



**LEARNING TO  
LAMENT TOGETHER**



CHURCH OF THE  
SAVIOR

*Lent Retreat*  
*March 9, 2019*

# MORNING PRAYER

## OPENING SENTENCE

JOEL 2:13

Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and repents of evil.

Leader: The Lord is full of compassion and mercy:

People: *Come, let us adore him.*

## JUBILATE

Be joyful in the Lord, all you lands;  
*serve the Lord with gladness*  
*and come before his presence with a song.*  
Know this: The Lord himself is God;  
*he himself has made us, and we are his;*  
*we are his people and the sheep of his pasture.*  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving;  
go into his courts with praise;  
*give thanks to him and call upon his Name.*  
For the Lord is good;  
his mercy is everlasting;  
*and his faithfulness endures from age to age.*

## PSALM 86:1-6

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Bow down your ear, O LORD, and answer me,  
*for I am poor and in misery.*

Keep watch over my life, for I am faithful;  
*save your servant who puts his trust in you.*

Be merciful to me, O LORD, for you are my God;  
*I call upon you all the day long.*

Gladden the soul of your servant,  
*for to you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.*

For you, O LORD, are good and forgiving,  
*and great is your love toward all who call upon you.*

Give ear, O LORD, to my prayer,  
*and attend to the voice of my supplications.*

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:  
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

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## LESSON

## MATTHEW 11:28-30

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

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*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those  
who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial,  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and for ever. Amen.*

## COLLECT

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O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness while it was day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## GRACE

## EPHESIANS 3:20-21

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Glory to God whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine: Glory to him from generation to generation in the Church, and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen.

# A PRIMER ON LAMENT IN THREE PARTS



As we seek to learn to lament, the Psalms are among the most valuable resource we have been given. Not only do they help us to understand that others have endured what we are enduring, that others have felt what we are feeling, but they also serve as a reminder that God welcomes our honest laments.

Today, we will use Psalm 13 as our guide through what we will call lament in three parts.

<sup>1</sup> How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

<sup>2</sup> How long must I wrestle with my thoughts

and day after day have sorrow in my heart?

How long will my enemy triumph over me?

<sup>3</sup> Look on me and answer, Lord my God.

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,

<sup>4</sup> and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"

and my foes will rejoice when I fall.

<sup>5</sup> But I trust in your unfailing love;

my heart rejoices in your salvation.

<sup>6</sup> I will sing the Lord's praise,

for he has been good to me.

Verse 1 and 2 serve as a guideline for how we need to be honest in our grief. Notice how intense are the emotions expressed, how bold are the questions and charges of sorrow.

Verse 3 and 4 serve as a guide for prayer as we learn to wait in the dark. When grief, pain, or sorrow overwhelm us we are tempted to believe that they will indeed overcome us. Part of our lamentation is facing that fear, begging for relief, and waiting on God's response.

Verse 5 and 6 serve to remind us that lament can lead us to light and love, and finally to hope.

As you go through these materials, you may find that you need to dwell in one part or another. This is not a linear journey and you should feel all freedom to work your way back and forth or stay in one place the entire time. The good news is, God is here, he sees you and he knows you, and he is more than ready to meet you in the honesty of lament.

## LESSON 1: LEARNING TO BE HONEST IN OUR GRIEF...



*How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts  
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?  
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*

*Psalm 13:1-2*

As ‘good’ Christians, or as ‘strong’ Americans, we may think that the best way to deal with loss is to buck up, keep going, look for the silver lining. Or maybe we think we need to trust that this loss must be God’s will in some way.

The reality of loss is not that simple, however. The whys and wherefores of suffering are a great mystery to us, and we often find ourselves paralyzed, disoriented, angry and confused rather than filled with triumphant hope.

God knows this and invites us in our suffering and pain to come to him, wherever we are, whatever we are thinking or feeling.

*As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;  
for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.*

*Psalm 103:13-14*

Jesus’ call is simple: “Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest...” (Matt. 11:28)

Aubrey Sampson, in her book on lament, expresses this well:  
“In our pain, God invites us to express our grief about the unraveling

of life. At the same time, we are invited to unabashedly, unashamedly declare that we want it back. No more pretending. Just the naked self, standing before God--all of our disappointments, deferred dreams, and disillusion in tow.” (*The Louder Song*, pp. 14-15)

- \* What might it look like for you to honestly lay your sorrows before the Lord?
- \* Is there anything that’s keeping you from being honest with God? Talk to him about this, if you can.

