

COMMUNAL LAMENT

*A Devotional of Common Lament
from the
Church of the Savior Community*



LENT 2019



CHURCH OF THE
SAVIOR

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INTRODUCTION

Sandy Richter

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ. (2 Corinthians 1:3-5).

Our theme of communal lament for this lenten season came out of a sense of the deep grief and pain many in our community have carried this past year. So many have been touched by chronic illness, job loss, relational break, death, injury, loneliness, depression—hurts that linger and abide in our bodies and in the depths of our souls.

As a staff we took some time to ask this question: what might the season of Lent have for our community this year? . . . and lament was the word that continued to resurface among us. We need to lament, we decided, and we need to do it together.

What even is lament? As Doug Stewart reflected in his entry, “It’s more than just grief. Grief and loss and pain just come because you suffer something. Lament seems to be a deliberate choosing to give words to what you’re feeling, thinking, what you’re going through, and bringing them before God and before others.”

Aubrey Sampson, in her book on lament, *The Louder Song: Listening for Hope in the Midst of Lament*, writes, “Lament is the rope that will keep you tethered to [God’s] presence. Lament helps you hold on to God because it is an honest form of worship and communication with him.”

Lament is truth telling, as hard as it is, in the face of some of the most bewildering, disorienting, and heartbreaking moments of our lives. So what’s the role of communal lament? Unfortunately, many of our Christian communities have not known how to help us lament in our grief. We are often so uncomfortable with suffering that we don’t know how to enter into another’s pain without trying to simply will it away. If lament takes attending, waiting, and being honest, our communities have often failed us by rushing to the pat answers, growing impatient with our questions, simply failing to be present at all. We struggle to lament together in our own fear, anxiety, or pain.

Part of what birthed this theme and this project is the question of how we can do better by each other. How can we as a community encourage, make space for, and be together in our lament?

This devotional is a start in that direction.

In the telling and in the hearing of one another's stories, we can practice communal lament. As we witness to one another's lives, as we see ourselves in one another's stories, we can begin to experience the mystery that Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 1—the God of all comfort, the Father of all compassion, brings hope and healing to our hearts in and through the ministry of his Spirit among us.

A note on how to use this devotional:

You will quickly see the treasure that our friends of the Savior have entrusted to us in their courage to share their stories here. Please honor that treasure with your discretion, even as you allow the Spirit to minister to your hearts as you read. Passages of Scripture have been paired with each story as liturgies of lament. We see in Scripture the brazen honesty of God's followers who have come before us. I encourage you to join your prayers with theirs, as it is helpful to you.

Peace to you all in this lenten journey of lament. May you know that the grace and peace of our Triune God is with you every step of the way.

LAMENT I

Ellen Hsu

“Something is very wrong with this baby.” I was pregnant with Elijah. We were seeing a maternal health specialist for a level-two ultrasound to check out some things that hadn’t looked quite right on the standard, twenty-week ultrasound we’d recently had. The doctor continued to roll the wand over my tummy as he pointed to various spots on the screen and began listing all of the “abnormalities” he found. Larger than usual nuchal folds . . . clenched fists . . . possible clubfeet . . . something wrong with the liver . . . enlarged ventricles in the brain . . . no stomach (but maybe he just couldn’t see it yet because the baby was so small). My tears flowed as his list grew longer. We agreed to an amniocentesis test so that we’d have a better idea if we should prepare to welcome a baby or plan a funeral.

Within a few weeks we learned that Elijah has Down syndrome. I was both elated and devastated. On the one hand, it was likely that he would survive. On the other hand, I felt incredibly anxious about parenting a child with special needs. I cried a lot and kept lamenting to Al, “This isn’t what I planned for my life!”

Elijah was born a few weeks early and spent most of April in the neonatal intensive care unit. Josiah was three at the time. It was exhausting to balance parenting a toddler while being at the hospital as much as possible those first few weeks, and then caring for both kids at home. There were doctor visits and therapy appointments. I went back to work where I’d recently received a promotion. I didn’t really have time to process my own feelings. I just did what was necessary to get through each day. Some days I cried. Some days I journaled, pouring out my grief and my joy in mingled batches, sometimes running out of energy and allowing a journal entry to trail off without finishing my thought. Some days I didn’t feel much of anything. Life went on, and I made it through that first year with the help of family, friends, therapists, and others.

When Elijah was diagnosed with autism some years later, I felt a fresh wave of grief, but it was easier to get through this time. I could look back at that first diagnosis and see all the ways God had been faithful to us. Even when things were really hard, God was present with us in meaningful ways: a church family that loved and accepted our family just

the way we were, a team of professionals who supported Elijah and our family, friends I could be honest with, work that was flexible when days didn't go as planned, and so many other things.

It's been over a decade since we received that first diagnosis, and while I've accepted and adjusted to what life is like for the most part, I'm still occasionally caught off guard by grief. When that happens, I'm usually tempted to keep it to myself. For some reason I wrongly think that burying my feelings is a sign of strength. I feel guilty for feeling sad and don't want to bother other people with my grief. But I'm slowly learning that it takes more bravery and strength to acknowledge my feelings and ask others for help. Sometimes that help comes in the form of a prayer or a hug. Other times the help is more practical: a ride to an appointment, an in-depth conversation, or some form of child care. When I trust others to share some of my sorrow, I'm more likely to experience God's love in meaningful ways. Christ comforts me through other people. And he gives me the privilege of comforting others who are brave enough to share their grief with me.

