly* believed that God had abandoned him, why was he addressing God at all? What would be the *point* of talking to someone who wasn’t listening? Yet rather than remaining silent, we see that he *does* speak to God. His pleading, his accusations, his expressions of desperation—*all* of these are statements of faith because they all indicate that he believes God hears him and cares.

We can see then, church, that when we’re in the midst of spiritual famine, lament may be our most faithful response to God. For it *doesn’t deny* that hardships surround us. This psalm, you see, is not a poem of praise or thanksgiving. It’s called a “*maskil*,” a song of *insight*. Praise and thanksgiving, we know, would be inappropriate to the dreary occasion, but *insight* shows that we understand the difficulties of the situation yet we turn to God anyway. Our lament, then, affirms that, *despite* appearances to the contrary, we *believe* that God cares about us. It affirms that we will remain faithful in the *hope* that God will liberate us.

“*Lament*,” you see, as one Christian has written, “is an act of faith.” “Lament transforms. Lament enables perseverance. Lament *empowers*. Lament gives *hope*, because embedded in the lament is an *appeal* that arises out of trust in the God whose *love* is *forever*. *Lament* is the mode by which *hope* is *reborn*.”

So, church, when we and those around us experience spiritual emptiness like the weeping woman or like the writer of Psalms 42 and 43, *let us remember*: while we wait in *hope* for the God who has *not* abandoned us, we can freely express our faith through lament. Because we believe that God hears us and God cares, with the psalmist we too can cry out, “Why are you downcast, oh my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Wait for God, for I will still praise him, my salvation and my God.”