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Evaluating Liturgical Engagement With Psalms of Lament: Reading Psalm 74 Through the Lenses of Feeling and Thinking

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Abstract

Recent trends in biblical scholarship that have generated new interest in the book of Psalms and in the voice of lamentation may in turn present new opportunities for the liturgical use of psalms of lament. Drawing on the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, the present study tested the ways in which feeling types and thinking types may evaluate Psalm 74 differently. The data demonstrated that feeling types and thinking types approach a psalm of lament in quite different ways. For thinking types, this is a satisfying intellectual exercise. They are caught up by the theological questions raised and fascinated by the capacity of the human mind to challenge God to keep God's side of the covenantal agreement with the people. For feeling types, this is a journey of the heart as they identify with the protagonists rehearsing the source and cause of their pain. Preachers and liturgists need to be aware of this contrast.

Keywords Empirical theology · Biblical hermeneutics · Psychological type theory · Biblical lamentation

Introduction

Since the middle of the 20th century there has been something of an earthquake in the world of Old Testament studies. For most of its history, the Old Testament has been taken at face value, and the story it has wanted to tell has been accepted without deconstruction (Bright, 1981; Noth, 1960). That story concerns narratives of the origins of 12 tribes who participated in the Exodus from slavery in Egypt to a promised land, during which journey they became partners in a covenant agreement with God. Subsequently they conquered and settled the land. There was some dispute about the need for a king,

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but they decided to have one, and it was that, according to one strand of tradition, that led finally to the demise of the nation and exile in Babylon. According to another tradition, it was the priestly and royal connection that actually gave Israel its identity and enabled it to continue as a 'people' in diaspora after the Exile.

More recently, since the second half of the century, a more suspicious hermeneutic has questioned the historical origins of Israel, the ethnic relationships on which it was built, the historicity of the conquest and settlement narratives and the motivation for writing the story in the way it has appeared (Davies, 1992; Dever, 2003; Gottwald, 1979; Whitelam, 1996). One result has been a shift in the focus of scholarship from the Exodus to the Exile, as the period during and after which the Old Testament materials were 'published' and, according to some views, created (McDermott, 1998). Consequently, there has been greater interest in the relation of the writings to the theological problems caused by the Exile (Brueggemann, 1997). Simply put, these problems concern how a God who has promised a land, progeny and a lasting favored relationship, could allow the people to be shipped out of that land to a situation where the purity of ethnicity would be diluted and to have that happen in a brutal and terrifying way (Clines, 1996). One outcome has been a renewed interest in religious response to trauma, and that has provided a new interest in the literary genre of lament (Holdsworth, 2021; O'Connor, 2002; Westermann, 1981). The book of Lamentations is a vivid and graphic description of what it was like to endure the sacking of Jerusalem and its aftermath. There has been general consensus that this form of writing is a corrective to denial and that it displays many features in common with modern responses to extreme tragedy (Brueggemann, 2020; Dorey et al., 2012; Holdsworth, 2003; Guest, 2008; Swinton, 2012, 2017, 2018; Warner, 2020).

Alongside these trends, there has been a renewed interest in the book of Psalms, a book largely bypassed by critical scholars until the 20th century. Such academic interest as there was concerned philological and anthropological evidence about the literary history of these liturgies and the historical settings that prompted them. They were not thought to be theologically interesting, and as the most recent reception history of the Psalms has pointed out, the book did not appear to coincide with the agendas of enlightenment rationalism (Gillingham, 2020). One aspect of historical criticism is the concern to identify genres in literary works. Within this context, in a work first published in German in 1926, Hermann Gunkel subjected the Psalms to this critical method and was able to list and classify different kinds of psalms (see Gunkel, 1967). A surprising result was the discovery that the most numerous category of psalms in the collection comprised psalms of lament. That conclusion was allowed to stand without further enquiry until the last quarter of the 20th century, when a seminal work by Claus Westermann (1981) prompted what has become a new, exciting and creative academic area.