The sorrows and joys of life get all mixed up. I simultaneously celebrate a new skill Elijah has mastered while feeling sad because that skill required more time and effort for him. Last Easter Elijah joyfully sang the Gloria and rang his bells, but he did it in the supply closet that he refused to leave. My tears that day were mingled delight at worshiping with him and sadness that we couldn't participate in the fullness of the Easter vigil.

When something difficult is happening that makes it incredibly hard to see God's goodness, I remind myself to seek out Christian friends who are willing to share my sorrows and my joys. Those friends often remind me that God has been, and will continue to be, faithful. Their expressions of care, whether through a long hug, a listening ear, an offer to sit with Elijah so I can be somewhere else, or prayers offered on my behalf, are tangible expressions of God's loving care.

God, my God, come and save me!
These floods of trouble have risen higher and higher.
The water is up to my neck!
I'm sinking into the mud with no place to stand,
and I'm about to drown in this storm.
I'm weary, exhausted with weeping.
My throat is dry, my voice is gone, my eyes are swollen with sorrow,
and I'm waiting for you, God, to come through for me.

Pull me out of this mess! Don't let me sink!
Rescue me from those who hate me and from all this trouble I'm in!
Don't let this flood drown me.
Save me from these deep waters
or I'll go down to the pit of destruction.
Oh, Lord God, answer my prayers!
I need to see your tender kindness, your grace,
your compassion, and your constant love.
Just let me see your face, and turn your heart toward me.
Come running quickly to your servant.
In this deep distress, come and answer my prayer.

LAMENT II: THE UNFOLDING OF GRIEF

Donna Scott

It was 2007, and my daughter was a senior in high school. Along with the excitement I felt preparing her for college, I was surprised by the extreme sadness and tears I experienced whenever I mentioned that my daughter would be leaving. I knew it was deeper than the expected grief during the transition of children leaving home. This was a feeling of sorrow, of things ending, rather than anticipating new beginnings. I journaled, trying to understand what the idea of leaving meant for me. This opened a door to grief waiting to be processed.

In 1970 my brother Al was chosen to be the first exchange student from our school, and he would spend the summer in Peru. On August 9, while on tour with other exchange students, their plane crashed into the Andes Mountains. He left in June and did not return. At age twelve, my world was rocked. My parents modeled a strong faith in God's good purposes, and they shared their faith at a packed memorial service. Three weeks later, my other brother and I returned to school. We found a new normal. Our peers didn't know how to enter grief, nor did my parents know how to grieve as a family.

I discovered in 2007 that grief can wait a long time to be processed. As I connected my daughter's leaving to my fear of things ending, I grieved. A massage therapist helped unlock the grief stored in my body. I began to let myself feel the pain that had been neatly tucked away. Questions that were impossible to form at age twelve were taking shape. In spiritual direction Marilyn Stewart gave me space for the anger that was never expressed. I became aware of how I braced myself in life for potential loss, never wanting to be taken by surprise again.

In 2013 my son was planning to study abroad, his country of choice, Peru. More healing came as I brought out the memorial book about the crash, and the tragedy moved from family history to a personal story between my son and me. He visited the same town where the crash took place and was able to view the memorial statue with the ninety-nine victims' names engraved. This time there was a celebrated return. When my son was preparing for Peru, I asked my mother if I could talk with her about the crash. She willingly filled in details that I could not remember. But I could not touch her emotions. I felt sad that as a family

we coped by burying our pain. When my father died I observed a similar pattern, a belief that strength means being able to move past grief by putting away the pain and memories. She tried hard to be content and happy, and didn't want to dwell on loss.

When my mother died in 2017, I was amazed at the collective grief that I experienced. I wasn't just grieving her loss, but the loss of two parents and a brother and the loss of connection with my family during grief. As my brother and I cleaned out her apartment, I discovered a box of letters and photos related to Al's visit and death in Peru. I cried for the years that I could not process my grief with family because, by the time I had any words, everyone else had buried their pain, hidden away like the box of memorabilia.

A few months after my mother's funeral a friend asked me how I was doing. I talked about my mom, but soon moved into the story of my brother. The two stories were tied together. Grief for my mom was also grief for the silencing of pain. My friend suggested that I create a ritual for my own closure. As I considered this I realized that what I needed to move forward through grief was to talk about it in community, the missing piece in my family. Forty-eight years after the tragic death of my brother I gathered with six women and my husband to share my story from the perspective of a twelve-year-old, allowing myself to name the pain and the questions that at the time I didn't have the capacity to name. I shed tears and was held in the beautiful presence of people who loved and cared for me. I had carried the message that my grief is too much for others, that there is a time when it is too late to grieve the past. Now, in community, my pain was heard and validated. I could let go of the need to carry it alone. I also know that I don't need to brace for life's tragedies because, while they will come, I don't have to go through it alone.

I cry aloud to the Lord;
I lift up my voice to the Lord for mercy.

I pour out before him my complaint;
before him I tell my trouble.

When my spirit grows faint within me,
it is you who watch over my way.
In the path where I walk
people have hidden a snare for me.

Look and see, there is no one at my right hand;
no one is concerned for me.
I have no refuge;
no one cares for my life.

I cry to you, Lord;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."

Listen to my cry,
for I am in desperate need;
rescue me from those who pursue me,
for they are too strong for me.

Set me free from my prison,
that I may praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather about me
because of your goodness to me.