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

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### Journal of Lament

*Cry aloud, then, to God,  
let your tears flow like a torrent,  
day and night;  
give yourself no relief,  
grant your eyes no rest.*

*Adapted from Lamentations 2:18 <sup>1</sup>*

Sampson’s suggestions on the practice of journaling our lament are helpful. In *The Louder Song* she describes how she puts words to her grief in an *ekah* journal. *Ekah* relates to the Hebrew word for “how” and is the literal translation of the title of the book of Lamentations. Sampson directs us to begin with our “hows” as the author of Lamentations models for us:

*How* is a blunt declaration. “How deserted lies the city!” laments Jeremiah. “How like a widow is she!”

*How* is an unadulterated question, something we’d demand of a friend or a loved one who betrayed us: “How could you!”

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<sup>1</sup> Wayne Simsic, *Praying Through our Losses: Meditations for those who are Grieving* (Ijamsville, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 2007), p. 23.



How dare you! How are we supposed to move past this?”

As we learn to lament, we must begin the same way--by following Jeremiah's example. We ask. We demand. We declare our own ekahs.

At times our ekahs are raw: *God how could you allow this? I hate this. Are you actually as good as I've always believed?*

On other occasions, our ekahs are a simple acknowledgement: *Oh how this stings!* At other times, repentant: *How sorry I am, God. I have betrayed you once more.*

Still, in other moments, our ekahs, like Jeremiah's, are on behalf of others. *God, so many people live with such toxic pain, in such oppressive circumstances. How will you fix this? This is too horrible, God. Look at how your people are suffering. Step in and do something!*

We can throw all of our ekahs at God without fear; he won't punish us for our honest emotions. So stop faking. Quit escaping. Don't walk away from him. . . . Whatever you do, just talk to God openly and freely. He can take it. Pour out your sadness and frustration as often as you need to, for as long as you need to.<sup>2</sup>

What is grieving you today?

- \* A recent loss...?
- \* The pain of a loved one...?
- \* An ongoing suffering...?
- \* A sinful habit you can't seem to break...?
- \* An injustice you feel acutely...?
- \* Fear of what may or may not be on the horizon...?
- \* Maybe you just feel numb or disconnected from yourself, God or others...?

Whatever pain or grief you might be carrying today, spend some time now honestly laying your *ekahs* before the Lord.

<sup>2</sup> Aubrey Sampson, *The Louder Song: Listening for Hope in the Midst of Lament*. (Wheaton, IL: NavPress, 2019), pp. 43-44.

## Liturgies of Lament

Sometimes, maybe especially when pain is most acute, we can't find words of our own to express our laments to God. Both physical and emotional pain tend to dull our minds and numb our hearts. Even if we want to pray, we might find ourselves unable to articulate our grief. It is at these times when liturgies of lament can be most helpful.

Put simply, liturgies of lament are others' written prayers — be they Scripture, poetry, or otherwise — that we are invited to make our own. The Psalms and the book of Lamentations are great resources in this regard. Nearly one-third of the Psalms are specifically categorized as psalms of lament. Psalm 10, for example, bemoans the prosperity of the wicked and begs for God to act on behalf of the helpless:

Why, Lord, do you stand far off?  
Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak,  
who are caught in the schemes he devises.  
He boasts about the cravings of his heart;  
he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.  
In his pride the wicked man does not seek him;  
in all his thoughts there is no room for God.  
His ways are always prosperous;  
your laws are rejected by him;  
he sneers at all his enemies.  
He says to himself, "Nothing will ever shake me."  
He swears, "No one will ever do me harm."

His mouth is full of lies and threats;  
trouble and evil are under his tongue.  
He lies in wait near the villages;  
from ambush he murders the innocent.  
His eyes watch in secret for his victims;  
like a lion in cover he lies in wait.  
He lies in wait to catch the helpless;

he catches the helpless and drags them off in his net.  
His victims are crushed, they collapse;  
they fall under his strength.  
He says to himself, "God will never notice;  
he covers his face and never sees."

Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God.  
Do not forget the helpless.  
Why does the wicked man revile God?  
Why does he say to himself,  
"He won't call me to account"?  
But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;  
you consider their grief and take it in hand.  
The victims commit themselves to you;  
you are the helper of the fatherless.  
Break the arm of the wicked man;  
call the evildoer to account for his wickedness  
that would not otherwise be found out.

The Lord is King for ever and ever;  
the nations will perish from his land.  
You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;  
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,  
defending the fatherless and the oppressed,  
so that mere earthly mortals  
will never again strike terror.

Consider also: Psalms 3, 4, 6, 7, 13, 17, 26, 28, 38, 42, 43, 44, 51, 55, 57, 59, 60, 64, 70, 71, 74, 77, 80, 85, 86, 120, 123, 126, 130, 141, 142, and 143.

Wayne Simsic in his book, *Praying Through Our Losses: Meditations for Those Who Are Grieving*, also provides a wealth of lament liturgies.

O God, I am shattered; my heart lies open and wounded. One moment everything was ordinary, secure. Then suddenly my life was on the edge of an abyss, and I was falling. Time has stopped,

and nothing seems important anymore. . . . People walk by me as if everything is normal, not realizing that my heart is being torn apart. (p. 22)

O God, the loneliness I feel has no language, only a cry. My heart has filled with sorrow. I am beyond help. Day and night I raise my voice to you, hoping for an answer. Hear my plea, O God, and do not abandon me. The wound in my heart will not heal. (p. 23)

Merciful God, I am confused, lonely, and sad. I do not feel like talking with people. Emotions drain my strength, leaving me numb and hopeless. Tears well up at unexpected times. What am I to do, O God? I have no control. Give me the strength to bear these bitter tears. (p. 24)

Faithful God, I am unable to find comfort in anything--in well-meaning friend who try to console me, in Scripture, and even in you. (p. 26)

May I be true to my feelings, O God, and not play a role, acting like a rock, feeling nothing, saying little. "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matthew 5:4). May I have the faith, loving God, to walk through the pain and not deny it. You suffer with me in my grief; my heart is filled with gratitude. (pp. 30-31)

It is winter in my heart, God, and you do not respond to my utter depression and isolation. You promise no relief. You do not break the silence and turn back this bitter wind that chills me to the bone. If only I could see a sign of hope, God, some signal to continue the journey. Your voice is at best barely audible. Fill the cold spaces of my heart with the warm announcement of your healing love. (pp. 32-33)

It seemed to me  
that my sorrow  
exceeded death itself...  
of all the pain  
that leads to freedom  
this is the greatest--  
to see someone we love  
suffer.

How could any pain be greater  
than to see the person  
who is all my life,  
all my happiness,  
and all my joy  
suffer?

— Adapted from Julian of Norwich, *Showings*

Consider using some of these prayers as your own to express your  
lament to God.

## LESSON TWO: LEARNING TO WAIT IN THE DARK...



*Look on me and answer, Lord my God.*

*Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,  
and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him,"  
and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*

*Psalm 13:3-4*

Grief, pain, conviction, anger over injustice: these are all incredibly uncomfortable realities. It is not our natural instinct to stay with these things, but instead we run away, hide, numb, ignore, and deny in all kinds of ways. Lament offers us the opportunity to stay with the discomfort — knowing that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, Companion, and Protector who is with us as we do so — long enough for faith and hope to reemerge.

With the psalmist, we do not wait passively, but we wait expectantly, with supplication and groanings, begging the Lord to look on us in our suffering and to bring the light of his holy healing.

This kind of waiting, or stillness, can be practiced in many ways — through intentional breathing, through exercise, through meditation on Scripture or an image of God, through repetitive singing. Feel free to take some of your time today to practice stillness in whatever way is most helpful.

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES

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### Water as a Symbol of Grief and Life

In Scripture, water is a powerful and recurring image. The waters of Creation, the waters of freedom from the slavery of Egypt, the waters of baptism. Isaiah prophesies that in the new earth the world will be filled with the knowledge of God, as the water covers the sea (Isaiah 11:9).