Westermann narrowed Gunkel's categories to just two, praise and lament, and sought to find a relationship between them. He identified the structure of laments. They begin with a description of personal or communal trouble with, usually, a defense of the injustice and unfairness of it all. Then there are axioms of faith. These have the effect of making a logical argument that since God is just, concerned, powerful and compassionate, God must act. There follows, often in robust terms a list of the things God must do. This can be followed by a negotiation along the following lines: What use am I to you dead? Make, me strong to serve you. And then, finally, there is a vow or promise that, if God does wake up (literally) and get on with the job (that is the tone of these laments), the lamenter will stand forever in God's debt and therefore will forever commend God and worship God.

Walter Brueggemann (1984) picked up on this theme in his book *The Theology of the Psalms*. His concern was to relate academic study to the (mostly ignored) fact that these psalms had their life in worshipping congregations and were not abstract literary creations; also, he wanted to find a satisfactory place, theologically, for psalms of lament that the church generally regarded as an embarrassment precisely because of their robustness. He posited a threefold scheme in the psalms, corresponding to three movements, or shifts, in human experience. He named these as psalms of orientation, psalms of disorientation, and psalms of new orientation. Lament made up the second category. They were theologically interesting in the way they connected with the other categories.

Since then, there have been a number of developments building on Brueggemann's insight. There has been increased recognition that the psalms are actually a useful database for discerning the feelings, attitudes and ordinary theology of the faithful (Holdsworth, 2023). There has been exploration of lament as a therapeutic device for those who have suffered a variety of traumas, ranging from disability to abuse, about which victims feel that they have been treated unfairly and are left angry and without resolution (Blumenthal, 1993; Holdsworth, 2021). People have been encouraged to write their own laments and to use lament as a basis for understanding their own unresolved suffering, as in the Reconciled Church Course (Hopley, 2021). Some writers have attempted to find a place for lament in existing liturgies. Brueggemann (2020, pp. 111–113) suggests that the only place left for truth-telling in liturgy is confession. Holdsworth (2021, pp. 124–125) believes there is potential in intercession. There is general appeal in the insistence of laments, which deal with situations as they are, as antidotes to denial. Critiques of some contemporary worship is a common theme, from the perspective of lament, claiming that much contemporary worship continues unaware or careless of the sadness and suffering in the world and that this is obscene. It seems that lament has found its time.

It is probably true to say that most proposed modern applications of the lament model are related to individual grief and that this mirrors the Old Testament psalms, the majority of which describe the suffering that arises from disease, the breakdown of relationships, and personal misfortune. There are, however, 16 psalms in the collection that are usually classified as 'community laments'. Pleins (1993) describes their context thus:

The psalmists recognized that communal tragedy is more than an amalgam of individual tragedies. Hence the need for a poetry that arises out of the community's experience of war, dislocation, refugee flight, exile, oppression and despair. (p. 31)

Psalm 74 is one such psalm, written after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple (and by implication all that it stands for) by the Babylonians, immediately prior to the Exile. It alternates vivid descriptions of the sacking of the temple with heartfelt expressions of the incomprehensible absence of God. Its author attempts to capture the spirit of despair that these events have caused. It is possible that there was some kind of liturgy among the ruins of the building, for which this psalm would have been an appropriate accompaniment (Mays, 1994, p. 244).

Research Question

The potential for the revitalization of psalms of lament within contemporary liturgy raises an important question about how participants in liturgy may respond to, engage with, and interpret the classic psalms of lament. One conceptual framework within which this question can be effectively conceptualized is the reader-response approach to

biblical hermeneutics. This approach gives serious attention to the location of the reader in shaping dialogue with the text of scripture, and it may do so in a variety of ways. The approach may be conceptual or empirical. The approach may be informed by sociological theory (concerned with issues such as gender, power and ethnicity) or by psychological theory (concerned with issues such as perception and evaluation).

