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## Why, God? I Will Worship Through It All Part 1 Worship When Life Hurts

Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today we're starting a new series. You saw what Matt just did on that video. He made that comma something special because we're not asking, "Why God?" The comma is very important in this series. We are asking "Why, God?" We're talking about worshiping through it all. How did we get to this series? We have one member on our teaching team. It doesn't matter who it is, but his initials are Travis Brawner. He has a mind like no one else.

Travis went through the last two years of teaching at our church – because we follow the five purposes of the church very closely – and he gave percentage points to each purpose that has been covered. He said, "The purpose we need to dig into a little bit is worship. We've done well with fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and evangelism; let's do something about worship." I think it was like 32.67% in all the other ones. He is passionate about it.

Today we're kicking off with *I will Worship When Life Hurts*. When I'm asking the question, "Oh God, why? **Why is this happening to me?**" If you haven't received your answer, you're now to the next question – "**How long is this going to last?**" We just sang the song, *Lord, I need you*. But I'm wondering how many people in here would rather sing this one: "Lord, I need you to get me out of this" or "Lord, I need you now." "I don't know how long I'm going to have to deal with this."

Today, we're going to look at a lament psalm. If you have your Bible, you can turn to Psalms 28. We're going to have a little bit of introduction of the series and of a lament before we get there. But we want to talk today about worship and how we express feelings and declare truth as we worship.

Kind of a working definition that has helped me greatly over the years is Pastor Steven Cole's. He says, "*Worship is an inner attitude and feeling of awe, reverence...*" Last week, when I walked in on Easter and Carolyn started off with *So Will I* and all of the pictures and we were celebrating our Creator and Sustainer of all life, I was filled with awe, as I know many of you were. "...*gratitude, and love toward God resulting from a realization of who he is and who we are?*"

You've heard us say it quite a bit around here. Part of our worship is always to keep in mind that he is God and I am not. That solves a lot right there. **He is God and I am not.** As we talk about worship, I know we often say this and you've seen this on the screen a bunch, but **worship is more than a day of the week, more than a building or a place where we gather, and more than music.**

Today, we're going to get pretty specific and look at worship as music as we dig into the Jewish Hymnal of the Book of Psalms. As we talk about worship, we've been having great conversations with our worship team. How many of you think Katie does a fantastic job leading the group? She does a great job. Our worship team is diligent in preparing each week.

This is why it's important. Pastor John Piper puts it this way. "*A congregation learns its theology by the songs they sing, not just the preaching they hear.*" This is John Ashcroft's big thing. I've met him in airports three times over the years. The last time, Doug Goodwin was with me and we were on a delay; it was like a 72-hour delay or something. John Ashcroft got to talking and his passion in life... He does keynotes on political stuff and all that, but his passion in life is getting the Word of God in the mouths of His people. He kept coming at me, asking, "Are you doing that? What are your people singing? Are they thinking about what they're singing?" That's because what do we do? Music starts and we start to get into it. A lot of you may get the shoulders into it...

Rick Rigsby, our favorite guest preachers that comes here... I'll never forget when he leaned over to me. You know he's African American, get down into the worship. He looks over at me and I'm just kind of swaying and bobbing my head. He goes, "This church is way too white. I don't know what we're going to do to help you out, Ted." But we do; we get into feeling the music and sometimes we sing things and we're like, "I don't know if I believe that."

It's one of my favorite stories of Lee Strobel. This is how the Lord really started to cultivate his heart. He was an atheist. He worked for the Chicago Tribune. He wanted to prove Christianity wrong. He set out studying it. I always love when he gives his testimony. He talks about going to church and then at home, when he's in the shower or he's driving somewhere, and he starts singing these songs that he heard at church that are just catchy and they stuck with him. He would stop and go, "I don't believe a word of this."

