

Sowing our tears

Psalm 126

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

1 When the LORD brought back his exiles to Jerusalem,
it was like a dream!

2 We were filled with laughter,
and we sang for joy.

And the other nations said,

“What amazing things the LORD has done for them.”

3 Yes, the LORD has done amazing things for us!
What joy!

4 Restore our fortunes, LORD,
as streams renew the desert.

5 Those who sow in tears
will harvest with shouts of joy.

6 They weep as they go to sow their seed,
but they sing as they return with the harvest.

Ps 126 outline

1. v1-3 remembering past salvation
2. v4 prayer of the present moment
3. v5-6 hope in the enduring promise in the present moment

It is a **song of ascents**, which means as they were walking up to Jerusalem, they were remembering how joyful it must have felt to be on that same journey finally walking home after bitter years in exile. They remember salvation history so that they will be empowered to walk by faith in their present journey.

The following outline of Psalm 126 (but not the sermon) I got from Tim Keller.

- Don't Stuff Your Tears
- Don't Dump Your Tears
- Sow Your Tears: pray them

1. Don't Stuff Your Tears (by “tears” i mean negative emotions, not just sadness)
 - **Stuffing the seed back into the seed bag.**

- **Avoiding emotions** (not feeling them, not admitting them, not owning them, and not expressing them constructively) is probably among the top snares in life that gets people stuck.
- **“I shouldn’t feel this way.”** this belief keeps people stuffing emotions and faking it. When this happens, the emotions don’t just disappear. They internalize as stress. And because they go unresolved, they continue to fester until they are dealt with.
- **Lack of emotional vocabulary** - some haven’t had emotional health modelled, and no relationships really required them to learn. They only know the words “upset” or “stressed out.” Like a painter with only red and black, they haven’t learned to interpret their own inner life so as to express it well, consequently they may choose to avoid emotional expression.
- **Some things heal with time; some don’t.** Little things might. Other things, big things, tend to heal wrongly unless they are dealt with, like an unset bone that leaves a person permanently maimed, or an abscess that painfully festers until it spreads infection to other parts of the body, such are bitterness, rejection, disappointment, and rage.
- **Stress and health.** Stuffing negative emotions causes stress, and both Scripture and science are in agreement regarding the impact stress has on the human body.

Proverbs 14:30 NIV A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

Psalm 32:3 NLT When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.

We aren’t designed to carry unresolved emotional tension long term. Our bodies are designed to carry love, joy, peace, and hope at our emotional center. Of course ALL of us will experience negative emotions, but when we do the question is, have we learned how to feel them, steward them well, and let them pass through us to God and others so that we don’t sink under their weight? Have you learned to do that, or are you stuffing them down?

Stuffing emotions compounds stress. We hold onto things we stuff. We add burdens to our load. And then life becomes more than we can bear. We aren’t taking things a day at a time, one day’s trouble at a time - which is what Jesus said to do (**Matt 6:34**). He said that each day has trouble enough. But when we stuff our emotions, we take them with us into tomorrow. Then we have **compound interest** on our tears, our worries, our anger, our fears, our bitterness, our rejections.

Religious guilt: Sometimes we experience compounded stress because a religious guilt makes us think we shouldn’t feel this way to begin with. Well you have my permission to feel negative emotions and to express them well! Since we are under grace, we have no need to fake it or to hide for the sake of keeping up appearances. Admitting you have a problem is the first step to dealing with the problem. Denial keeps problems alive in the dark that could be healed in the light. The emotions you bury alive don’t really die, and they probably won’t stay buried either.

Danny Silk: “Religion stuffs emotion and hides sin or anything deemed inappropriate. So we struggle against bringing unacceptable emotions to the surface. But I don’t have a solution for anyone who does not have a problem.”

So what does stuffing your tears look like?

- not feeling your feelings, not admitting them
- deny them verbally, “I’m not bitter, I’m not upset, I’m fine...”
- Claiming to be fine way before you are
- wearing a mask of “I’m okay”

- avoiding deep conversation
- acting “nice” on the outside while resenting people on the inside
- smiling on the outside while weeping on the inside
- “I’m tired all the time.”
- “causeless” depression
- blowing up over small things
- stress in the body can sometimes lead to headaches, aches, pains, joint pains, constant diverse illnesses
- delayed emotional responses - okay in the moment but later not okay at all
- abiding feeling that you are unworthy of love and “people” are unworthy of trust
- various coping strategies to cover over how you really feel:
 - eat your feelings (food)
 - alcohol, drugs (prescription or non)
 - compulsive cleaning
 - compulsive working
 - compulsive exercising
 - sexual addictions
 - video game addictions
 - escaping through tv, movies, reading, social media - any kind of fantasy seems better than the real world
 - fixing other people’s problems instead of working on your own (busybodying, gossip, ministry)

You didn’t own and deal with it, and now it is owning and dealing with you. So don't stuff your tears.