LAMENT III

Aaron Harrison

I'm in a season of lament, but until recently I didn't know it. It has been six years since I graduated with my Master of Divinity with the intention of stepping into a life of ministry in the Anglican Church, and nothing has gone according to my plans or desires. I was ordained as a deacon and later as a priest with no direct ministry in which to serve, which for most clergy is quite unusual. Priests are typically ordained to a specific parish or function. I was not, because positions were going to open up as people retired, or so I was told. Over the next few years, I applied to jobs all over the country; things above my experience, things below; small churches, large churches. Every time I would come away from an interview that ended with a no, I would dissect the experience and draw out some way to learn from it. But after a dozen of these rejections, the postmortems no longer made sense. This wasn't a learning process anymore; it wasn't about building resilience, or having the right network, or anything I felt was under my control. It was just rejection. And I didn't understand why. Had God called me, and had the Church ordained me, only to subsequently reject me?

After one particularly brutal no, which showed all the signs of being a yes until the last phone call, I began to doubt God's goodness to me. He had opened so many doors for my friends, giving them jobs, advancements, stability, ways to make a difference—and in places they wanted to call home. But for me, I was asked to work three jobs at a time, live in places I disliked, weather extreme loneliness, and generally feel like a failure at most things I put my hand to. My lament felt more like a constant complaint: these are all the situations I never wanted to find myself in; these are things that are eroding my soul. I've fallen through the cracks. I've been forgotten. Should I just start over, or is this a test I have to endure to prove my ability to serve? I even went as far as to call a priest from my ordination committee to ask him if somehow there could have been a mistake. He said no.

My lament was also a particularly private one. No one talks about the jobs they don't get. Among my friends it was hard to speak about how they had "beaten" me in jobs we both applied for. When I would broach the subject to others, it seemed absurd to them. A priest who

can't find a job? "I thought there was a shortage of priests?" It was hard to escape the failure I saw when I imagined myself through their eyes. Yet at the same time I felt bound to maintain a persona of faith, peace, and calm. I am a priest, after all, and isn't that what I am supposed to believe? Never mind the desperation in my eyes and manner betraying otherwise. "No one will want me if I'm desperate," was the lie I repeated to myself. I felt quite alone, not knowing who to lean on, convinced I was a burden to those close to me, and slowly losing hold of whatever positive motivation I had to do ministry in the first place.

I think we live in a culture that is always trying to put lament in the place of last consideration. We want to first exhaust every other possibility, constantly rebounding "failure" back on ourselves: *what could I have done better? How can I gain more skills, knowledge, control so that it won't happen again? How can I protect myself from pain, not take it personally?* Even in writing this, I kept asking myself, *is this experience even lamentable? Does it really qualify? You're just being selfish, seeking attention. Everyone goes through setbacks. Surely it's your fault somehow.* And yet, when all other options are closed, lament is still there.

It took someone saying to me, "You have a lot of lamenting to do," and, "You are lamenting your calling," for me to name the realities of my life as something to lament. Not a process of overcoming, not a choice to lean in, not an opportunity to adapt and retool. No resilience, no lesson. Lament.

"May the bones you have broken rejoice."

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.

Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.

Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

LAMENT IV: CRUCIFORM PAINTING

JoAnn McNeely



The small black and white painting using a cruciform composition is an abstract image of Christ on the Cross. It is a view looking down from above the cross. The black shape in the upper left represents the top of Christ's head, the white above that represents his shoulders, and his legs extend below in strokes of gray.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my
groaning?

O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.

Yet you are holy,

enthroned on the praises of Israel.

In you our ancestors trusted;

they trusted, and you delivered them.

To you they cried, and were saved;

in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.

But I am a worm, and not human;

scorned by others, and despised by the people.

All who see me mock at me;

they make mouths at me, they shake their heads;

“Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—
let him rescue the one in whom he delights!”

Yet it was you who took me from the womb;

you kept me safe on my mother’s breast.

On you I was cast from my birth,

and since my mother bore me you have been my God.

Do not be far from me,

for trouble is near

and there is no one to help.

Many bulls encircle me,

strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

they open wide their mouths at me,

like a ravening and roaring lion.

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint;
my heart is like wax;
it is melted within my breast;
my mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

For dogs are all around me;
a company of evildoers encircles me.
My hands and feet have shriveled;
I can count all my bones.
They stare and gloat over me;
they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

But you, O Lord, do not be far away!
O my help, come quickly to my aid!
Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life from the power of the dog!
Save me from the mouth of the lion!

From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me.
I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:
You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!
For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

LAMENT V

Alexis Olsen

I spent much of my late twenties in a season of lament. I experienced a trauma in my personal life that left me feeling devastated and disintegrated. In the early stages of my lament I was pretty raw. I remember days when, encapsulated in the privacy of my car as I commuted home from work, I would cry and even scream out my anguish. I felt like an open, gaping wound.

During the same season, I became aware that poor people were being harmed by the work of the ministry I was working for. It was happening in a copper-mining town in Zambia, and I began to essentially commute there to try to help them correct the problem. I became sick during a seven-week trip there, and I went on a medical leave after being diagnosed with pneumonia. But then I didn't get better. After seeing many doctors, I was eventually diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. I also realized that I was struggling with workaholism, so I resigned from my job and spent the better part of three years basically incapacitated.

I would spend hours lying on my couch, looking at the water reflection cast by a retention pond on our apartment ceiling, or sitting next to the pond in the park across the street. Even as I began to heal emotionally from my initial trauma, my lament shifted to encompass the frustration of being so sick for so long, shame for having physically broken down, feeling stymied professionally (which felt particularly acute given my age), and anxiety over whether I would ever recover my health.

A few months after the initial crisis, I began to journal. I don't think I thought of it as lament at the time, but that was certainly what I was doing. Page after page, I poured out my heart to God. I filled three journals over those years and informally titled them "The Ravings of a Crazy Insomniac." I kept them, but I gave my family strict instructions to burn them if something happened to me. I considered burning them unread myself. I was afraid that exposing myself to the pain of that time might somehow trigger it, even part of it, to come back.

