

# **First Movement: Lament**

## **Lament 1 – Expression**

*Excerpt from an N.T. Wright's article published in March, 2020:*

*Lament is what happens when people ask, "Why?" and don't get an answer. It's where we get to when we move beyond our self-centered worry about our sins and failings and look more broadly at the suffering of the world...*

*The point of lament...is not just that it's an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that God also laments. Some Christians like to think of God as above all that, knowing everything, in charge of everything, calm and unaffected by the troubles in his world. That's not the picture we get in the Bible.*

*God was grieved to his heart, Genesis declares, over the violent wickedness of his human creatures. He was devastated when his own bride, the people of Israel, turned away from him. And when God came back to his people in person—the story of Jesus is meaningless unless that's what it's about—he wept at the tomb of his friend. St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit "groaning" within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation. The ancient doctrine of the Trinity teaches us to recognize the One God in the tears of Jesus and the anguish of the Spirit.*

### **A lament is a prayer for pain born of pain.**

We have many reasons to grieve right now – over what's been done and what's been left undone. Spend this period allowing yourself to feel and express grief.

\*You may want to freewrite – put a pen on the page and write without stopping, unedited expression.

\*You may want to write a psalm – lines to God expressing, demanding, wondering, begging, describing. Let yourself write freely.

\*You may find that your spirit is "groaning" and you need to express yourself beyond language – with color, shape, scribbles, thick paint. Do so.

### ***What we learn in scripture:***

#### ***-Cry Directly to God***

*"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord hear my voice!" (Psalm 130:1)*

*"My soul, too, is utterly terrified; but you, O Lord, how long...?" (Ps 6:4)*

***-Allow yourself to ask questions***

"How long, O Lord? Will you utterly forget me?" (Psalm 13:2),

"Why, O Lord, do you stand aloof? Why hide in times of distress?" (Psalm 10:1)

***-Name how you feel:***

My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long,  
"Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3)

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint.

My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.

<sup>15</sup> My mouth<sup>(a)</sup> is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. (Psalm 22:14-15)

***-Search your own heart (prayer of confession, Book of Common Prayer):***

Most merciful God,

we confess that we have sinned against you

in thought, word, and deed,

by what we have done,

and by what we have left undone.

We have not loved you with our whole heart;

we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ,

have mercy on us and forgive us;

that we may delight in your will,

and walk in your ways,

to the glory of your Name. Amen.

***\*Some more laments from scripture to aid you on your journey:***

2 Chronicles 20:12 (20:6-12) – the nation under attack and the people at a loss

Psalm 6

Psalm 88

The book of Lamentations

Job

Jesus' own heart and prayers (Matt 26:38-39, 27:45-46)

## **Lament -2: the tension of God in the dark**

God never answers our aches and longings with the reassurance that God will take all pain away and fix everything that's broken. God answers us with God's own name: Immanuel: I am with you.

\*After you have explored and expressed your grief, shift to sitting in the tension of pain *and* Jesus' company. Settle deeper and look into Jesus' eyes.

Are there quieter things you need to say, more intimate?

What might Jesus say to you, as he looks at your eyes, listening to every breath of your heart?

Without negating any of the pain or grief, we remember that our lament is not the *end*. That in the midst of it (smack in the middle of Lamentations!), we have hope.

Lamentations 3:19-28

<sup>19</sup> I remember my affliction and my wandering,  
the bitterness and the gall.

<sup>20</sup> I well remember them,  
and my soul is downcast within me.

<sup>21</sup> Yet this I call to mind  
and therefore I have hope:

<sup>22</sup> Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.

<sup>23</sup> They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.

<sup>24</sup> I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."

<sup>25</sup> The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him;

<sup>26</sup> it is good to wait quietly  
for the salvation of the LORD.

<sup>27</sup> It is good for one to bear the yoke  
while she is young.

<sup>28</sup> Let her sit alone in silence,  
for the LORD has laid it on her.

How does having Jesus *with* us affect how we grieve?

## **Second Movement: Invitation and Illumination**

It's only *after* we lament – after we own and express our pain and negativity, our fears and deep doubts – that healing can begin. Jesus showed us through himself, and continues to remind us every winter-to-spring, that new life comes through death.

2 Cor 4:7-10

*<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.*

Lament reminds us not to rush into a false or posed positivity, but to let praise be born out of full expression.

### ***Illumination:***

*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* (Psalm 119:105)

Illumination from a lamp comes slowly, one step at a time.

God, what have you illuminated for me this morning – small or large – about myself, the world, and You? What are you bringing to the surface even now?

<<you may want to sit with your hands open, palms up, in a receiving posture>>

*He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.* (Dan 2:22) What is not yet revealed that you have to trust, actively, that God knows and is holding?

How do you need to receive what's surfaced – or still lies in the dark – this morning:

with confession?

with gratitude?

with humility?

Take time to receive.

### ***Invitation:***

Is God inviting you to take any specific action? It could be a life-shift or it could be a single step, a surrender, an apology, a declaration.

Are there any specific ways God is inviting you to deeper into Micah 6:8?

*This is what is good and what the Lord requires:*

*To act justly,*

*To love mercy,*

*And to walk humbly with your God.*

As we leave this time of lament, let us be assured that God, our true source of hope, is the fountain of deep joy and renewal. God always re-members us as we remember who God is and brings mercies every morning!

Isaiah 61

Psalm 22

Pslam 10

2 Corinthians 4:16

Lamentations 3

Closing words from N.T. Wright :

*As the Spirit laments within us, so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope.*

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Lord, may it be so.