Music has the power to draw us in and get us going. This is why Pastor Piper said, "*I commend every worship team to be vigilant over the lyrics of what their people are singing.*"

There have been plenty of times when I've been down there singing and I see something on the screen and I'm thinking, *Oh that's bad. We should probably stop singing that.* I'm sure somebody wrote it with a great heart and there are a lot of feelings expressed in it, but it just kind of rubs me wrong.

We dealt with this a couple of weeks ago with the song that Carolyn opened Easter with, *So Will I*. We were talking about it as a worship team. We wanted to be vigilant over these lyrics. I said, "There's just one word that I think, especially to someone new in the church, is just not really expressing what we believe." It's at the end of that song where it says, "Eight billion ways that God has expressed his love." In that, he's speaking of the population of the earth. Then it says, "...each one a *child* you died to save." Speaking of everybody on planet earth. I listened to it and I just had this moment. It's probably copywrite infringement to do what we're about to do, but if we could change the word *child* to the word *soul* because we believe, according to the scripture, if you've not placed faith in Jesus, you are of your father the devil and a child of darkness.

We want to make sure what we're speaking and what we're sharing... Because you learn just as much in what you're singing as you do through preaching. It's just as important and we have to be vigilant over that. Carolyn sang it and I was like, *We should submit that to Hillsong; I thought it was better.*

We want you to know we are on this. Yet, after the last service, I got like three people with other songs they want us to look at. We don't need you to be lyric police; let's just trust the worship team and the leadership of that.

Here's what we're doing when we worship: we're **expressing feelings**. You're going to see that today in the lament psalms. We're expressing feelings. Maybe you grew up in a church that really taught you how to suppress feelings. Maybe you kind of have this idea that feelings are bad. We believe feelings... John Calvin calls them distracting emotions like complexities and fears and doubts. But we are to listen to them.

Ryan Pannell said it for years around here. Feelings are like our children. We listen to them, we care for them, we just do not allow them to make major decisions for our family. I would say in worship, we listen to them, we express them – it's not a right or wrong issue; it's just what's going on and we're going to talk about how to do that today – but we also **declare truth**.

Maybe you grew up in a church like I did where we didn't do a lot of expressing feelings, we did a lot of declaring truth and we did it out of this thing right here. Does everybody know what this is? Josh, this is a hymnal and it's a book full of songs that we used before we had screens. Then, around the 90s, the church got projectors. How many of you remember when we went to projectors? We used the hymnals to kind of prop up the projectors because we had them on the table. At First Baptist Little Elm, I needed three of them to get that projector all the way up on the screen. I'm not going to bring it up because some of you are still ticked we're not using them. First United Methodist is two and a half miles that way. Okay... That's a joke.

I love this hymnal. I remember "Would you stand with me and turn in your hymnal to page 572..." In the first service, a guy stood up. I said, "You're not paying attention; this is an illustration. Sit down, sir." I led worship for about a year and a half. I don't know music. I never studied music. I know what sounds good. I know what sounds bad. That's about all I know about music. We had worship leaders that would get that arm swinging. I don't know 1 and 2, 2 and 4, 4 and 4, 8 and 6... They had no idea what they were doing, but, man, they got the arm just a flailing out there to lead us and we would all belt out "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of..." I always loved when we got to the chorus. We had one really wiry music minister and he would hold out the chorus. So, I did this because it's all I knew how to do.

At Southside Baptist Church in Lakeland, Georgia, I would lead, "This is my story, this is my song, praising my savior all the day long." Then I would hold out the end. I'd make everybody hold it out. I would hold out my arm and sing "This..... Is..... My..... I can remember the old people going, "Oh my golly, lets get it done." Now, this song is called *Blessed Assurance*. If you don't believe in eternal security, you've probably never sung this song, but we had another one called *Victory in Jesus*. We always had the piano on the righthand side. I would always say Jesus is on the righthand side of the Father, not the

piano, but we always felt it had to be over there. We had a lady that played the organ. I'm leading us in *Victory in Jesus*. It was "Victory in Jesus" and then she would pound the organ keys twice. Again, I don't know how to tell her to fix it; I just know that's not how it's supposed to go. "Praising my savior all the day long" again she would pound the keys twice. That's all she would do. That's when I learned I could play the organ too.