Within the reader-response approaches to biblical hermeneutics, a strong strand of empirical research, rooted within psychological theory, has been generated by the SIFT approach. The SIFT approach, as defined and developed by Francis and Village (2008), is rooted in psychological type theory as originally proposed by Jung (1971) and as developed and refined by a series of psychometric indicators, including the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers & McCaulley, 1985), the Keirsey Temperament Sorter (Keirsey & Bates, 1978), and the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Francis, 2005; Francis Laycock, & Brewster, 2017).

Psychological type theory distinguishes between two core psychological processes, each of which is relevant for hermeneutical theory: the perceiving process and the judging (or evaluating) process. As defined by this theory, perceiving is concerned with the ways in which people see the world or gather data about the world around them, and judging is concerned with the ways in which people evaluate or make decisions about that data. The distinctive feature of psychological type theory concerns how each of these two processes is conceptualized as being expressed through two contrasting functions. The perceiving process is expressed through the two functions of sensing and intuition. The judging process is expressed through the two functions of thinking and feeling. Psychological type theory maintains that, when engaging in each process, individuals tend to prefer one function over the other. As a consequence, the preferred function becomes well developed and the less preferred function tends to be less well developed.

In terms of the perceiving process, people who prefer sensing concentrate on the facts and on the details. They develop as practical people. Those who prefer intuition concentrate on the bigger picture and the larger themes. They develop as imaginative people. In terms of the judging process, people who prefer feeling focus on subjective personal and interpersonal values and on how people are affected by decisions. They develop as humane people. Those who prefer thinking focus on objective analysis, on logical trajectories, and on how systems are affected by decisions. They develop as logical people.

Francis and Village (2008) hypothesized that these core psychological differences would be reflected in the ways in which people approached and interpreted scripture. They suggested that sensing types would pay close attention to the details within the text while intuitive types would be more concerned with the bigger themes and the wider picture posed by the text. They suggested that feeling types would pay close attention to the human narrative and values within the text while thinking types would be more concerned with identifying the theological issues and problems raised by the text. They suggested that feeling types might warm to the God of mercy, while thinking types might wish to stand alongside the God of justice.

The program of empirical research designed to test the theory underpinning the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics and liturgical preaching involved structuring hermeneutical communities based on psychological type preference. Participants were first invited to explore psychological type theory and to become aware of their own psychological type preference. Then they were invited to work in 'type-alike' groups in order to reflect on and to respond to a specific passage of scripture. Working in these type-alike groups generally clarified the distinctive voices of the four functions. For example, a group of sensing types, without the distraction of intuitive types, settled into working with a characteristically sensing perspective.

The initial studies conducted in this way focused on passages from the four Gospels. For example, Francis and Jones (2011) employed the resurrection narratives reported in Mark 16:1–8 and Matthew 28:1–15, working with two different groups: 26 ministry training candidates and 21 Anglican clergy and readers. In stage one, the participants were divided according to the perceiving process and invited to discuss the Marcan resurrection narrative that is rich in material to attract sensing and intuition. In stage two, the participants were divided according to the judging process and invited to discuss the Matthean resurrection narrative that is rich in issues to engage feeling and thinking.

