



MISSION  
INSTITUTE

## POWER OF LAMENT

### a lenten practice

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#### Introduction

Lament is a prequel to joy, gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise. It manifests as sounds of distress in which we cry out in faith to God—and anyone else who is listening. Lament embodies the messiness of life and helps us deal with its full reality. It is intended to be overheard by others and teaches courage, honest speech, compassionate listening, and witness to what is right. Lament is a powerful tool that assists us in learning how to intertwine life's joys and griefs.

Throughout scripture, lament has taken on the tone of prophecy. We see this in many of Jesus' words. To lament is to cry out from the midst of suffering, injustice, poverty, tragedy, and violence. It is the partner, antecedent, and companion to praise. A life without lament is incomplete. This guide invites you to explore and try on this spiritual practice as an important part of faithfully following Jesus, the Christ.

#### What you will need

We have created *Power of Lament* as a four-part series for group practice. Leadership and roles are designed to be shared, with different people taking on responsibilities as they feel called, whether praying, reading, singing, or setting the space.

As you read through the sessions, notice how they follow a similar rhythm each week. All begin with a brief introduction followed by scripture, silence, prayer, embodied practice, and a concluding prayer. There also are practices people can follow at home during the week. At home we recommend people select a space where there are no distractions and lights can be dimmed.

Some tips you might find useful:

- Designate a weekly facilitator to be responsible for going through the material in advance, delegating roles, and guiding the process.
- Attend to creating a sacred space with religious and natural objects whether candles, a cross, a meaningful icon, stones, plants, etc.
- Begin and end with silence and prayer.
- Take a posture of listening rather than discussing.
- Come with an open heart and an ear to vulnerability.

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## + Lament & Christian Faith

Lament is the part of our faith life that binds suffering to God—our own as well as that of others and the whole of creation. Lament is a type of prayer long used by prophets and the faithful including Abraham, Moses, Hannah, David, and Jesus. Lament is necessary to deal with the most difficult parts of our lives. It is the tone of Holy Saturday, opening the way for transformation and resurrection. Lament demands a response to suffering and announces a need for change, whether the suffering is ours or others’.

Lament is always temporary. It is neither a lifestyle nor a personality type but a facet of our full spiritual life. This does not mean it is risk-free. As an act of faith, lament is steeped in vulnerability. Daring laments are strong expressions of compassion, hope, and faith. They become the foundation from which gratitude, thanksgiving, and praise flow.

### Opening Scripture & Silent Prayer

*“Where is your brother Abel?” “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” “What have you done? Hark, your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground!”* Genesis 4:9-10

*Jesus wept.* John 11:35

Take a few moments to be still and center your heart in silence on these readings.

### Opening Prayer

I call on You and You answer me, O God. Turn your ear to me. Hear what I say! Display your faithfulness in wondrous deeds. Guard me like the apple of Your eye. Amen!

### Embodied Scripture Reading: Micah 8:1-8

Assign and read the parts of this scriptural reading aloud *with full emotional weight*: prophet, people, God, mountain witnesses. Listen to God lament and ponder what that means for you and this group.

- How is the lament carried out? Where? When? Why?
- What are the strong emotions for each character?
- To whom is the lament addressed? What is requested?
- What does the lament have to do with sin, guilt, and innocence?
- What impact does it have on others who may be listening at that time? What about those listening now? What impact does it have on you?

### Practicing Lament

Begin with five minutes of silence, inviting each person to write down a personal distress in their life. Next, invite each person to write a brief prayer of lament to God about their distress, writing in the first person. Finally, invite those who are willing to read aloud their prayer. Encourage the group to receive the prayer without comment, letting the words be offered up as a collective prayer.

### Closing Prayer

We call on You knowing You will answer us, O God. Turn your ear to us and hear what we say! Display your faithfulness in wondrous deeds and guard us like the apple of Your eye. Amen!

### Ongoing prayer practice for the week (continued on the back)



# Lament & Christian Faith (continued)

## Practicing Lament at Home

### Lament through Words

Pick one of the biblical laments below or read all if time allows. Take time to contemplate the lament or journal in response to it, using the questions below as a guide.

<b>1 Samuel 1: 9-19</b>	Hannah's Lament
<b>Micah 6:1-8</b>	God's Lament
<b>Luke 19:41</b>	As Jesus approached Jerusalem
<b>Psalms 13 &amp; 22</b>	Lament
<b>2 Samuel 18:31-19:1</b>	David's lament

### Questions to Contemplate

- How is the lament carried out? Where? When? Why?
- What are the strong emotions for each character?
- To whom is the lament addressed? What is requested?
- What does the lament have to do with sin, guilt, and innocence?
- What impact does it have on others who may be listening at that time? What about those listening now? What impact does it have on you?

### Lament through Sound

Experience lament through sound by playing one or both of the songs below. As you listen, see if you can connect with the artist and their lament. How does it make you feel? What experience does it invite you into?

[Sometimes I feel like a motherless child](#)

[David's lament over Absalom](#)

### Lament through Image

Take ten minutes to carefully examine the image below, contemplating what you see and what emotions it evokes in you.