But do you know what these were? I was flipping through this this week. This is a used hymnal for \$82.00, I think. They are precious commodities, so if you have them propping up your projectors, watch this; you can get some cash. "Standing on the promises of Christ my King..." Let's take another offering because I know we could easily get another ten grand out of this service. But we did this. How many of you know what I'm talking about? At your church, you just stood up week after week and you declared truth, declared truth.

Then we kind of shifted. I don't think you have to swing from one to the other where a lot of songs could be about feelings. We desire here to express the souls cry to our Father in heaven while declaring truth. The Baptist preacher, Spurgeon, said this when he speaks of the Psalms. The Book of Psalms was the Jewish hymnal. *"In these busy days, it would be greatly to the spiritual profit of Christians if they were more familiar with the Psalms, in which they would find a complete armory for life's battles and a perfect supply for life's needs. For every condition there is a psalm, suitable and elevating."*

So, the Psalms break down, and the one we actually used breaks down into different categories. Here are not all of the categories, but some of them, just so you see:

**Creations Psalms** are when we express gratefulness. We are in awe of the splendor of God's creation and praising him as creator.

**Exodus Psalms** would be Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage.

**Royal Psalms** praise the kingship of Yahweh, thy Lord.

**Torah Psalms** would be singing the Word of God.

**Wisdom Psalms** would be the fear of the Lord.

**Messianic Psalms** would of course be speaking of the coming Christ and the role and the person of Jesus.

Out of all the categories in the Psalms, the largest category is what we are going to look at today. It's a lament psalm. Of the 150 Psalms, 67 of them would be laments. If you're wondering how you would know the difference between the kinds of psalms, I would really encourage you to get a study Bible. Life Application Bible does this and Ryrie Study Bible. When you go down to the notes, it will say, "In this lament psalm, in this royal psalm, in this wisdom psalm..."

I want us to look at the basic structure and the elements of a lament psalm so we get the feeling of this before we look at Psalms 28 and we see it play out. One of the quickest ways to identify a lament psalm is just the “**Oh God, why?**” “Why am I hurting?” “Why do I feel empty?” “Why do you feel distant?” “Why am I not hearing from you?” That’s why you get the petition. “I need you to incline your ear to me.” “I need you to rise up.” “I need you to repay my enemies.” “Oh God, why?”

If you keep asking that question, then it’s “**How long do I have to deal with this?**” This week, somebody said, “Ted, I know God does not want my loved one to suffer here at the end.” He was almost declaring it as a promise. Rex and Don, as care pastor, are excellent at this and we discussed it this week. It’s hard to do this in a hospital, but to say, “God never promised you that you won’t suffer.” Carolyn just shared it. We go through trials and troubles and difficulties. It’s not a promise of God that you won’t suffer. So, we have to be careful that we’re not standing on our preferences. I want to be super clear about this. When I die, I want zero suffering. How many of you are with me on that? I do not want to suffer. I want to go in my sleep. Amy wants to go next to me like the couple in The Notebook. But, that’s not a promise given to me.

The next one is “**The enemy is winning.**” “They’re slandering me.” As we are going to see today. “God, don’t put me in this category. Don’t just plunk me in with my enemy. Deal with them and deal with me separately.” The enemy is winning, and they’ve been winning for a long time.

And then this one. “**I am hurting.**” Some of you have to stop... I hope you get this from the text. I hope you stop spending 30 minutes scrolling online, telling everybody who says they are a friend how much you’re hurting. Go into your closet and tell your Heavenly Father. Lift your hands to him. Cry out as Robert Duvall did in that movie The Apostle; he’s shaking his fist, crying out to God. Telling God how much you’re hurting and how painful life is for you right now doesn’t affect his greatness one bit. “Life hurts. “I don’t like what people are saying about me. I don’t like what people are doing to me. I don’t like any of it.”