Water is also related to grief. Psalm 69 describes the experience of suffering in terms of drowning:

Save me, O God,  
for the waters have come up to my neck.  
I sink in the miry depths,  
where there is no foothold.  
I have come into the deep waters;  
the floods engulf me.  
I am worn out calling for help;  
my throat is parched.  
My eyes fail,  
looking for my God.

Psalm 69:1-3

And, of course, water evokes the imagery of tears, of weeping.

Psalm 42:1-3 uses the imagery of the water of life, contrasted with the water of weeping:

As the deer pants for streams of water,  
so my soul pants for you, my God.  
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When can I go and meet with God?  
My tears have been my food  
day and night,  
while people say to me all day long,  
“Where is your God?”

You may want to engage with this image of water in one of two ways:

### ***Imaginative Prayer***

Imagine yourself standing with Jesus at the seashore.

- \* *Take some time to imagine what you hear, what you see, what you smell, how your feet feel in the sand.*
- \* *What is Jesus doing while he is there with you? Is he beside you, next to you, in front of you, behind you? Is he touching you, or just standing alongside? Is he close or is he far away?*
- \* *Can you see any particular look on Jesus' face?*

Now imagine that Jesus invites you to walk into the water a little ways with him.

- \* *How do you respond to this invitation? What are you thinking or feeling?*

If you can, bring to mind any pain, suffering or cause for grief that is on your heart or mind.

- \* *How do you feel as you think on these things?*
- \* *What do you notice about your body's response to these thoughts and feelings?*

Now, imagine that the waves that are coming towards you contain these thoughts, feelings, emotions. As you become aware of the strength of the waves, also become aware of where Jesus is, what he might be saying or doing in this moment.

Try to be still in this scene. Take deep breaths and allow the water to come near you. Tell Jesus, if you can, if you want to, what you are experiencing. Take your time here.



As you stay in this place, meditate on the following from Isaiah 43:1-2:

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have summoned you by name; you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters,  
I will be with you;  
and when you pass through the rivers,  
they will not sweep over you.

When you feel ready, take some deep breaths and bring your meditation to a close.

### ***Art Meditation***

On the table in the narthex, you will find art materials and pieces of paper with part of a wave pattern drawn on it.

You are invited to take some time to decorate this piece of paper in whatever way you choose. As you work on it, ask the Lord to quiet your mind, perhaps even using the brush or pen strokes to focus your thoughts on your lamentation and supplication. Allow yourself to be aware of God's presence with you as you work, and let your prayers flow through your art work. The goal is not to make anything happen here, but instead to engage another part of your mind and body in the work of lament, and to allow the Spirit to minister to you as you do so.

### LESSON THREE: LEARNING TO OPEN OURSELVES TO THE LIGHT...



*But I trust in your unfailing love;  
my heart rejoices in your salvation.  
I will sing the Lord's praise,  
for he has been good to me.*

*Psalms 13:5-6*

The psalms of lament often follow a simple pattern:

- \* First, address to God, such as “Lord, hear me...”
- \* Then, laying forth the complaint
- \* Third, the petition for God’s intervention
- \* Finally, praise that God will answer the prayer

It’s interesting to note that although at times there are statements of God’s faithfulness interspersed throughout the psalm, the psalms always end with the final acclamation of praise and/or thanksgiving.

It’s not as if the psalmist’s situation has changed between the beginning and the end of writing the psalm, but somehow the process of lamentation leads itself to an affirmation or confession of who God is and what he will do to act on our behalf.

We should not rush into this third lesson in lament. If we bypass the other two phases of truth telling and waiting, we risk holding ourselves back from God and from receiving the full light of his healing and comfort in those dark places. However, when we’re ready, the practice of opening ourselves to the light of God’s love can be a potent part of our lament process.

## SUGGESTED PRACTICES:

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### The Spiritual Practice of Rest

Facing into pain and suffering is exhausting, taxing, and tiring in more ways than one. Opening ourselves to God's healing often begins with acknowledging this simple fact: we are embodied creatures who need rest.

Adele Calhoun explains the practice of rest in her *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*. She begins with this quote from Archibald Hart:

People in a hurry never have time for recovery. Their minds have little time to meditate and pray so that problems can be put in perspective. In short, people in our age are showing signs of physiological disintegration because we are living at a pace that is too fast for our bodies.