When I was asked to write this devotional, I felt an invitation to go back and reread these journals for the first time, about eighteen years later. I was surprised by what I found. Yes, there was a ton of pain. In

those pages I confessed to God that I wanted to hurt people. I journaled about wanting to smash things: in one entry I even specified which of my dishes I wanted to smash and which I liked too much to throw. But when I reread those entries, with both trepidation and prayer cover, I was mainly struck by how much grace I found. There was a lot of pain there, but for every ounce of pain there was a pound of grace.

I see grace in the community that God provided for me—mainly through my “team of wise women,” which included my spiritual director (Marilyn Stewart), a wonderful therapist who used art to help me heal, and sponsors from two different twelve-step programs. I see God’s love and wisdom flowing through them onto those pages.

I see the grace in the scriptures that I copied down to meditate on.

I see the grace in the messages I heard from God that I put on paper, which focused on his unchanging and absolute love for me.

I see grace in how putting my deepest self on paper, and then sharing it with a trusted person and with God lessened, and in some cases lifted, the burden of shame.

I see grace in how my distortions of reality began to slowly heal. I see how I slowly became aware that God was God, and I was not. I was the one lost sheep that the Good Shepherd left the other ninety-nine to find.

I see grace in how God planted a vision in my heart for a new life in him.

My first indication of the arrival of that “true self” was in a picture I drew in crayon as part of my art therapy. I titled it “In the midst of all this chaos there is a baby growing.” It was the first image that gave me a sense of hope that even in this extended season of messiness, God was remaking me into the person he created me to be.

My healing was slow, and it was anything but linear. An infographic designer would need to be called in to depict all the progression and regression, the ups and downs that I experienced.

But in the midst of it, “This pain did not lessen me. It helped me step deeper into the light of Christ where I discovered my true self” (quoted from my journal).



I'm hurting, Lord—will you forget me forever?
How much longer, Lord?
Will you look the other way when I'm in need?
How much longer must I cling to this constant grief?
I've endured this shaking of my soul.
So how much longer will my enemy have the upper hand?
It's been long enough!
Take a good look at me, God, and answer me!
Breathe your life into my spirit.
Bring light to my eyes in this pitch-black darkness
or I will sleep the sleep of death.
Don't let my enemy proclaim, "I've prevailed over him."
For all my adversaries will celebrate when I fall.
Lord, I have always trusted in your kindness, so answer me.
I will yet celebrate with passion and joy
when your salvation lifts me up.
I will sing my song of joy to you, the Most High,
for in all of this you have strengthened my soul.
My enemies say that I have no Savior,
but I know that I have one in you!

LAMENT VI: A MOTHER'S LAMENT

Mary Gonzalez

*God, God, why is my child suffering?
Why aren't you listening?
I keep crying out to you, and you do nothing!
Where are you?*

*I keep looking for answers
And all I get are more questions.
I have exhausted all options, all explanations.
Why is this happening?*

*Do not take any more of her dreams,
Do not hold her back.
I will take her place.
I will take her pain, put it on me.*

*I cry out to You.
You are God,
You are sovereign.
You love her even more than I am able to love her.*

*You know her inside and out.
You wipe away her tears.
You quiet her heart.
You reassure her soul.*

*I will put my faith in you.
I will trust your goodness.
I will hold you to your promises.
You are my God, you are her God.*

There are no words to describe the pain a parent feels when their child is suffering. There are no words that make that pain better or take it away. It is a pain that cannot be fixed, that cannot be ignored, that cannot be brushed under the rug.

Over the last five years I have journeyed with my daughter through the unimaginable. I have walked with her as we sought answers for her deteriorating health. Together we have driven into the city more times than we can count. We have sat in doctor's offices, listened to countless explanations, and tried even more suggestions. Together we have cried, we have yelled, we have laughed, and we have sat in silence. We have recognized each other's pain, and we have accepted that we do not completely understand it. We have learned to give each other space to feel the pain, to complain, to question, and sometimes to hold our tongues.

Along this journey, many have tried to console us; many have tried to give us advice; many have given us scriptures to lift our spirits. Others have sat with us, and cried with us; they have railed with us and have withheld advice. It was this latter group that brought the most comfort. I have learned that at times silence can be better than words.

I have also discovered that there is great relief in raising my voice to my God; he doesn't mind. I have reached the end of my tears and have found myself unable to pray. In these times, the prayers of God's people have lifted me up. I have felt the reassuring embrace of a friend, and I have found great comfort in knowing that I am not alone. God has gifted me with friends that give me space to complain and question and friends that share their own journeys with me.

I still do not understand suffering. I do not know why God does not intervene when I think he should. I do not comprehend why it seems like some suffer more than others. I am angry at the brokenness of this world, at the ways sin finds its way into our lives and turns them upside down.

However, I do know that God has not forgotten me or those I love. I know that life is only worth living with God in it and that the only way to endure suffering is with God. He truly is the Good Shepherd that goes before us in the spaces of danger and shows us the way through.

PSALM 6

O Lord, don't rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your rage.
Have compassion on me, Lord, for I am weak.
Heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.
I am sick at heart.
How long, O Lord, until you restore me?

Return, O Lord, and rescue me.
Save me because of your unfailing love.
For the dead do not remember you.
Who can praise you from the grave?

I am worn out from sobbing.
All night I flood my bed with weeping,
drenching it with my tears.
My vision is blurred by grief;
my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies.