2. Don’t Dump Your Tears (unfiltered explosions, reactionary expressions)

- **Dumping the whole seed bag on the ground wherever, or throwing seed anytime we have it on any kind of soil.**
- Sometimes we know the hypocrisy of stuffing, so we don’t stuff. We dump. We vent. We blow up. We give them a piece of our mind. We tell them a thing or two. We let her rip. We lay it out. We dump.
- **We say, “I’m just being real.”** Are you being “real,” or are you simply being reactionary, speaking rash, regrettable words, and making more messes? Are you burying the original mess of pain underneath new layers of conflict, making the problem even harder to fix? You are, if you are dumping.
- **We say, “At least we’re finally communicating!”** The anger and volume are high, but is it actually helpful communication? Is it resolving the problem or compounding it? Is it helping you get what you need in the relationship? I sorely doubt it.
- **Letting negative words and emotions come out unfiltered can be hurtful and damaging to others.**
- **Letting negative words and emotions come out unfiltered can be hurtful and damaging to us.** Hostility expressed in hostile and aggressive ways actually increases our disdain toward the person who is the object of our scorn.

Proverbs 29:11 A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man quietly holds it back.

James 1:19-20 **19** Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. **20** Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires.

- **Where did you get the idea that was okay to just say whatever hurtful thing you feel in the moment?** People who grew up in homes or cultures in which venting or dumping negative emotions was the normal model have received “permission” to act that way from other people’s example, even though it is harmful and counterproductive.
- **Inauthentic?** Some people think calm, carefully stated, vulnerable expressions of emotion are inauthentic because they view high levels of disrespect in their relationships as normal if people aren't stuffing their feelings. Please don't tolerate this in yourself or others. Have enough self-respect to hang up the phone or walk away and insist that you be treated with respect. And if that's you or me who is the one exploding or dumping, then we have some repenting to do and some messes to clean up, without EVER blame shifting or excusing ourselves on the basis of circumstances.
- **Things spoken in a moment of passion** can damage a heart for years, doing more damage than even the initial issue under discussion. Statements like, “I wish I'd never married you,” while they may be genuine feelings at the time, are extremely irresponsible and harmful. Those words also *likely* don't reflect the whole truth about your perspective, so one moment is now hijacking a lot of lives by a single sentence.
- **Grumbling.** A lot of our emotional dumping takes the form of **grumbling** - which is *complaining or protesting something in a bad-tempered way, often under our breath*. This looks like stuffing, but its passive-aggressive dumping. Grumbling is expressing our hostility or displeasure at people, God, or circumstances in angry, hopeless, blaming ways. Grumbling is intimately connected with unbelief, disobedience, and rebelliousness, and it will not be treated as cute by the Father. **1 Thess 5:18** invites us to a way better outlook on life by giving thanks in all circumstances.
- **Words matter.** What we DON'T often realize is that we are releasing something with these declarations. The declarations align our hearts with what is expressed.
- **Living down lies planted in childhood.** Some of the most difficult lies we have had to live down were childhood grumbling negative declarations that somebody dumped on us in a moment of emotional venting. “You are nothing but trouble. How could you be so stupid! Why do you always have to ruin everything good in my life? Will you just shut up!” Being on the receiving end of these kinds of statements can breed beliefs within us like, “I'm an inconvenience and not worth people's time. I'm stupid. My role is not to assert myself and what I need, but rather just to be used is better than what I deserve. I should shut up because my opinions aren't as important as other peoples'.” Some of us have submitted to this foolishness and don't know how to respectfully assert ourselves in healthy ways. Or perhaps we didn't take it lying down, but we still bought into the broken model and so we manipulate others through smooth talking or intimidation. It is one thing to break free from a specific lie. It is another thing to break free from the whole unhealthy system.
- **Curses.** What we don't recognize, especially in our western scientific worldview, is that the power of life and death are in our tongues. Jesus taught us to bless and not to curse for a very very very good reason. What we often don't recognize is that we are unintentionally cursing ourselves, others, our circumstances. These curses affect the invisible realm. The demonic kingdom literally will partner with these declarations to put power on them in a similar but far inferior way that the Holy Spirit puts power on the truth spoken in love.
- **What the Lord showed me on Tuesday** during my GSSM class. Anger and fear dumping → “I can't handle it!” Turning my back on grace to empower. “I can't” vs “God can.” Learning to verbally thank God for the opportunity to let him do the impossible in and through me (in trials). Immediate opportunity with Carrie taking a while to bring back lunch while I held the fussing baby.