Following similar approaches, studies have been published exploring the following passages from the Gospels: the feeding of the five thousand reported in Mark 6:34–44 (Francis, 2010); the cleansing of the temple and the incident of the fig tree reported in Mark 11:11–21 (Francis, 2012a ; Francis & apSiôn, 2016b); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6:4–22 (Francis, 2012b); the narrative of separating sheep from goats reported in Matthew 25:31–46 (Francis & Smith, 2012); the birth narratives reported in Matthew 2:13–20 and Luke 2:8–16 (Francis & Smith, 2013); two narratives concerning John the Baptist reported in Mark 1:2–8 and Luke 3:2b–20 (Francis, 2013; Francis & Smith, 2014); the Johannine feeding narrative reported in John 6:5–15 (Francis & Jones, 2014); two passages from Mark exploring different aspects of discipleship reported in Mark 6:7–14 and Mark 6:33–41 (Francis & Jones, 2015a); the foot-washing account reported in John 13:2b–15 (Francis, 2015); two healing narratives reported in Mark 2:1–12 and Mark 10:46–52 (Francis & Jones, 2015b); the narrative of blind Bartimaeus reported in Mark 10:46–52 (Smith & Francis, 2016), the Road to Emmaus narrative reported in Luke 24:13–35 (Francis & apSiôn, 2016a; Francis & Smith, 2017), the call of the first disciples as recorded in Luke 5:1–7 (Francis & apSiôn, 2017), the missionary journey of the disciples in Mark 6:6b–17 (Francis, Smith, & Francis-Dehqani, 2017); the Matthean pericopes on Pilate and Judas in Matthew 27:3–10, 19–25 (Francis & Ross, 2018); the messages of grace in Matthew 6:25–30 and Matthew 20:1–15 (Francis, Smith, & Astley, 2022a, 2022b; Francis, Smith, & Francis-Dehqani, 2018); the account of the baptism of Jesus in Mark 1:4–9 (Francis, Jones, & Martinson, 2019); the search for the lost sheep in Matthew 18:10–14 (Jones & Francis, 2019); the teaching about binding and loosing on earth in Matthew 18:15–18 (Francis, Jones, & Hebden, 2019); the account of Jesus' dialogue with Pilate in John 18:33–37 (Francis, Smith, & Evans, 2021); Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26–40 (Francis & Jones, 2022); and the resurrection appearance at the lakeside in John 21:1–12a (Francis & Stevenson, 2024).

Recently, this research tradition has also been applied to the Psalms: Psalm 1 (Francis, McKenna, & Sahin, 2018; Francis & Smith, 2018), Psalm 73 (Francis, Jones, & Ross 2020; Francis, McKenna, & Sahin 2020), Psalm 93 (Francis, Smith, & Evans, 2021), and Psalm 139 (Francis, Smith, & Corio, 2018).

Research Context

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to build on those earlier studies that had employed the SIFT research method to explore Psalms 1, 73, 93 and 139, now focusing attention on Psalm 74, a psalm of lament. The opportunity to do this was provided by the annual seminar arranged by the Network for Psychological Type and Christian Faith in 2022. From the Network, 14 individuals who were well versed in psychological type theory agreed to comprise hermeneutical communities and gave permission for their participation to be recorded and analyzed for research purposes. Reviewing the content

of Psalm 74, it was agreed to concentrate attention on the judging process, distinguishing between thinking and feeling on the grounds that with lament there is much to engage both the heart and the mind.

Method

Procedure

The hermeneutical communities were formed within the annual seminar convened in 2022 by the Network for Psychological Type and Christian Faith. Participants were given a printed copy of Psalm 74:1–9, 12–13, and 18–23 from the New Revised Standard Version, together with the invitation to address the following two issues: What in this psalm touches your heart? What in this psalm stretches your mind? The verses selected from Psalm 74 ensured that all the components of lament were present.

Participants

Among the 14 participants, there were six thinking types and eight feeling types. The six thinking types were all men, one extravert (ESTJ) and five introverts (one ISTJ, two INTJs and two INTPs). The eight feeling types comprised four women (one ESFJ, one INTJ and two ENFPs) and four men (one ENFJ, one INFJ and two INFPs).

Analysis

The discussion with the two groups was recorded. These recordings were analyzed and documented by the first author and then critiqued by the third author. Pseudonyms have been employed in this analysis to protect the anonymity of the participants.

Results

Thinking

The six thinking types in the group were all men, one extravert (ESTJ) and five introverts (one ISTJ, two INTJs and two INTPs). The group opened in an organized way, with one of the INTJs setting the process in motion. Leonard introduced the task by pointing out that the group had been asked to consider a filleted version of Psalm 74, a psalm of lament. He explained that it had been filleted only to make it shorter and that it still contained all the essential parts. The missing verses were only expansions of themes already introduced. Leonard then asked Nigel (INTP) to read the text.