## Faith & Strong Emotions

The incarnate God—among us and in us—is made fully known when all emotions are given space to exist including the strong ones: anger, grief, rage, fear, and anxiety. Strong emotions are clear indications of dis-stress or dis-ease. Just as a fever tells us that something is wrong with the body, strong emotions reveal an underlying problem in our selves, our relationships, and/or our communities.

People grow in their capacities to deal with strong emotions through a combination of risk taking, grace, passionate desire for good, and life experience. Rather than avoid or deny our strong fears, anger, or grief, we are called by God into daring, intimate, and trusting encounters in which we open the realities of our lives to God and each other.

We never lament alone, for the Holy Spirit is always groaning along with us. When we fully participate in lament, we legitimize both the God within and the God that dwells in others. We must dwell in lament until the grief or other emotions begin to dissipate and we have a more complete idea of why we are so deeply distressed, and what God is calling us to now.

### Opening Scripture & Silent Prayer

*Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? and why are you so disquieted within me? Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to the Holy One, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.* Psalms 42:14-15

Take a few moments to be still and center your heart in silence on these readings.

### Opening Prayer

When we encounter suffering and distress, O God, may we be as Jesus when he saw his dear friend weeping and was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Amen.

### Embodied Scripture Reading: Psalms 55:1-15, 17-18

Print out the scripture reading in large text so it is easier for multiple people to see. Sit around a table or form a circle and place the scripture in the middle of the group and invite people to “edit” the Psalms with comments and annotations:

- Which emotions are being announced?
- What are these emotions doing to the lamenter?
- What is the order of emotions as they flow through the lament?
- What is the response?

### Practicing Lament

Break into pairs for ten minutes and read Psalm 42, alternate reading and taking turns adding a comment or detail from your own experience for each verse. Then gather as a whole group together, and for fifteen minutes invite folks to go round the circle sharing their observations of this experience—*without comments from others*.

Go round once more, inviting each person to briefly answer the question: *Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul?*

### Closing Prayer

When we encounter suffering and distress, O God, may we be as Jesus when he saw his dear friend weeping and was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Amen.

### Ongoing prayer practice for the week (continued on the back)



# Faith & Strong Emotions (continued)

## Practicing Lament at Home

### Lament through Words

Pick one of the biblical laments below or read all if time allows. Take time to contemplate the lament or journal in response to it, using the questions below as a guide.

**1 Peter 5: 6-7**

**Psalm 42**

**Psalm 43**

**Psalm: 55 1-15, 17-18**

### Questions to Contemplate

- How is the lament carried out? Where? When? Why?
- What are the strong emotions for each character?
- To whom is the lament addressed? What is requested?
- What does the lament have to do with sin, guilt, and innocence?
- What impact does it have on others who may be listening at that time? What about those listening now? What impact does it have on you?

### Lament through Sound

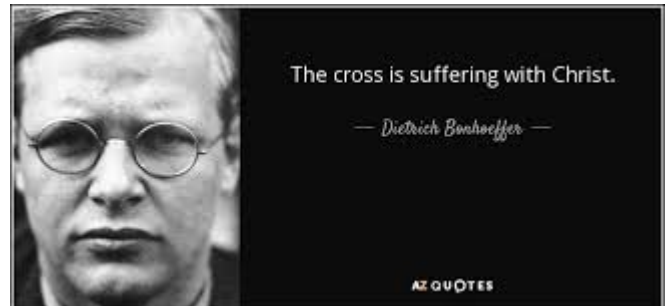
Experience lament through sound by playing one or both of the songs below. As you listen, see if you can connect with the artist and their lament. How does it make you feel? What experience does it invite you into?

[There is a Balm in Gilead](#)

[Nobody Knows the Trouble I See](#)

### Lament through Image

Spend ten minutes looking at the image below, contemplating what you see and what emotions it evokes in you.





## + Lament & Spiritual Strength Training

The patterns of lament and praise found in the Christian tradition make it very clear that distress, suffering, and strong emotions are *normal* among people of faith. This works against a “pattern of this world” that sees suffering and distress as unusual and avoidable. Lament is an indication of faith not its betrayal. It takes a great deal of trust and courage to openly acknowledge our suffering and distress before God and each other.

This week we look at how, rather than promoting a “victim” identity, lament manifests an interior courage and strength within the community of faithful.

Lament is a means of transformation. It strengthens intimacy and relationship by offering our witness to grief, wounds, and struggles that may be beyond our experiences, helping us learn from them. When we are allowed from a young age to observe others faithfully moving through distress (voicing their pain and being transformed by it) then we know what to do when it is “our turn.” Because lament is rooted in public use within community, it helps us move the focus away from “me and mine” to a much larger “we and ours”—eventually including even those others whom we do not yet see as a part of “we”.

### Opening Scripture & Silent Prayer

*Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying.* Romans 12:15

Take a few moments to be still and center your heart in silence on these readings.

### Opening Prayer

We give thanks for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on God alone. Amen.

### Embodied Scripture Reading: Lamentations 1:1-9, 22b

Divide the group into readers and listeners and have the readers read the text aloud two times while the listeners have their eyes closed. Then switch sides, and repeat the reading and listening.