3.) Sow Your Tears (Pray them)

- We've seen not to stuff our tears, or dump them. So let's talk about how to pray them. How to sow them.
- **Sowing.** When a gardener or farmer sows seed they carefully plant it in good soil, at the right depth, knowing that doing so will yield a good harvest LATER ON.
- **Gospel of Appearances.** Of course, the false gospel of appearances has no real help to offer here. All it can say is, "You shouldn't feel that way, and if you do feel that way, then quit it. Feel joy instead! Feel forgiveness! Why don't you just believe God? What's your problem?" The gospel of appearances wants the results of sowing your tears without the process of actually doing so. **It wants a harvest without the work of planting, watering, weeding.** This won't do.
- The Scriptures model a better way. Not hypocritical denial, or sinful grumbling, but **lament.**
- I count **68 of the Psalms** to be laments. Not grumbling. Not stuffing. But praying the tears.

(Dennis Bratcher) The function of a Lament is to provide a structure for crisis, hurt, grief, or despair; to move a worshipper from hurt to joy, from darkness to light, from desperation to hope. A lament arises from an immediate crisis or emotional state that faces the worshipper. This can range from physical threat either externally (an invading army) or internally (physical illness), to interpersonal conflict with others in the community, to betrayal or injustices perpetrated by friends or family. All of these can be referred to metaphorically as "the enemy" or "foes," even when the crisis is physical illness. This becomes a stereotypical way of describing any crisis that threatens or diminishes the vitality of life. In this same vein, "death" is a frequent metaphor for this crisis, whether or not the crisis is physically life threatening

[Structure of the lament]...the lament moves from articulation of the emotion of the crisis, to petition for God to intervene, to an affirmation of trust in God even though [as of yet] there has been no immediate deliverance from the crisis...

- **Scripture is good at this.** Many Scriptures were in fact, given exactly for this! Prewritten prayers to pray when your heart is breaking and you don't know the way to the place to which you are going...
- **Jesus is** a "man of sorrows, familiar with suffering," who carried our pain - he knows (**Isaiah 53:3**).
- Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted (**Matt 5:4**)."
- **The Father is** close to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit (**Ps 34:18**)
- **James 5:13** Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.
- Praying our tears we grieve Godward. We journey from denial or despair to hope.
- Praying our tears changes us.
- Praying our tears releases the power of God to help us.
- Praying our tears IS the way of faith in this broken world.
 - Don't Stuff Your Tears
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So now, it's time to do it. Let's pray our tears.

Prayer Time (praying the structure of Ps 126) - by yourself or with others

stage 1 - Recounting God's Past Faithfulness

- God you delivered the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt because they cried, and you heard their cry.

- You delivered David from all of his enemies and heard his cries.
- You have always heard your people's cries, and delivered them.
- This is who you are. We remember you.

stage 2 - praying our tears

- God will you please show me if there are tears I have stuffed, bring them to my mind
- God will you please show me if I have empowered the tears by speaking evil things
- What do you want God to do for you? Pray your tears.

stage 3 - declaring our hope in the promise, not the problem (though you might not yet see or feel it)

- God, I will worship you and sing for joy when I see you turn this darkness into light
- God I will tell others about the greatness of your salvation when you have turned my tears into joyful songs
- God, I will see your goodness in this life, in the land of the living
- Surely you hear me, see me, know me, are with me, for me, in me, forever!
- Surely I am blessed in my coming and going, when I sit and rise, when I lie down and sleep, surely I will never be abandoned.

Benediction based upon Psalm 126:5-6

5 May you sow in tears

and harvest with shouts of joy.

6 May you weep as you go to sow your seed,

but sing as you return with the harvest.