Following a meditative silence, this group of thinking types began the process of identifying the issues that needed to be addressed. The silence was broken by Frank (INTJ), drawing on his familiarity with biblical studies: although this psalm was written a long time before, it could have been a description of what the Romans did in 70 CE; they took the holy things away to Rome. Nigel placed alongside this account the earlier desecration of the temple by Antiochus Epiphanes. Within the scriptures there is

a recurring theme of desecration, oppression and the feeling that God has abandoned the people.

Then, standing back from the recollection of biblical history, Nigel identified the first major issue raised in his mind by the psalm. He noted how the psalmist tells God what had happened, almost as if God did not know, as if God had not been there, and as if God needed to have the details pointed out (they smashed the carved work with hatchets and hammers). Adrian (INTP) immediately linked this to the way in which something similar happens in the intercessions in church, when people read out the long list of things that God needs to know.

Adrian then went on to identify the issue raised in his mind by the psalm: In what way did God redeem the tribe of his heritage? Nigel suggested that this was done through the Exodus, and Frank explained that the Exodus was about buying back the people from slavery – now that is redemption. But Adrian was not convinced that this was really a buying back.

For Sam (ESTJ), the issue raised in his mind related to the voice that was speaking and captured by the ‘us’ in the question ‘Why do you cast *us* off?’ Was this the voice of one tribe, or of all the tribes together? Frank speculated that the voice was that of the exiles in Babylon, rather than the voice of the whole people. But for Sam, it could have been the voice of those left behind.

The issue raised in Leonard’s mind concerned the term ‘the tribe of your heritage’. He wanted to know whether there was any history behind that term. Nigel suggested that later readers may have identified this as the tribe of Judah and that Christians could interpret it in that way too. Adrian, however, hypothesized that most of the lament was about the destruction of the temple, and so the tribe of your heritage could refer to the Levitical tribe as providing the priests for the temple. Could we then speculate that this lamentation was the Levites wondering what on earth their job was now that the temple had been destroyed? Nigel, on the other hand, saw the lamentation as broader than that. Not only had they lost their sanctuary, they had lost their emblems, there were no longer any prophets, and there was no longer any hope. In short, there was no worship, no word, no hope.

For Frank, the big question was now on defining what lamentation really is. Is it rehearsing what happened? Is it a kind of talking therapy? For Adrian, lamentation is more than that. There are three parts to it: part one rehearses the hopeless situation, all has been lost; part two recalls confidence in God’s ability to act in history; part three pressures God to rise to the occasion, to act, and to avoid the accusation of powerlessness.

Adrian’s analysis prompted Nigel to explore in greater depth the dynamics of the third section of lamentation. This section draws on the sense of shame. You scoff at a God who has no power, like Elijah scoffs at the prophets of Baal. God needs to stir Godself to avoid that shame. Nigel argued that, in a shame culture, there is no horror greater than being shamed.

Then Adrian raised a new issue: Does lamentation still happen now? Is there a modern version of lamentation, or is that something that does not happen in any context now? Frank suggested that lamentation happens today on occasions like the death of Princess Diana or the death of Queen Elizabeth II. But for Nigel, these examples did not illustrate lamentation. For Nigel, lamentation is not just sadness or pain. Lamentation is saying to God that this is your responsibility – what are you doing about it, God? It is holding God to account. It is saying to God that this is a disaster. We are your people. What about the covenant? Lamentation is putting God on trial.

Norman was not convinced by Nigel’s argument. For Norman, lamentation did not depend on God being involved. For him, lamentation is when people cry out aloud their

grief. Sorrow might be kept to yourself, but lamentation is crying out loud. There can be lamentation without God being brought in.

The trajectory of the conversation brought to Nigel's mind the powerful imagery of Edvard Munch's classic agonized face *The Scream*. For many, this image symbolizes humanity's existential sense of loss. In an atheistic society, there is no other power to which you can turn. Can you really rely on your own resources and the resources of other human beings? This is the existential problem.

Taking a different starting point, Leonard drew attention to the title of John Holdsworth's book *Honest Sadness*. Perhaps lamentation is speaking sadness out to God in an honest and forthright way. This is a reasonable challenge for thinking types to give.