Go away, all you who do evil,
for the Lord has heard my weeping.
The Lord has heard my plea;
the Lord will answer my prayer.
May all my enemies be disgraced and terrified.
May they suddenly turn back in shame.

LAMENT VII

Alice Teisan

In 1992, at the age of thirty, I worked full time as a home health nurse and was an avid cyclist, having cycled 10,000 miles on four continents. Days before my next scheduled trip, I awoke with the “twenty-four-hour flu.” But it never ended. Ten months later after seeing nineteen specialists, I was diagnosed with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS). Four years later the diagnosis of postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS) would be added to the list.

ME/CFS, once dubbed “Yuppie Flu,” is not a “glamorous illness,” where people can’t wait to help. It was thoroughly demoralizing, having my body working against me, with the added burden of the healthcare system and the church and society lacking knowledge of my disease. The onus for healing and educating landed inappropriately on me. I constantly had to prove I was disabled—not a malingerer with an all-in-the-head illness.

During that time, I experienced repeated losses; overwhelming gloom surrounded my sickbed and threatened to crumble the foundation of my faith. I was no longer able to numb life’s pains with pleasure or to remain “productive,” as defined by society. I struggled to perform activities of daily living. I thought, *If I had cancer, the doctors would treat me with respect. They’d follow a protocol that would end my symptoms, or cancer would end my life. But this . . . ?*

Unable to continue my career as a home health nurse, I thought, *I don’t know how long this illness is going to last, but I still want my life to count for something.* That day I revised my prayer plan, that I began in 1988, from one uninterrupted hour of prayer a week to one hour a day.

When my lifelong props began crumbling, my performance-based independence was shattered. There I had a choice—to become bitter against God or to become better acquainted with Him. Accepting suffering as a valuable asset and gifted teacher, I pursued a total abandoned dependence on Christ.

When I accepted Christ at the age of twelve, it was my prayer “to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection” (Philippians 3:10, NIV). Only as I entered into my suffering, and with the Church’s

support, did I begin to learn that knowing Christ only happened in the “participation of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,” (Philippians 3:10, NIV). Transformation—the formation of Christ living in me—happens through giving and receiving within community, as God burns away the dross.

Discovering my God-given purpose required walking the same purpose-filled road Christ walked—a messy, rough, and rugged one. I faced a constant temptation to veer off the painful path and pursue an easier, more leisurely way. But suffering digs deeper foundational pillars of faith, providing the support needed to follow the Lord’s invitation to soar to extraordinary heights. Suffering also helps me adjust my thoughts and accept that God’s plans are best.

His Wheels International (HWI), a mission providing the design and development of hand-pedaled trikes for people with disabilities in developing countries, was birthed through my suffering. HWI has provided opportunities for speaking, authoring two memoirs, distributing 1,700 two-wheeled bicycles and designing a hand-pedaled, three-wheeled cycle for those in developing countries.

On August 16, 2017, through a Facebook feed God led me to a new medication, which has brought gradual ongoing healing and an answer to a prayer I wrote out on August 23, 1998: “Lord, please heal the malfunctioning mitochondria so oxygen would be effectively utilized . . . and lactic acid and CO₂ waste would be properly disposed of, thus allowing me to exercise without symptoms.”

Since then I’ve experienced an ongoing gradual healing of my symptoms through a new medication. I’m learning that living into this answered prayer is requiring me to put into practice all the lessons I’ve learned during suffering. As the Lord reveals what’s next for me, I am facing my fears as I continue walking one step at a time, with the Lord, out of my “Egypt, of CFS/ME.” I am walking into the promised land of Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (NIV).

Hear me, Lord, and answer me,
for I am poor and needy.
Guard my life, for I am faithful to you;
save your servant who trusts in you.
You are my God; have mercy on me, Lord,
for I call to you all day long.
Bring joy to your servant, Lord,
for I put my trust in you.

You, Lord, are forgiving and good,
abounding in love to all who call to you.
Hear my prayer, Lord;
listen to my cry for mercy.
When I am in distress, I call to you,
because you answer me.

Among the gods there is none like you, Lord;
no deeds can compare with yours.
All the nations you have made
will come and worship before you, Lord;
they will bring glory to your name.
For you are great and do marvelous deeds;
you alone are God.

Teach me your way, Lord,
that I may rely on your faithfulness;
give me an undivided heart,
that I may fear your name.
I will praise you, Lord my God, with all my heart;
I will glorify your name forever.
For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the depths,
from the realm of the dead.

Arrogant foes are attacking me, O God;
ruthless people are trying to kill me—
they have no regard for you.
But you, Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God,
slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
Turn to me and have mercy on me;
show your strength in behalf of your servant;
save me, because I serve you
just as my mother did.
Give me a sign of your goodness,
that my enemies may see it and be put to shame,
for you, Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

LAMENT VIII

Emma Shane



1 SAMUEL 1:1-17

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the Lord Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the Lord. Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the Lord had closed her womb. Because the Lord had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the Lord, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the Lord's house. In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the Lord, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "Lord Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the Lord for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

As she kept on praying to the Lord, Eli observed her mouth. Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the Lord. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

LAMENT IX: SOMETIMES . . .

Annika Norquist

You think one person will be there forever,
Because, they always have been,
And then one day they're not,

Sometimes
We don't consider,
The joyful times in life,
With loved ones,
Because we are too scared,
Of what might happen to them in the future,

Sometimes
You don't see a person every day,
But simply knowing of their presence,
Comforts even the deepest sorrows,

Sometimes
We see an amazing person,
Doing the works of God,
And their kindness, and way of being,
Is so infectious,
That we just want to join in,

Sometimes
We don't realize,
The impact of one's actions,
And one's life,
Until they are gone,

Sometimes
We go through hard and uncertain times,
And yet there is always one person,
Who is welcoming, and generous, and loving,

But always, I will remember, those welcoming, generous, and
kind hearted people.