Now this is key and you’re going to see it in the lament Psalm today. “**God, you seem distant.**” And often that distance is perceived through silence. “I’m not getting any answers right here. I’m not hearing from you, so you must not be interested at all.” And that’s a promise you can stand on. God has promised you his presence. He’s promised you the forgiveness of sin. If you confess your sin, he is faithful and just to forgive you of your sin. And because of the resurrection that we looked at last week, we are no longer in our sins. We don’t have the penalty of sin upon us. We know heaven is our home. These are the promises we stand on.

My mom... How many of you had the mom with the eyes that pierced through your soul? Do you know what I’m talking about? How many moms feel they have that gift right now and you’re good at it? I loved to ask my mom, “Oh mom, why?” Like when she would tell me to do something. This is the teenagers’ line, right? “Oh, why?” Then my mom would give me that look. She wouldn’t say anything. Do you know why? It’s because she’s saying. “You know the answer. You know it. You’re pushing back right now. Why don’t I give you a second? Because I think if you answer it, it’s going to be a lot better for this whole interaction.”

How many of you know what I'm talking about? You came around to the answer, right? You were like, "I know why. I was just seeing if I could get out of this." That Bonnie Cunningham piercing through to my soul... That's what the lament Psalm does, and I love it.

They typically end with one or both of a declaration of trust and a vow of praise. Through all of this it ends with "**Yet I will trust you.**" "I know what you've done." That's why a lot of the hymns tell us... I remember singing, "Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done." This is why when you read throughout all of Israel's history, you get the "Hey, your son is going to ask you questions one day and you've got to be ready to answer that he delivered us." This is why... We know "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one." There is a God, there is only one God, he is the Lord, he is our Lord, and we will love the Lord. Then what does it say? "These truths are to be upon your hearts." That's why when we sing and we get into it, it is finding its way... As Gary Smalley used to say, it's tattooed, branded on our hearts."

I have a friend that sends me these texts and they are a lament because of the pain he's going through from a physical ailment. I get this: "Teddy, I'm at war, but I'm kind of having fun." I'm like that is the opposite. He's like, "It's the most pain I've ever been in. God is good. I know heaven is my home." He shares his pain; he's clear with that and open to that and honest about that, but it always has a vow of praise or a declaration of trust behind it. He's in so much pain. He's a very conservative guy that hasn't had a drop to drink his entire life.

I said, "Is there anyway a doctor can give you medicine like heavy narcotics to help with this pain? I'm for it if it keeps you pain free."

My friend, who is the most conservative man I know, said, "Ted, I would drink Jack Daniels and smoke pot right now if it took away this pain."

I said, "Well one, you're in the wrong state. And two, I wouldn't do any of that..." He is lamenting and, in this honesty, this raw emotion, he's praising his father in heaven. And we're going to see that in Psalm 28.

You can't read this in a monotone. If you read all of the Bible in just one tone throughout all of it, you're missing it. The lament has passion. "They enemy is winning." "I am hurting." "God, where are you?" "Listen, come to me. Incline your ear to me."

Psalm 28 - ***1 To you, Lord, I call; you are my Rock, do not turn a deaf ear to me.*** So, as the pain comes in, the silence and the distance that he feels from God is there. ***For if you remain silent*** (distant), ***I will be like those who go down to the pit.*** The pit is a common illustration in the Psalms for death. ***2 Hear my cry for mercy as I call to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward...*** This is a common expression throughout all of the psalms for praises.

