

changing church

ONE BIG IDEA | LAMENT

PRACTISING LAMENT

In this new season, there is an avalanche of pain, grief, loss, brokenness for people to work through.

We need to give time and space for people to acknowledge and journey through the struggles and the suffering they have faced. We must listen, walk with people, and allow them to be sympathetically helped. We need to develop practices of lament. Many psalms of lament start with plea and frustration but end in reliance on God.

For example, Psalm 83 begins:

*O God, do not remain silent;
Do not turn a deaf ear,
and concludes:
Let them know that you, whose name is the Lord –
That you alone are the Most High over all the earth. (NIV)*



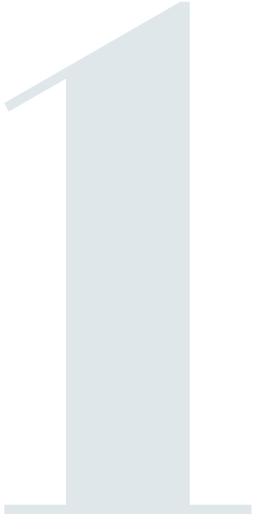
Psalm 13, a psalm of individual rather than corporate lament, starts with:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?
and concludes:
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. (NIV)*


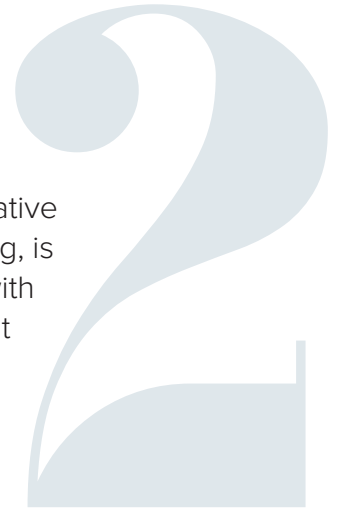
There will be various ways to help people work through the journey of honest reflection that sometimes leads from a place of plea to one where the attitude of the speaker gradually changes to a transformed refocus on the love of God, changing the context of their experienced reality.

We have put together some simple ideas of how to practise lament, either individually or as part of a community. You can lift the ideas directly or incorporate them into your services or gatherings.

Three steps on the journey of lament



Consider how to create space for people to engage with the sacrament of Holy Communion however that might be possible with social distancing restrictions. Rehearse the ultimate story of both hope and suffering, commitment and the entering into of the world of pain. It is the sensitive reminder of who we are and whose we are which throws us back on the promises of God.



The thoughtful leading through liturgical prayer, creative reflection and scripture, alongside space for listening, is significant. Providing resources that deal honestly with the journey people find themselves on is helpful, but we must be wary of giving glib answers or rushing on as if lament is unimportant.



Develop as a community of believers a language of subtle but consistent hope which will gently but consistently provide a (sometimes shaky and barely stable) bridge between felt reality and reality in God.

But we can be confident that, as we make space for lament, we will discover that lament is not the end of the conversation, instead it makes space for whispers of hope.

Reflect on a Psalm of Lament

Spend time in the scriptures and use the words as a backdrop and prayer for your own lament.

Psalm 5

¹ Listen to my words, Lord,
consider my lament.

² Hear my cry for help,
my King and my God,
for to you I pray.

³ In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you
and wait expectantly.

⁴ For you are not a God who is pleased with
wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.

⁵ The arrogant cannot stand
in your presence.

You hate all who do wrong;

⁶ you destroy those who tell lies.

The bloodthirsty and deceitful
you, Lord, detest.

⁷ But I, by your great love,
can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down
toward your holy temple.

⁸ Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies—
make your way straight before me.

⁹ Not a word from their mouth can be trusted;
their heart is filled with malice.

Their throat is an open grave;
with their tongues they tell lies.

¹⁰ Declare them guilty, O God!
Let their intrigues be their downfall.

Banish them for their many sins,
for they have rebelled against you.

¹¹ But let all who take refuge in you be glad;
let them ever sing for joy.

Spread your protection over them,
that those who love your name may rejoice
in you.

¹² Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favour as with
a shield.

(NIV)

A reflection

God is my King. I trust Him but sometimes life is rubbish. I just don't get it. Everywhere I look there are people who use violence, lies or deceit to get their own way.

It fills me with frustration and sometimes discouragement to see people live unjustly and yet still prosper. Yet I know there is a higher power, with unfailing love who shields and protects me. Even in my confusion and pain I trust that you are in control and I choose today to worship you.

Prayer

Gracious Lord and King,
my hope and salvation.
When I can think of nothing to say;
when I am gripped by sorrow, and frustration;
when a fog of confusion and a cloak of darkness surround me,
still you are with me.

Thank you that I can share my pain with you.

Because of your great love
I can take steps towards you.
Sometimes like a toddler
meandering, unsteady to your heart.

Thank you that I can share my pain with you.
You meet me in my uncertainty and your presence sustains me.

Thank you, my saviour.

Amen



Write your own prayer of lament

It may be that we simply want to write our own prayer of lament. Simply start from thinking of God being close by and listening, and you with the chance to share your storms and pains with Him. Remember, that He is faithful, gracious and loving. He is our shield and our salvation. Write the prayer as if you were speaking directly to God.

Start with who God is and remind yourself of His promises. Be as honest as you can. Don't worry about how it looks or what words you use – be yourself. If there are things that you can't write, that is fine. Start and stop where you are comfortable.

God understands. When you have finished writing sit in silence; reflect upon God, on your relationship with Him and all that He has done. Perhaps you will want to rip up the prayer feeling that you are in a slightly different place and that you have moved on. Or it may be that the writing of the prayer is one of several that you will write as you work through the petitions, questions and pains of your present reality. Some storms take time to walk through. Don't rush on too quickly; sometimes it is in the stillness and waiting that the still small voice of God whispers by.

Liturgical lament

Read together as part of your service:

Doubt and fear

All: *“Say to those who have an anxious heart,
be strong; fear not!” (Isaiah 35:4) (NIV)*
“Cast all your anxieties on Him for He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) (NIV)

Leader: *Loving God, rich in mercy,
hear our cries.*

All: *Lord have mercy.*

Leader: *We, your people, are filled with worry and sorrow.*

All: *Draw near, we pray.*

Leader: *In silence we bring our lives before you.*

– time of silence –

Leader: *Grant us peace to calm our fears,
courage to face the day.*

All: *Be our strength and shield;
we place our trust in you.
“Now may the Lord of peace Himself
give you peace at all times in every way.
The Lord be with us all.” (2 Thessalonians 3:16) (NIV)*

Frustration and pain

All: *“Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:28-29) (NIV)*

All: *God of love and kindness, we turn to you.*

Leader: *You understand our human condition,
our sorrow, sadness and pain.*

All: *Gentle Lord meet us in our pain.*

Leader: *Lord, we face pain and struggle:
Our lives are wounded through no fault of our own.*

All: *Gracious God, enable us to find strength in you.*

Leader: *We each carry unseen pain, frustration and anger.
In stillness we wait upon you.
Meet with us, Lord, in our frailty and weakness.*

All: *We need to know your presence, God;
come answer us, O God, and reveal your healing power.*

All: *“Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed
for I am your God; I will strengthen you,
I will help you; I will uphold you with my righteous hand.” (Isaiah 41:10) (NIV)*