And always, I will remember Marilyn.

JOHN 11 (SELECTIONS)

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.) So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.” Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days, and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

Jesus wept.

LAMENT X: LAMENT AND GRIEF

Interview with Doug Stewart

What was your life like before you experienced a season of grief and lament? What were some of your assumptions about lament before you experienced this pain?

First, I'm a 7 on the Enneagram and 7s major in avoiding pain, and especially psychological pain—the grief, the boredom, the fears. So I have never seen lament as something I should practice. I wasn't even sure what it was. Rather than lament things, I thought I should find reasons to rejoice, to celebrate, to change the subject. To do something to avoid. It seemed like a negative approach to life. Therefore, I did not spend time to lament. I lamented my father's death, my mother's death but not deeply. Losing Marilyn was the first time I've lost somebody physically close to me. I'd been away from my mother and father for a long time, so in a way they had been absent from my life for a long time. I've lost some friends, but nothing like this recent experience. I think I would say it was more spiritual to not lament, but to rejoice, to celebrate, to give thanks, to step away from negative thinking.

I remember when I first heard about the spiritual practice of lament, maybe five or ten years ago. I reacted negatively to it. I didn't know what it was. I didn't want to practice it. So when this hit me—Marilyn's suddenly being snatched away from me—I was unprepared.

What was your life like in the midst of your season of grief and lament? What actions did you take to exercise your grief? What was it like for you to interact with God during your season of lament?

I think I didn't know what had hit me. It was huge. It came in stages. The first stage was when Marilyn was operated on, and we learned that she had melanoma cancer. That just totally took over my life. She needed 24/7 attention. She was only partially present. It seemed clear that she had something that would take her life. Of course, we all know that we are going to die, but when you have something on the calendar, it totally changes the story. So, I think for about a year, as long as she was with me

physically, I don't think I experienced a day of peace, of release. There was always some anxiety noise in the background.

But I didn't allow myself to really entertain the thought that Marilyn might be taken from me. For the first months I clung to the idea that Marilyn would be healed. So it was quite a blow, it really was a blow, when the surgeon, the neurologist, came in and said, "We've done new imaging of your wife's brain, and the radiation and the immunotherapy is not working." So basically they said, we've done all we can do. And they weren't sure it was worth trying anymore because of the side effects. That pulled the rug out from under my faith because I was really confident that God was stepping in to heal her.

They had used the same drug to heal her that they had used to heal Jimmy Carter. He had melanoma, brain cancer, and the same drug had been the effective agent to clear him of his cancer. So I thought, *well, that's going to be our case*. So that really set me back, and started me on an inner dialogue. *What happened? Where were you? Why didn't you respond this way?* I wouldn't say there was any lament; there was just sort of numbness. I shut down spiritually. I didn't lose my faith, in the sense of abandoning it. But I didn't experience any real intimacy with God. I think I lost confidence in him. I thought, *I was sure you were going to do this, and it's not happened, how can I trust you to do anything further? If you didn't do this, which was the big thing, and you could have, how can I trust you to do something good?* That was not a season of lament; that was just a season of anxiety, of fear.

The season of lament came when she died. That left an awful, gaping hole, and I'm still facing that. Not as intensely but it's still present. That's where this little book, *Praying Through Our Losses* [by Wayne Simsic], provided me with words to express my anger, my confusion, my sense of despair, of just grief, pain, hurting because she was gone. I came to realize what a terrible thing death is. There's a lot of tragedies or losses, but death, there's something so final about it. You don't reverse it. Jesus will reverse it, but in the meantime, it's definitive, final. Somebody is taken out of your life and they are not only dead, but their body is removed, physically. So it leaves an empty space.

I found it's great to be in the house, but it's hard to come home and find an empty house. There are moments that are harder than others. One is coming back into the house and there be no one there to greet

me. Going to bed at night, and there's no one in the room, or in the bed. Eating—eating is hard. I still love to eat, but I don't enjoy eating much now because there's no one to share it with. I enjoy eating with someone. So I eat by myself, if I have to, but I eat quickly and don't savor it. At night, watching television, we would watch together. I turn, and she's not there. Now that doesn't happen as much, but in the first months, I'd be watching something and I would start to say, "Marilyn, what do you think of that?" And there's no one there. So all of that just produces a throbbing sense of ache or pain, of sadness, of despair, and that's where I find that book helpful, just to give me words to express honestly before God what I was feeling and still feel.

Has your view of the practice of lament changed in this, or do you feel that you were sort of forced to practice it?

The latter. That's to say, it was something I didn't embrace as a valuable exercise. It seems, as you say, something that you are forced to practice because you've experienced loss. But it did not seem like something to voluntarily take up.

I was trying to figure out what I understand about lament. It's more than just grief. Grief and loss and pain just come because you suffer something. Lament seems to be a deliberate choosing to give words to what you're feeling, thinking, what you're going through, and bringing them before God or before others. I think there's an experience of grief and loss and sorrow that you just experience, but you don't articulate. You just feel it. It numbs your mind, but you feel it in your body; it's a physical sensation. One of the benefits I've found of lament is of just telling God honestly, trying to tell him honestly. I find it hard to be honest with God because—it may be my southern heritage—but you just don't express anger and negative thoughts to people, less to God. There's just a reluctance to say, "I'm mad. Where are you? Why haven't you shown up? Why have you neglected me? Why this?" That just feels disrespectful to me. So again having words, having somebody else give me those words, has been helpful.