And Deuteronomy 33:12:

Let the beloved of the LORD rest securely in him,  
For he shields him all day long,  
And the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.

Although rest and recreation can feel like guilty pleasures in the face of pain and suffering, they can actually be acts of faith. We can acknowledge that God still has good things in the world, and for us, and we can be open to those as we rest.

Here are some of Calhoun's practical suggestions that you may want to try today:

- \* Intentionally place yourself in the presence of God, then do something you delight in: go for a walk, take a nap, have a massage.... Enjoy yourself in God. Receive the gift of rest.
- \* Write down what a perfect day of rest and recreation would look like to you. Plan when you can take this day or a version of it.

- \* Think about your childhood experience of play. What was it like for you? How does your past experience affect your ability to play today? Plan some time for play and fun into your coming week.
- \* Consider what kind of rest would refresh your body and your soul? Maybe exercise, going to bed early? Maybe music, reading, art, nature, centering prayer? Choose two times in the coming week when you will intentionally enter into these kinds of rest.<sup>3</sup>

## Discipline of Community

Grief and pain often cut us off from our community, either because it feels like too much energy to engage, or maybe because we feel like no one can understand us or bring us comfort. This, unfortunately, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and we can quickly become turned even further in on ourselves.

God has made us in his image, as communal creatures. We were made to be loved and to love, to know and to be known.

Perhaps you are sensing the invitation to move out of yourself and connect to your community.

Consider:

- \* What is keeping me from others?
- \* What do I fear in engaging with others?
- \* What pain have I experienced through others for which I need healing?

Spend some time talking to God about your answers to these questions. Ask for the courage and grace to heed his invitation to practice community.

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<sup>3</sup> This section excerpted and adapted from Adele Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, second edition, Downers Grove: IVP, 2015, pp. 74ff

The practice of community on a silent retreat may seem counter-intuitive, but today you may want to:

- \* Visit with a spiritual director
- \* Go for a massage--even putting yourself in the proximity of another person can be healing
- \* Write a letter to a trusted friend, sharing your heart and experience of grief
- \* Ask the Lord to bring to mind someone with whom you can connect in the coming week. Commit to one action towards that connection--a phone call, an email, any form of open communication.
- \* Consider whether there ways that you need help in this season of life, but perhaps you have been too afraid and/or proud to ask? As the Lord brings these to mind and ask him to show you people who you can ask and commit to one small step in this direction.

## MIDDAY PRAYER

### OPENING SENTENCES

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O God, make speed to save us.

O Lord, make haste to help us.

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

*Almighty Father, hear our cry  
Through Jesus Christ, our Lord Most High,  
Whom with the Spirit we adore  
For ever and for ever more.*

### PSALM 121:1-8

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I lift my eyes to the hills;  
    *from where is my help to come?*  
My help comes from the LORD,  
    *the maker of heaven and earth.*  
He will not let your foot be moved.  
    *and he who watches over you will not fall asleep.*  
Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel  
    *shall neither slumber nor sleep;*  
The LORD himself watches over you;  
    *the LORD is your shade at your right hand.*  
So that the sun shall not strike you by day,  
    *nor the moon by night.*  
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;  
    *it is he who shall keep you safe.*  
The LORD shall watch over your going out and your coming in,  
    *from this time forth for evermore.*

*Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be for ever. Amen.*

If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has passed away,  
behold the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ  
reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.  
(2 Corinthians 5:17-18)

*Thanks be to God.*

*Lord, have mercy.*  
*Christ, have mercy.*  
*Lord, have mercy.*

## THE LORD'S PRAYER

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*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your Name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.*  
*Give us today our daily bread.*  
*Forgive us our sins*  
*as we forgive those*  
*who sin against us.*  
*Save us from the time of trial,*  
*and deliver us from evil.*  
*For the kingdom, the power,*  
*and the glory are yours,*  
*now and for ever. Amen.*

Blessed Savior, at this hour you hung upon the cross, stretching out your  
loving arms: Grant that all the peoples of the earth may look to you and  
be saved; for your tender mercies' sake. *Amen.*

## GRACE

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Let us bless the Lord.  
*Thanks be to God.*

## JOURNALING