

LAMENT PRACTICE

INTRO TO PRACTICE

We've intentionally flipped some things around in our service today, to create space to respond together to this collective sense of loss, through the practice of lament.

Lament is an important – and beautiful – part of a life of faith. We often lean into joy when we come together to worship – because in Christ there is always lots to be joyful about; but in this world – *and in the honesty of Christ* – there is also a ton to be heartbroken over at the same time. In our own lives and in the lives of those around us.

Our sorrow can be as sacred as our joy. In fact in the Bible over 70% of the Psalms (ancient Israel's hymnbook) contain some form of lament – a song or prayer that expresses grief, sadness, pain or frustration. Culturally we are very good at complaining – but lament is something different. It's a channeling of those complaints into meaningful prayers that point our hearts towards the God who cares about our pain and struggles.

Biblical laments have a few common movements that we're going to follow today.

Each one starts with an **ADDRESS**, declaring *who* we're talking to. This isn't random venting to empty air! We point our words and eyes towards the One we believe is present and listening. Every lament voices a **COMPLAINT**, describing with raw honesty the circumstances that are messing with the flow of joy and hope at the moment. There's usually an expression of **TRUST**; the belief that God will not leave us here, in this, forever. And always, a **PETITION** – a specific asking of God to turn things around. In the end, they often conclude with **PRAISE**: a stubborn resolve *to worship God anyway*, no matter what happens.

So take a deep breath and join me as we lament together. Because life is hard, and God cares about our pain.

ADDRESS

Tender Father,
Who comforts and carries us.

You have known struggle and pain,
Tears of grief and loss,
Adversity and injustice.

Though You hold the whole universe in Your hands,
You care deeply about the everyday details of our lives.
You invite us to pray freely and honestly.

Thank You that You listen,
Attentive to our every word,
And to the prayers that can't be put into words.

Hear us now. Amen.

SONG: PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

THE COMPLAINT

Next we come to the complaint. The *what-exactly-is-it* that's going so wrong right now. You probably have a million things you could choose from, but right now try to zero in on one specific issue. What grief, pain or frustration is sitting heaviest on your heart right now? [PAUSE] Have you got something?

Now hopefully you were able to find some kind of old scrappy piece of cloth, like we mentioned earlier in the service. I want you to take that and hold it in your hands right now. One of the things we learn in grief is about the fragility of life. How loss can appear suddenly out of nowhere and disrupt everything forever. Mandy talked about our need to stare that reality right in the face, rather than trying to avoid or look away from it. So as you hold that fabric in your hand, I want you to try to let yourself feel all the feelings, about the thing that is so messed up. Let the fabric be a symbol of the way life was supposed to have gone, the perfect intact picture you (or they) deserved, which is now lost. Let your grief and rage go into this little symbolic piece of cloth, and just hold it, as you pray. We are aiming for unfiltered, raw, honesty here. Tell God how it feels. And why.

Grief is an intense bodily emotion, and prayer can be too. So I'm going to invite you to take that strip of cloth, with all its painful symbolism, and just rip it right in two. And let that rip be both an act of accepting reality (because life *has* become broken!) and also an expression of your own visceral pain about it.

Ready? Let's rip and let it be a prayer.

SONG: WHY AREN'T YOU AWAKE?

Kate Bowler: A Blessing For When You Mourn What Could Have Been

Blessed are you, friend, sitting among the shards of what could have been. It is broken now, that dream you loved, and it has spilled out all over the ground.

Blessed are you, dear one, letting your eyes look around and remember all the hope your dream once contained. All the love. All the beauty.

Blessed are you, telling your tears they can flow. Telling your anger it can speak.

Blessed are you when mourning is the holy work of the moment, for it speaks of what is real.

Blessed are you, letting this loss speak all its terrible truth to your soul.

Blessed are we who mourn, saying let us remain in grief's cold winter for as long as it takes, that mourning might be to our hearts the gentlest springtime.

Amen.

TRUST

- And now, having poured out our complaint before God, the next movement in a Biblical lament is often a pause for a declaration of trust. But it's not a trust in *how* or even *that* the circumstances will change; it is more simply a declared trust in *who God is*. In God's character, and closeness, his goodness. It's: ***"I may not know what's going to happen, but I know who's here in it, with me."***
- It's a reminder to one's own soul. We have to do that sometimes, to speak courage into our own souls and remind ourselves of the God we have known, when life gets stormy. So let's do that now, by actually reading a psalm of biblical lament:

Psalm 42 (NLT)

*As the deer longs for streams of water,
so I long for you, O God.*

I thirst for God, the living God.

When can I go and stand before him?

*Day and night I have only tears for food,
while my enemies continually taunt me,
saying, "Where is this God of yours?"*

*My heart is breaking
as I remember how it used to be:
I walked among the crowds of worshipers
leading a great procession to the house of
God, singing for joy and giving thanks
amid the sound of a great celebration!*

*Why am I discouraged?
Why is my heart so sad?
I will put my hope in God!
I will praise him again—
my Savior and my God!*

*Now I am deeply discouraged,
but I will remember you—*

*even from distant Mount Hermon, the source
of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar.*

*I hear the tumult of the raging seas as your
waves and surging tides sweep over me.*

*But each day the LORD pours his unfailing love
upon me, and through each night I sing his
songs, praying to God who gives me life.*

*"O God my rock," I cry,
"Why have you forgotten me?
Why must I wander around in grief,
oppressed by my enemies?"
Their taunts break my bones.
They scoff, "Where is this God of yours?"*

*Why am I discouraged?
Why is my heart so sad?
I will put my hope in God!
I will praise him again—
my Savior and my God*

As we sing this next song together, try to call your own heart to courage, making it your personal declaration of trust in the God you know is present and working, even when you can't feel or see it.

SONG: WAYMAKER

PETITION

And now from that place of trust, the next step in lamenting is The Petition; where we *invite, ask* – sometimes even feels like we’re *pleading* with God to **do something**. Whether the move we’re desperate for is something external – for circumstances to change. Or whether it’s an internal shifting/strengthening we need. (Often, both are needed.)

Asking isn’t about trying to convince God to get with our program; it’s about being honest with God, not just about our hurts, but also about our desires. And in the act of asking, God often reveals and realigns our hearts’ desires.

So we’re going to take a few minutes to name those requests to God. You can just quietly name them in your heart, you can journal them onto a scrap of paper or notes app in your phone, you can post them real time on our online prayer wall.

So what (specifically) do you want God to do? In the external circumstances you’re facing, or the internal space of your own soul? Bring him the full cry of your heart right now.

SONG: DRIVE OUT THE DARKNESS

PRAISE

The last part of a Biblical lament is “praise”, which might sound counterintuitive. The “praise” part of a lament isn’t aiming for a happy-clappy feel where we pretend the pain is gone... but rather we simply end by pointing our hearts fully toward the God who never fails, never gives up, never misses one single tear, and never rests until his goodness is running over in our lives.

Even when we don’t see or feel it in the moment. We praise anyway, because the bedrock of our faith is rooted in who God is, timeless and eternal, not our ever-changing circumstances and feelings.

You don’t have to sing overtop of your sadness today. Just sing holding onto both grief and faith together, at the same time.

Because – even in grief – the goodness of God is unshakeable.

Let’s sing.

SONG: GOODNESS OF GOD