I'm just going to encourage you to try it this week. You've seen the movie War Room, but we need to do more of this. Stay off of social media to vent your problems and you find a room in your house and you go into it with your hands up. You share everything that you're feeling: hurts, pains, doubts, fears,

frustrations, anger. And do you know what's great. I see it online all the time. People are kind of passive aggressive. They don't name the person they're talking about. They don't name them, but they give you enough information that you know who it is. You can go in your room and name the person between you and your father in heaven. Cry out to him. Be very honest. ...***your Most Holy Place.***

***3 Do not drag me away with the wicked...*** Now he's saying, "I don't want to be clumped in with them, but I'm feeling that right now." ...***with those who do evil, who speak cordially with their neighbors...*** What's common in a lament psalm is, "God, have I done something? Reveal that to me. Would the Holy Spirit call me by name right now? ...***but harbor malice in their hearts.*** Here, you get the "God, I need you to act." The petition is coming in. ***4 Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work; repay them for what their hands have done and bring back on them what they deserve.*** This is a passionate cry out to God. ***5 Because they have no regard for the deeds of the Lord and what his hands have done, he will tear them down and never build them up again.***

Now you're going to start to get into the confession of trust, the declaration of trust, and the vow of praise. ***6 Praise be to the Lord, for he has heard my cry for mercy. 7 The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.*** I know this, I stand on this. ***My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him. 8 The Lord is the strength of his people, a fortress of salvation...*** I love that imagery in the Psalms. The fortress is that impenetrable defense. In those days, they would build the walls to keep the enemies out, but no wall was perfect to keep a human army out with ordinary weapons of war. It was possible to get through, but with the Lord, it is an impenetrable defense. He is our fortress. ...***for his anointed one.*** Then we get messianic foreshadowing here of the Good Shepherd, Jesus. ***9 Save your people and bless your inheritance; be their shepherd and carry them forever.***

That you and I, this week, in our worship, in our praise, in our prayer, would listen to what we're feeling, would care for our soul, would understand what's going on. Sit down long enough to listen and go, "Yes, I am feeling this." And then don't take it automatically to your spouse, to your children, to your boss. Find a place to get alone and take it to your Father in heaven because this is what a lament psalm does. If you read through... Maybe this week and the next couple of weeks, you'll have time to study this a little bit, but you'll see that this is how we worship with a broken heart.

**A lament psalm teaches us how to worship with a broken heart.** Come in here and pour your soul out to your Father in heaven while you declare and stand on the truth of God's Word that you know. I love what Vince Gill said at George Jones funeral. He said, "George Jones taught us how to sing with a broken heart."

I love that, so I got a play list together this week of George Jones. That's why I'm down today. I've never gone to a George Jones concert, but I bet you didn't walk out of there super happy. I have to be honest with you. I love this song when he goes, "Step right up, come on in, if you'd like to take the grand tour of the lonely house that once was home sweet home." When you start listening to these songs your like, "Where's the happy. I need some happy right now." At the end of the song, it says, "And on your way out, stop by the nursery where she left me without mercy..." By the end of the song you're like, "Man, this is rough. That was the worst tour ever."

Then you think there's got to be a better one, so I hit the button on my steering wheel and I go over to, "He stopped loving her today. They place the wreath upon his door." This guy has to die to get over the love of this woman who would never return the love to him. You're going, "Wow, come on, George, I need something to perk it up."

I can remember when Amy and I... I graduated college and then went to Illinois. I drove Amy over to Nebraska. I was going to propose there, and I did in Fremont, Nebraska. I gave her the ring and we were engaged. The next day I had to leave and go back to Illinois and then down to George to start ministry. That next day, I was a mess.

I'll never forget hugging her good-bye. We were both weeping uncontrollably because we're not going to see each other for months before the wedding. I pushed her hand back through the door. And then I had to drive through the entire state of Iowa. Raise your hand if you've ever driven through Iowa. That's sad enough. It's like there is nothing going on in your life. That's a pretty rough drive right there. But, it's even worse when you're listening to Vince Gill sing, "I never knew lonely could be so blue..."