Frank drew attention back to the third part of Psalm 74. Here is a series of instructions to God: remember, do not forget, have regard for your covenant, protect the downtrodden, rise up, O God. Adrian takes the analysis deeper and identifies three different themes in this third part. The first is a plea to God. Then there is appeal to the covenant: look, you have made promises to us and you will have to stick to those promises. Then the third part says that if you do not do something about it everyone will scoff at you. The writer is trying three different ways to get God to rise to the occasion.

This analysis put Frank in mind of the Book of Job. Job spends his time calling on God to come and give an explanation. And when God does come, God puts Job in his place, asking 'Who do you think you are?'

Nigel then turned his attention to the middle section that sets out the psalmist's belief in the power of God that contrasts strongly with the account of the current reality that is so catastrophic. Sam now sees this section as the crux of the psalm. Here, the psalmist was rehearsing the religious tradition in which he is rooted. We believe this, and we can believe that God will do something about the current situation.

As time began to run out, other issues came to mind and other connections were drawn. The phrase 'the soul of your dove' caught Adrian's attention and was linked by others with the dove released from Noah's ark and the dove that appeared at Jesus' baptism. The phrase 'we will utterly subdue them' caught Frank's attention and was linked by others to the Holocaust in Nazi Germany and to the massacre in Clifford's Tower in York in 1190.

Before drawing the session to a close, Leonard asked, 'What about giving voice to lamentation today; what should we be doing?' Adrian argued that lamentation today would make us think about things against the background of transcendent values. A number of examples came to mind: the conflict between Jews and Palestinians in the Holy Land, the current war being waged in Ukraine, the influx of asylum seekers crossing the English Channel in small boats. Such issues could be given a clearer voice in local churches framed against psalms of lamentation.

Now time was running out, and no thought had yet been given to preparing feedback for the plenary session. Throughout the discussion little had really touched the heart, but a great deal had stretched the mind.

Feeling

The eight feeling types comprised four women (one ESFJ, one INFJ and two ENFPs) and four men (one ENFJ, one INFJ and two INFPs). Arthur (INFP) invited the participants to read the psalm individually. Nancy (ENFP) pointed out that there were verses missing from the psalm on the printed sheet. After a period of three and a half minutes for silent reading and reflection, Arthur suggested that Beth (ISFJ) should start by reading a few

lines and then passing over to someone else. The baton then passed to Richard (ENFJ), James (INFJ), Philip (INFP), Annette (ENFP), Nancy (ENFP), Tracy (INFJ) and Arthur (INFP). Beth jumped in immediately after Arthur had stopped reading: 'My first reaction is, "Gosh!"'

Then Arthur opened the discussion, saying that he had been struck by the details in 'You can see the people standing there with hatchets and hammers.' Arthur could feel the emotion. James had been struck by the way that this had all happened two and a half thousand years ago, 'but it is still happening today.' What touched James's heart was the realization that once there had been beautiful places, places that are now just ruins.

What touched Nancy's heart was the hope that came in the four lines in the middle section, immediately following that very graphic description of destruction. For her, these lines of hope were very powerful. By this time, Richard had looked up the psalm in his Bible and discovered that the middle section was much longer than on the printed sheet. He read out these missing lines with a note of triumph as they rehearsed the mighty acts of God. Richard emphasized how this oracle of hope was much longer and much richer than on the printed form.

What Arthur felt in the passage was studied violence against the temple. This was not just casual violence. It was directed and deliberate violence. The mighty acts of God celebrated in the second section of the psalm showed God also to be directed and deliberate and showed that God doesn't give up.

What touched Annette most in the passage was the way in which the psalmist was recalling God to remain faithful to God's covenant. The psalmist is accusing God of having forgotten the promises. Arthur built on this point, emphasizing that the psalmist is speaking directly to God, reminding God that the destruction counts not against them but against their God. The psalmist says, 'Remember how the impious scoff at you all the day long.' For Arthur, this is the ultimate standing in somebody else's shoes, as the psalmist stands in God's shoes and experiences how God feels about the situation.