- How does it feel to witness such strong emotions read aloud?
- What is your response to this lament?
- What kind of relationship with or understanding of God do those who lament in this way seem to have?

### Practicing Lament

Working in groups of two or three, spend fifteen minutes together on the following reflection: Where, if anywhere, do you hear cries of distress like these? What needs lamenting today? Then, working on your own for ten minutes, write a one or two sentence lament in the first person (singular or plural) addressed to God. Make sure it is one you are willing to pray aloud in worship.

### Closing Prayer

Begin with silence then invite people to read aloud their laments, the group responding with “Amen!” after each prayer.

Conclude with the following:

We give thanks for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on You alone, O God. Amen.

### Ongoing prayer practice for the week (continued on the back)



# Lament & Spiritual Strength Training (continued)

## Practicing Lament at Home

### Lament through Words

Pick one of the biblical laments below or read all if time allows. Take time to contemplate the lament or journal in response to it, using the questions below as a guide.

**Romans 12: 1 –2, 9-12, 14-15, 20- 21**

**Matt 5:3-6**

**Psalms 137**

**Lamentations 1:1-9, 22b**

### Questions to Contemplate

- How is the lament carried out? Where? When? Why?
- What are the strong emotions for each character?
- To whom is the lament addressed? What is requested?
- What does the lament have to do with sin, guilt, and innocence?
- What impact does it have on others who may be listening at that time? What about those listening now? What impact does it have on you?
- What do you need to lament today?

### Lament through Sound

Experience lament through sound by playing one or both of the songs below. As you listen, see if you can connect with the artist and their lament. How does it make you feel? What experience does it invite you into?

[By the Waters of Babylon](#)

[Steal Away](#)

### Lament through Image

Take ten minutes to carefully examine the image below, contemplating what you see and what emotions it evokes in you.







## Following Jesus & Lament

So much of what Jesus does for us (and at times through us for others) is to announce and take on *whatever it is that disrupts life*. That includes sin in all of its forms: the harm that we do to others, and the wounds, injustices, suffering, and tragedies done to us.

These wounds and disruptions of life are *not* found “a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away”, but are alive now. The entire unfolding of Jesus who dwells amongst us takes place within the normal human events of family, marriage, friendship, parenting, sickness, healing, work, leadership, eating, social and political instability, loss, and so on. It is right here that we need help to restore our lives back to their fullness.

Jesus does not respond to our woundedness by denying, or ignoring our powerful emotions. Rather than covering them up, he sanctifies, blesses, and embraces them as holy. This tender, compassionate and loving response leads to transformation and reconciliation.

### Opening Scripture & Silent Prayer

*When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled. He asked, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They replied, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Jesus began to cry.* John 11:33-35

Take a few moments to be still and center your heart in silence.

### Opening Prayer

Out of the depths have we called to you, O Lord. Hear our voices! Let your ears consider well the voice of our supplications. Amen!

### Embodied Scripture Reading: John 11:31-40

In the large group, read the scripture aloud twice, taking turns reading each line. Invite folks to read in a way that gives life to the emotion of the scripture. After you have read it a few times discuss the following questions:

- What strong emotions are found in this story?
- What place do they hold in the story?

### Practicing Lament

In groups of 2-3, read Luke 19:41-46 aloud. Afterwards reflect silently on the following questions:

- Why is Jesus deeply disturbed, troubled and crying?
- What does this weeping have to do with his ministry?
- How does Jesus hold his grief and other strong emotions?
- What role do your own strong emotions hold in your spiritual life?

### Closing Prayer

Holy One, the blood of the innocent cries out to You from the ground, for You are the One who hears the cry of the distressed. When our souls are full of heaviness and disquieted within us, may we put our trust in You. For we will yet give thanks to You, who is our help. As Jesus did when he saw Mary crying, may we be deeply disturbed and troubled. And, may we learn to be happy with those who are happy, and to cry with those who are crying. In the Name of One who cried, we pray. Amen.

### Ongoing prayer practice for the week (continued on the back)



## Following Jesus & Lament (continued)

### Practicing Lament at Home

#### Lament through Words

Pick one of the biblical laments below or read all if time allows. Take time to contemplate the lament or journal in response to it, using the questions below as a guide.

**John 11: 32-35**

**Matthew 27: 46**

**Mark 15: 34**

**Luke 19: 41**

**Psalms 130:1**

**Ezekiel 37: 11-14**

**Romans 8:26**

#### Questions to Contemplate

- How is the lament carried out? Where? When? Why?
- What are the strong emotions for each character?
- To whom is the lament addressed? What is requested?
- What does the lament have to do with sin, guilt, and innocence?
- What impact does it have on others who may be listening at that time? What about those listening now? What impact does it have on you?
- What do you need to lament today?

#### Lament through Sound

Experience lament through sound by playing one or both of the songs below. As you listen, see if you can connect with the artist and their lament. How does it make you feel? What experience does it invite you into?

[Oh Lord Hear my Prayer](#)

[When Jesus Wept](#)

#### Lament through Image

Take ten minutes to carefully examine the image below, contemplating what you see and what emotions it evokes in you.