That's what happens if you're just expressing feelings. I love country music, but with the lament, we get the vow of praise. Though the fields are done, though the crops did not produce and there are no grapes on the vine, yet, I will rejoice, I will praise. I don't know how long. I will praise. I don't know why, but I know what God does. I know his promises. I'm going to stand on those.

Here's how you worship with a broken heart. Express what you're feeling. Be honest about that, but, at the same time, stand on the promises of God, not your preferences. I love what Rick Warren always taught us. God is not your genie. God is not your servant. We can cry out to him, but I oftentimes wonder... As I'm asking these questions and shaking my fist, wanting to know why, I sometimes see my Mom and Dad looking at me, going "I'm going to give you some time to get there. I told you I'm with you." Jesus said, "You can come to me and find rest."

I told you this before, but I'm not really a big fan when worship leaders say, "God showed up." I think a better expression is "We showed up."

Express your hurts, fears, and frustrations – what John Calvin would call the distracting emotions – and at the same time, remember that God is with you. Bring your questions; he can take them. Bring your emotions; cry out; go into that secret place.

Here's what we hear a lot, and I'm with you on this. People say, "I can't wait for Sunday. Just can't wait for worship on Sunday. By the time I get here, I'm so beat down, so dry, but I leave here so refreshed." I kind of feel like you're soaking it all in for an hour as we gather and have fellowship and worship and discipleship together. But you'll notice it's running out.

Then, tomorrow, you're back to work and then Tuesday night, you have dinner with in-laws. Then Friday, you have a recital to go to. You want to hear your kid, but not all the other kids. Then Saturday, you're going to sit on bleachers for eight hours watching volleyball games and you're drained by the time you get here.

I'm with you. I love gathering here. I love being here on Sundays when I'm not teaching. I don't have to have an outline in my head. I don't have to pick slides... I love to engage. This is very replenishing for me and very much fills me up. But let me tell you, I don't want to just leave here, soaking it all up, and then by Wednesday, there's nothing left. This is for a lot of your right now. You're waiting for Sunday to worship. You're not going to read your Bible between now and next Sunday. There's not going to be much of a prayer life.

I just want to encourage you. Dad, start by going into your kids' rooms this week and asking, "Hey, can I pray with you?" You're going to learn a lot about your kids if you start praying together. Ask your spouse to pray with you. Don't wait for Sunday, don't be dry because we don't want to be behind you on 76 when you're dry. Then you go to church and you're like, "Man, I love all these people on the strip." On Sunday it's like, "Yeah, take your time. Come on and get on in here." By Saturday, nope.

Don't let Sunday be your only day of worship. Let this be a great time for us to gather. Let this be unbelievable for us as we gather in fellowship and worship together, but I just want to encourage you. Worship at home, pray at home, gather your family to do the same.

If this is not part of the rhythm of your life, go to lunch after this service and talk about it as a family. What are we going to do? We already know how to express feelings to each other. But as a family what if, instead of just venting and spewing all these feelings on one another, we learn how to do this and take it to the Lord? What if we do that as a family? What if we begin praying and worshiping together? I don't know, maybe when you leave here you find worship on your phone and maybe grab some of these songs and start playing it as a family. I love country music, but I know when I need to kind of get off it a little bit and go over here and express feelings and declare truth. I hope you do this as a family.

Father, we're grateful for what you're doing at our church. As we launch into this series, asking the why and the how long questions, I pray for families to get into new habits and new disciplines throughout it. I pray that dads would open Bibles around the table this week.

Instead of just a hug and a goodnight, that they would gather around the foot of the bed with teenagers and with preschoolers that have never done this before. It's brand new for them and they don't know what to think of it all or how to do it or how to proceed, but that they would commit to this journey over the next several weeks and learn how to do it.

I pray that they would not just rely on Sunday for their worship, that they would not rely on venting and all these different social media sights and with friends and co-workers and all that, but they would learn to bring all of this to you.

Teach us, grow us through this series. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.