What Tracy felt most in the passage was being stirred by the line 'there is no longer any prophet, and there is no one among us who knows how long.' For her, that is really a terrible position to be in – and she felt that we might be in that same position today in some church contexts. Who has the prophetic voice? Who speaks it? Beth endorsed this point. For her, without the prophet, all hope is gone. For Tracy, the prophet was not a comforting voice but a true voice, whatever that means.

James recalled there are lots of times in the Old Testament when the king was desperate for the prophet to come to tell him what to do. The king felt lost without that kind of guidance.

Arthur's sense of the despair of the people was sharpened when he linked priests and prophets together. Without the temple there is no ministry for the priests, and now the prophets have disappeared as well. Now there is nothing left. They are cut off totally.

For Richard, the oracle of hope was really very important. There are a lot of psalms of lament, but all of them include an oracle of hope – an oracle which says we know you can fix this, God. We know that you won't desert us because we know what you have done in the past. So, lament is not a prayer of despair. It is a prayer of faith.

What touched Philip's heart the most was the tenderness within the psalm: for example, the image of 'the soul of your dove'. Amid all the Cromwellian destruction, the psalmist remembers what really matters to God. Philip's insight here was widely affirmed in the group. For Arthur, it was important to have the images and to have the language to express this kind of thing. How do you deal with this fear, anger, sorrow, despair? You need to find words, and poetic words seem to do this best.

For Annette, the psalm opened with an extraordinary image: ‘Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture?’ For James, his feeling function empathized with the desperation of the people who shaped that image, and he recalled again how so many people stand in that same situation today. Later the psalmist complained that God was not keeping his side of the bargain. That is a bit rich if the people are not keeping their side either.

Nancy was touched by the lines ‘remember how the *impious* scoff at you’, ‘an *impious* people reviles your name.’ That word really touched her heart.

Annette’s mind had gone back to the destruction and to the feeling of despair that their temple had been destroyed – the temple they had built and where they went to worship. Annette linked that with so many little churches closing after Covid, and people losing their place of worship that had been treasured in their villages. That is what helped her to understand Debussy and “The Sunken Cathedral”, said Annette, feeling the pain of the people lamenting that they had lost their place of worship. Their faith that was based in the place where they had worshipped had really been challenged by its destruction.

For Tracy, you might destroy the temple, but you do not get rid of the temple from people’s hearts. The graphic description of the destruction of the temple put both Tracy and Nancy in mind of the deliberate persecution of the Jews across the ages – the attempt to annihilate them completely. And that hasn’t gone; it is still here today.

For Arthur, it was important to speak out the pain before jumping too easily to the praise – to stay with the pain. This put Arthur in mind of the nightly appeal made by President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, rehearsing the suffering of his people and calling on the power of the West to support the defense of his people. We need to try, said Arthur, to put ourselves in the place of the people living in those towns and asking who is there to help them.

At this point, Nancy wanted to know more about the people who had shaped this psalm. Where were they? Were they among the exiles in Babylon? Were they the people who hang their harps on the willows by the rivers of Babylon, who wept when they remembered Zion?

James reflected on the case of bringing lament more prominently into Christian worship but couldn’t see how that could work in practice. Richard wondered whether alongside the intercessions there could be ‘prayer in protest’. James wondered whether he could try that next Sunday but was worried about how it would make people feel if they expressed anger against God. There are people who do not like the idea of complaining to God and feel that it is disrespectful. For James, anger with God cannot be an authentic part of Christian worship. For Arthur, we were torn between not wanting to blame God and not wanting to concede that God is not in control.

Beth interjected that she did not have a problem about being angry with God. If that is how you are feeling about a situation, why cannot you let God know how angry you are? God is big enough to take it. Recognizing the therapeutic nature of expressing anger to God, Richard affirmed that it can be a very helpful pastoral exercise to help someone write their own lament – to make their own complaint against God – if they feel God has forsaken them.

