

**An Examination of the Psychodynamic Effects on
Individuals Using Psalms of Lament Intentionally, in the
Form of Ritual Prayer, as a Way of Engaging With
Experiences of Personal Distress**

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I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree in any tertiary institution.

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Abstract

The Psalter has formed the basis of Judeo-Christian worship since ancient times. It has served, and continues to serve, individuals and communities of faith as a foundation for communal and personal devotion. As a devotional tool it is unique in that it provides prayers which address God directly concerning the whole gamut of life experience. While the Psalms can be examined and analysed as a literary text, they must be *used* and *experienced* by people to more fully discover and recognize their power in providing a pathway for expressing life experience.

As a starting point for this research it is recognized that many different approaches have been developed, particularly in more recent times, to discover the significance of using the Psalms. They include examining issues such as literary style, form, cultic function and the connection between praying the psalms and ritual. Many of these approaches have provided signposts pointing to the invaluable resource for prayer provided by the Psalms as people of faith engage with everyday life.

The lament psalms are of particular interest in this regard. There appears to be a reluctance, in some quarters, to employ them as an expression of prayer. As a result, the lament psalms as a way of engaging with experiences of personal distress, and voicing the reflections and responses such experiences produce, have often been ignored.

This study suggests that psalms of lament provide a framework for expressing personal distress in the context of prayer. The framework, identified as a matrix of lament, consists of various modes of articulation characterized as expressing, asserting, investing and imagining constellations. The study examines what happens when individuals, who have first been made aware of the matrix of lament and its constellations, use lament psalms for prayer. Praying of lament psalms in this study is embedded in a prescribed process through which participants engage with their experiences of personal distress.

As a result of such a process any significant psychodynamic changes which may take place can be observed, examined and explored, thereby, highlighting the efficacy of using lament psalms as a form of prayer. The study achieves this by examining the reflections and responses of selected individuals to see whether the process does in fact facilitate changes in the individual's levels of distress, sense of personal control over distress and the nature of relationship between the individual and God. The reflections and responses also provide some indication of how the process might 'birth' a fresh perspective on personal distress for those who choose to incorporate these psalms into their journey of faith.

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Abbreviations

CE	Common Era
DASS	Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
LOC	Locus of Control Scale
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
Ps.	Psalm
Pss.	Psalms
SAI	Spiritual Assessment Inventory
TNIV	Today's New International Version
Trans.	Translation

Bible References

All references are taken from the New Revised Standard Version
unless otherwise stated.