

Leading Lament

Why do we Lament?

Lament is a Christian response of grief to suffering, injustice, and pain in the world—past or present. In Psalms, David writes in the midst of his suffering and persecution: “my God my God, why have you forsaken me?” This is Psalm 22, which Jesus quotes while dying on the cross. In fact, over 60 psalms have sections of lament. The sheer number of such Scriptures indicates we should be fluent in this type of individual and corporate prayer.

Lament can make us in the Western world uncomfortable because of the painful or unfamiliar emotions that it brings. If we are from church traditions or ethnic cultures that don’t often talk about painful things, lament prayer can feel even more unfamiliar.

However, Jesus is no stranger to grief, lament, and emotion. In John 11, Jesus hears that Lazarus has died. His response is not just to say, “Don’t cry, I’ll raise him from the dead!” He weeps with Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother, and he enters into God’s grief and sits in that mourning. Something about lament is worth not skipping over when pain enters his life. It is afterwards that he calls for Lazarus to rise in resurrection. And we should not miss that it is the women at the tomb, who are willing to weep and stay in the place of grief who get to see Jesus risen first. There is a holiness to grieve and lament in Jesus’ name, as it allows us to pour out our concerns to the Father and more fully express love in loss.

There is a difference between human grief and prayerful lament, as our lament is not mired by despair since our hope is in the risen and coming Lord. Lament is the cry against the tainted garden, the cry of “this should not be!” We were not designed for death nor sin, and thus, we cry out against the marks of sin. We long for *shalom*, and as Christians we long for the final resurrection, where God himself will wipe away every tear and make things right.

Lament allows us to enter into the Father’s heart as he mourns over the suffering and pain of his children. Doing so enlarges the chambers and rooms of our hearts to reflect the house of the Father. Lament is what David goes to time and time again. If he had not had space to mourn, would he have been able to be the agent of mercy and wisdom to his enemies?

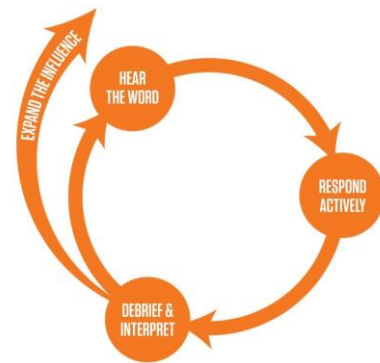
Lament allows us to confess, repent, and pray in the midst of grief. It is intercession, an act of prayer that is doing spiritual battle against the very things that are causing brokenness. Though we can't always see the immediate effects, something happens in the midst of lament prayer communally, binding the community together more deeply, and helping bring God's purposes into the world, whether it be through us or others.

If our lament muscles are weak, our joy muscles will be weak also. We mourn, but not without hope. We need to not jump to hope early because we can't deal with the sorrow and pain (and often, such premature jumping invalidates pain of those suffering). We have to be willing to walk through the valley of the shadow of death with those who are hurting. Lament prayer allows us to do such.

We are not defined by our pain, but we need to be aware in order to be able to proclaim the good news in relevant and powerful ways. Being aware of such pain allows us to better share and live out the gospel with integrity, especially with those who are hurting from specific pains.

Leading a Discipleship Cycle around Lament

This is a Discipleship Cycle that is meant to help us grow in lament and honesty. It is for students impacted by the pain of this world, for those who are in mourning. The D-cycles help participants learn the discipline of lament and gain greater freedom and ability to be honest with God.



The desired impact is that such practices create and grow a community that is not afraid of engaging with brokenness (both racial and other) on campus, because they have a constructive way of processing such grief and pain.

HEAR THE WORD. Reflect on Psalm 42 using [Lectio Divina](#).

After reflecting on the passage, discuss the following questions:

1. Name the emotions in Psalm 42.
2. What is the psalmist's posture towards God? Describe the honesty and longing.
3. When was the last time you felt these feelings?
4. How did your family express this array of emotions when you were growing up?
5. Describe a situation in the news (domestic or international) where people are feeling this way.

RESPOND. Write your own psalm of lament.

- I long for you to:
- My soul is cast down because:
- I feel forgotten by God when:
- I feel oppressed by my enemies when:
- I will again hope in God. God is my:

Read each other's psalms out loud.

DEBRIEF AND INTERPRET.

1. What was it like to write your psalm? Where was it hard? Where was it good?
2. After writing and while reading your psalm, when did you feel connected to God?
3. What are you learning about connecting with Jesus in the midst of life's brokenness?

EXPAND THE INFLUENCE.