The group then moved on to reflect how today prayer for the environment embraces lament and cries out to God to step in. For Arthur, it is not possible to borrow someone else’s lament. Our temple has not been destroyed, but our world is being destroyed – we are staring into our own destruction. It is possible to do lament in church, but people have to feel deeply about it.

Funeral services, too, need to give space for lament. For Annette, the growing tendency for a small gathering in the crematorium followed by a service of thanksgiving in

the church takes away the proper opportunity for grieving that may involve confusion and anger. The emphasis on thanksgiving is pushing lament to one side. Arthur recalled Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians that we do not grieve like people without hope. We need to hold onto these kind of psalms because they show that we come from a heritage that shows how we can juxtapose incomprehension and anger alongside confidence in God's creative goodness.

For Philip, the Christian journey involves both Good Friday and Easter Day. It is necessary to linger on the brutality of Good Friday and to hear Jesus' cry of lamentation (Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani), before moving on to Easter Sunday.

Time had now run out, and Arthur asked for help in collecting together the material to present to the plenary session.

Conclusion

In light of the burgeoning interest in the biblical category of lament and the potential application in liturgy of the psalms of lament, the present study was designed to test the ways in which feeling types and thinking types may evaluate a classic psalm of lament differently. Drawing on the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics, one group of six thinking types and another group of eight feeling types were invited to read Psalm 74 and to address the following two issues: What in this psalm touches your heart? What in this psalm stretches your mind? Three main conclusions can be drawn from the data.

First, although the two groups were invited to address the same two questions, they approached the task with different priorities. The six thinking types working together were instinctively drawn to exploring the issues that stretched their minds, while the eight feeling types working together were instinctively drawn to exploring the matters that touched their hearts. This finding adds to the cumulative evidence accruing from previous studies shaped within the SIFT approach to biblical hermeneutics (as reviewed in the introduction to this paper) that demonstrates the importance of psychological type in shaping the reader response to scripture.

Second, in line with previous studies, when thinking types were working together in a group, without the distraction of feeling types, their tendency to focus on the issues that stretch the mind was reinforced and the matters of the heart were eclipsed. Similarly, when feeling types were working together in a group, without the distraction of thinking types, their tendency to focus on matters that touch the heart was reinforced and the issues of the mind were eclipsed. It was when these two groups came together and summarized for each other the nature of their deliberation that eyes were opened to new understandings and to richer interpretation. This is a very fruitful method of working for Bible study groups.

Third, and of specific relevance for the present study, the data demonstrated that feeling types and thinking types approach a psalm of lament in quite different ways. For thinking types, this is a satisfying intellectual exercise. They are caught up by the theological questions raised and fascinated by the capacity of the human mind to challenge God to keep God's side of the covenantal agreement with the people. For feeling types, this is a journey of the heart as they identify with the protagonists rehearsing the source and cause of their pain. This is the contrast of which preachers and liturgists need to be aware. It may be all too easy for preachers and liturgists to draw on their own personal psychological preferences when dealing with a psalm of lament. The risk is that those who prefer thinking may underestimate the personal impact of the text on the hearts of feeling types. The risk is

that those who prefer feeling may underestimate the intellectual curiosity of thinking types. While this is the case with all biblical and liturgical materials, the stakes may be particularly high in the case of lament.

A clear practical implication emerges from these findings for preachers and liturgists engaged with applying biblical and liturgical material concerning lament within public acts of worship. It is important for those leading public worship to be aware of their own psychological type preferences and their own susceptibility to overlooking alternative perspectives. A viable and professionally sound strategy is to build effective and collaborative teams that consciously include feeling types and thinking types capable of complementing and constructively critiquing contrasting perspectives.

The limitations with the present study are that the findings were derived from just one psalm of lament and were generated by just one group of thinking types and one group of feeling types. Further studies are now needed to test the generalizability of these findings.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Ethical Approval This study received ethical approval from the School of Humanities, York St John University (Ethical approval code: HUM-RS-AV-08-21-01).

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