But I've found there's a great benefit from lament. One, it helps to get feelings outside of you and give them a name where you can objectify them a little bit, identify them, and address them, and it gives other

people a chance to share your burdens, to take care of the burden with you. There's a certain relief from just telling another person what's going on, and they hearing you and empathizing with you. They really can't do much to change anything, but it helps just to take it with you, come under the same yoke with you, and share that yoke. And then there were times, there are times, where God very plainly has gotten back to me—I *know what you're going through, I grieve with you. It hurts me too*—where there's a compassionate, empathetic response that the Holy Spirit makes me aware of. I wouldn't say that's everyday. But it does happen, and that's a powerful experience. Also, giving words to your grief and sorrow sort of sets it out there and allows God to address specifically what you've just said. I raise questions. I raise a complaint—*where are you? why did you allow this?*—and I find that often, thoughts come into my mind that address those questions. They don't explain them all, but they give me a light to see that there is another way to look at this. And then that's been very helpful. That reconnects me with God. I find God wants to connect with us in specific ways, but in a way, we have to tell him what it is that's troubling us so that he can then address that question in ways that we can understand and receive.

Has your experience with lament changed anything about how you relate to God, your community or yourself?

Well, it certainly has. I think also it's been a call. I've paid a lot of attention to Scripture over my life. There's just a lot of truth that's embedded itself in my mind. And that's a powerful bulwark. I can confront feelings through Scripture, and I find often I'm drawn back to Jesus, what I know about him, what he's said to me, through Scripture. The Scripture keeps redirecting my attention towards him, away from depression, loss, pain—but not so much the pain and loss, as much as the sense of despair and hopelessness they push you towards.

How did your community respond to your grief? Were there some helpful ways your community lamented with you?

There's been an outpouring of love, support, towards Marilyn. I just stood in awe about the way people took care of Marilyn. They visited

her, they wrote to her, they shared with her, they blessed her. They prayed with her. They wept with her. It was a wonderful, wonderful experience. And I think it was a gift from God that allowed more time, rather than if she had been taken suddenly. People would have not been able to express these things; I don't think they would have felt a sense of closure. A lot of people, I realized, they were saying goodbye to her. They didn't phrase it that way when they came to visit, but they were saying goodbye. They just wanted to make sure they heard some things before the Lord took her. And I've found that it's been that same reaching out to me. Not as intense or as frequent—I wouldn't expect it—but people have called me, come to visit, taken me out to meals, to a movie, just trying to be with me. And that's been a tremendous help. I think staying by yourself too much, too long, is not healthy. I don't know how people endure years of singleness. And I realize you must be able to develop a familiarity or an acceptance of it. But after you've lived fifty-four years intimately with somebody, it seems impossible to return to any sort of normality of life. So to have people in and out of my life has been helpful. My daughters have been wonderful. They call me regularly. They check by. I feel their care for me. But woe to the person that suffers a deep grief and has no one to enter into it with them. Wow.

Also, I appreciated physical hugs. I think there's a power in embracing that's more than words. People who come up and put their hand on my shoulder, or just come up and look me in the eye, don't have to say much, but there's something communicated in that physical experience of intimacy, of touch.

Perhaps the most helpful aspect for me is the weekly Eucharist. Somebody told me, "Oh, I admire you for still coming to church." I thought to myself, *you can't hold me back*. There's just something of getting out of the house, getting to be with people that I laugh with, celebrate with, worship with, sing with, pray with, listen with that is life giving. And it's also helpful to have a service that's liturgical because you're carried. You follow a guide, and that's true in the praying that I do now. I pray spontaneously, but mostly I follow a guide. It's hard to stay attentive in prayer when you're grieving, when you're lamenting. So written prayers, Scripture, liturgies, like *Pray As You Go*, or *The Divine Hours*, or our regular Anglican prayer forms, they are gifts. You thank God that people have taken the time and given the thought to reflect

enough to capture words that resonate with your own experience. And you think, *yes, I can make those words my own*. They're not empty. It's not just going through phrases. There's something that resonates within you.

I think that—here I'm trying to say this respectfully—I trust God more deeply, but I'm less sure that I know what he's doing. I do trust him. I trust him. *Lord, I belong to you, I'm in your hands. You died for me, you've been raised from the dead, you're my shepherd, you're my savior, you're my Lord. I will be well. But how long is this going to last? What's going to happen? Why did that happen?* They're just questions that you just have to push aside and say, "I'll leave these to the Lord." If he wants to give me more light, and some light does come, but I think many things we won't see and understand until we're in the presence of the Lord. That experience of sort of having my faith, my strong conviction that she was going to be healed, that sort of wounded me, left me vulnerable, so I'm not as sure about what God's going to do now. I know he's good. I just don't know how that goodness will play out. How does goodness interact with difficulty and pain? Certainly goodness does not mean exemption from pain and suffering, so how do those two weave together?

I definitely do see now that it's not just being grieved but attempting to confront that grief, to give a name to it, to bring it before God and share it with others, so that it's not just oppressing you interiorally, but also so that it can be addressed. Questions that can be acknowledged, God can answer. You almost have to own the questions before God can deal with the responses. So I think lament is a liturgical practice. So to have liturgies to guide you through lament is helpful. I don't know that you can do it by yourself.

I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.
When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.

I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.
You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.
I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;
I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

“Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?
Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?
Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?”

Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.
I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”

LAMENT XI: THE STRANGE BEAUTY OF SADNESS

Heather Maynard



LUKE 7:36-50

When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.”

Jesus answered him, “Simon, I have something to tell you.”