- Think of someone who's been having a hard time recently. Can you share your psalm with them? Can you lead them to write their own psalm?
- Would you post your psalm on social media and name the pain that is in process?

How to Lead a Lament Service

Beforehand

** If you have students who are part of the offended party, ask them if they want to help lead during the service. You as the staff can coach them and offer resources as they need them.*

** Offer space for Prayer Ministry at any point during the service.*

STEP ONE: Cast Vision

We are here because of the pain on campus. We, as followers of Jesus, are here because Jesus regularly sides with the oppressed and marginalized, and he calls his people to do the same.

STEP TWO: Tell the Story

Be as descriptive as possible without assuming you know all the facts. Try not to be alarmist.

STEP THREE: Five-Minute Teaching from Scripture on Lament

In the Old Testament, the prophets were told by God to speak to the powers about God's heart for the poor and oppressed. We, too, have a prophetic responsibility on campus. As Jesus followers, we need to respond and engage in prayers of lament and solidarity. *[Give a quick introduction to lamenting. See explanation above.]*

Pick a passage:

- **Romans 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn
- **1 Corinthians 12** When one part of the body is hurting, we all hurt
- **John 11** Jesus wept over Lazarus, he wept with Mary and Martha
- **Mark 11:15–19** Jesus turns the tables. This practice of injustice not only offended Jesus, but it also blocked Gentiles (“outsiders”) from having access to a relationship with God. Jesus would have none of it. He threw out those who benefited from and perpetuated the system of injustice.

STEP FOUR: Give Guidelines on How to Engage as a Spiritual Community

- We speak the truth in love. We will process our pain in prayer. We will be invited to also love our enemies.
- There may be wide range of emotions in the room. That is fine. Some of us may be tempted to disengage. You can observe, reflect, or stay silent, if that is what God is inviting you to. But if you are holding off your emotions because you're trying to control things, let go.
- Don't fabricate emotions: be authentic to who you are.
We invite you to respond in a way that is authentic to you, there is freedom to cry, pray out loud, be angry and ask God where He is in all of this. And if you're not feeling tears or emotions, that's OK, too. You may listen.
- Weep with Jesus about the things that are broken and hurting.
 - You may cry or wail. You may be quiet or journal.
 - You may pray alone. You may pray with others
- Different cultures respond differently to pain. Acknowledge this difference. Encourage those who come from less outspoken cultures to actually express their grief for the sake of the offended party. *Our cultures and families have different responses to pain. Stay present as you listen to what's going on in the room. The Holy Spirit may move you to weep, to confess on behalf of your people. Be open to what He has for you and be willing to move out of your comfort zone, (especially if you might come from less verbal or expressive cultures), to engage in this time. Silence may be your reaction to confusion and not knowing what to say. But not saying anything at all can communicate disengagement or apathy. Even praying, “God, I don't know what to pray. I'm overwhelmed” is a way of engaging as a group in prayer.*

STEP FIVE: Prayer of Solidarity

(This should be tailored to your group's needs)

As a multiethnic community, we enter into prayer differently. We want to come alongside each community in the room, and pray in solidarity with each ethnic group. We will mourn with those who are mourning. (If those who are mourning are in the room, ask if they can come forward so that others can lay hands on them and pray for them. After praying for them in specific, close by interceding for everyone on campus who feels this way.)

Possible formats for prayer:

- **Pray and declare the truth.** Declare the opposite of what the event spoke. Break off lies, proclaim truth, facilitate inner healing. (e.g. "I declare that Jesus says this people is beautiful, smart, and wanted.")
- **Pray for Jesus to work.**
Jesus, we pray for comfort, restoration, and your presence to be felt for...
Jesus, we pray that the offender would be brought to justice & repentance...
Jesus, teach us to stand with our _____ brothers and sisters.
- **Invite them to pray sentence prayers.** Lead them using these kinds of prompts. You pray, and they finish your sentence, such as...
"Father, it breaks my heart that..."
"Father, forgive us for our/my ..."
"Jesus, I rebuke the lie that..."
- **Write prayers on Post-it Notes.** Put on a wall of prayer for others to read and agree with.

****If there is strong trust with the prayer leader and the community, pray for those who represent the offenders. Pray for administrators and faculty on campus.***

STEP SIX: Interpret and Get Practical

Give your interpretation of what God has been doing.

"What has God been saying to you personally in this time?" Share in pairs.

- Ask them to interpret what God has been doing for you all.
- Acknowledge that just because this space is over, doesn't mean our lamenting or our call to action is over.
- Brainstorm next steps in pairs. "What do you want to do because of this experience today?"