“Tell me, teacher,” he said.

“Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?”

Simon replied, “I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven.”

“You have judged correctly,” Jesus said.

Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.”

Then Jesus said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The other guests began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”

Jesus said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”

LAMENT XII

Emily McGowin

When Ronnie's mother, Susan, died of pancreatic cancer at the age of forty-six, I fell into a deep depression. The root of my depression was anger. Anger at the doctors for not recognizing her condition sooner. Anger at family members for their ineptitude in the face of such tragedy. Anger at the hospitals for being so darn expensive. Anger at friends for not knowing what to say or do. Anger at Susan for dying. Anger at God for letting it happen.

But all of that anger turned inward, rather than resulting in flaming outbursts toward others. Like molten lead poured into a cast, the anger filled up my insides and slowly hardened into something frigid and impenetrable.

Of course, I didn't know what was happening. Like the character Riley in the Pixar film *Inside Out*, someone (or something) had taken away Joy and Sadness, which left me to be governed by Fear, Disgust, and Anger. My emotions deadened, my desire for pleasure disappeared, and I was consumed with a ravenous, interminable exhaustion.

Unfortunately, my situation was exacerbated by my church. One pastor said regularly, "If you're depressed or anxious, then it's because of a biblical truth not understood or a biblical truth not applied." The implication was clear: either you're ignorant or you're being disobedient. I was married to the youth pastor. I was in seminary. I was a professional holy person. So, I was not ignorant. And yet, I couldn't make myself better. How could I tell someone that I'm struggling if it would expose me as "disobedient"? So, I faked it. And faked it. And faked it.

Interestingly, I did not feel God was absent during this time. I never doubted God's existence or love. But we were not on speaking terms. God was there, but I could not hear him—and I didn't really want to, either.

Several months passed. One day I was spending time with a good friend and we were talking about my feelings—or lack thereof. At one point she turned to me and said, "Emily, it's okay for you not to be okay. You've gone through a lot this year, and it's okay to be struggling."

A few weeks later, an older woman in the congregation took time to talk with me in depth after a service. She pressed gently for details, and I opened up a little more. Later, she followed up by email with an article to read. “Take a look at this,” she said. “It sounds like you’re experiencing several of these symptoms. Do you think maybe you’re depressed?”

Even though I knew something was wrong, seeing the list of symptoms made everything “click.” I was not okay. And what I had, what I was struggling with, had a name. And others have it, too. She gave me the name of a local physician and urged me to make an appointment. He confirmed what I suspected: I was depressed. Due to the length of time I had been dealing with symptoms, he suggested I consider trying medication. I left his office with a six month prescription for Lexapro and something I hadn’t felt in quite a while: Hope.

The medication helped. The darkness didn’t feel quite so overwhelming. The coldness wasn’t quite so chilling. And I could begin to imagine what it would be like not to be depressed. Even so, over time I began to realize that there was a spiritual element to my condition, too. It was brain chemistry, for sure. But it was also spiritual. I discerned a spiritual darkness in my heart that I couldn’t heal with medication and couldn’t address on my own.

So, I reached out to a woman that I trusted more than most and asked if she could arrange a time to lay hands on me and pray. She readily agreed and requested permission to invite others. Saying yes to that was difficult. But I felt a compulsion to risk trusting them. So I did.

We gathered at one of the women’s homes on a Friday night. There were about seven women in attendance. And I sat among them and told my story. I shared all of the anger and disgust and fear. I shared all of the grief and doubt. I cried and cried: the kind of body-shaking, nose-dripping, ugly cry that you never want to do in public. I don’t know if that time is rightly called confession or lamentation (or both), but through it a softening took place in my soul. Or, to switch metaphors, the twisted knot inside my heart came loose and began to unfurl. Those sweet women listened patiently and affirmed my feelings. They were present with me while I wept and gave me the freedom to be distraught and undone.

Then, without trying to fix it, they laid hands on me and prayed. I don’t remember the content of their prayers, but I remember the

sensation of their bodies near mine. The feeling of their warm hands on my neck and shoulders. The sound of one woman praying quietly in tongues. And I felt a deep-in-the-gut release when they were finished. It was grace and mercy in bodily form.

I wish I could say the depression left that day and never came back. But, that's not how my story worked out. Depression has remained a lifelong companion since that time—a “dark passenger” I can never really leave behind. Christians have mental health conditions too and should not be afraid to seek help for them. But, alongside remedies like medication and therapy, mindfulness and meditation, there are spiritual treasures available in the body of Christ. Weeping, lamenting, holding, and praying—all of these are graces imbued with God's good presence and power. I hope we will learn to avail ourselves of that power every chance we get.

Listen to my prayer, O God,
do not ignore my plea;
hear me and answer me.
My thoughts trouble me and I am distraught
because of what my enemy is saying,
because of the threats of the wicked;
for they bring down suffering on me
and assail me in their anger.

My heart is in anguish within me;
the terrors of death have fallen on me.
Fear and trembling have beset me;
horror has overwhelmed me.
I said, "Oh, that I had the wings of a dove!
I would fly away and be at rest.
I would flee far away
and stay in the desert;
I would hurry to my place of shelter,
far from the tempest and storm."

As for me, I call to God,
and the Lord saves me.
Evening, morning and noon
I cry out in distress,
and he hears my voice.
He rescues me unharmed
from the battle waged against me,
even though many oppose me.

Cast your cares on the Lord
and he will sustain you;
he will never let
the righteous be shaken.
But you, God, will bring down the wicked
into the pit of decay;
the bloodthirsty and deceitful
will not live out half their days.

But as for me, I trust in you.

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