

**Lament a Journey in Resilience**  
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**September 18, 2021**

Resource: Bill Yoder "Helping Youth Grieve"

Lament: A passionate expression of grief/sorrow often expressed in a physical manner.

Psychology today says, "Lament is essential to psychological health and is often the main pathway to personal growth, to great compassion and wisdom. Although painful, it is altogether natural and a good."

Could it possibly be that God designed us to lament?

Obviously, it is easy to talk about a reactive type of lament like a recent father who came to the ER with his 5-year-old who drowned....

What about a more intentional biblical lament? What about a spiritual discipline of lament?

God never responds in Lamentations, but the book itself becomes a comforting witness. It is a 'house of sorrow' and a safe place for tears. It honors the voices of loss, pain, and despair. It mirrors pain back to those who suffer and, in the process, brings them out of isolation into community, even if only briefly. Lamentations is about the collapse of a physical, emotional, and spiritual universe of an entire people. Yet the power of its poetry can embrace the sufferings of any whose bodies and spirits are worn down and assaulted, whose boundaries have shrunk, who are trapped, and now face foreclosed futures."

--Kathleen O'Conner

However dark life must have been for the post-destruction community of Jerusalem and its surrounding environs, it is a fitting tribute to this community's resilience that the one literary work that can be attributed to its members most securely, the sequence of the five poems collected . . . is a most profoundly life-embracing work . . . lamentations may well be the most remarkable and compelling testament to the human spirit's will to live in all of the old testament." F. W. Dobbs-Allsopp

## 1. What is biblical lament?

The biblical tradition of lament includes those prayers and expressions of complaint, anger, grief, despair and the protest to God. Prayers that erupt from the wounds, burst out of unbearable pain and bring it to language . . . They take anger and despair before God and community. They grieve. They argue. They find fault . . . Although laments appear disruptive of God's world, they are acts of fidelity. In vulnerability and honesty, they cling to God and demand for God to see, hear, and act. In the process of harsh complaint and resistance, they also express faith in God in the midst of chaos, doubt, and confusion. . . lamentations and the tears of the world. Kathleen O'Conner

Anything in this definition that makes you feel uncomfortable?

### Classic biblical model of lament

1. God is addressed presumption of a listening ear
2. Need: Complaint that identifies the trouble
3. Demand: Petition demanding God acts
4. Hurt: Motivations are added to the petitions giving additional reasons for action
5. Venom: Due to extreme pain may request vengeance not just relief
6. Praise, confidence, gratitude

The order can fluctuate

This is not an instantaneous process

Not to be confused with penitential prayers (personal/cooperate sins/laments or funeral dirges)

## 2. Recovering Biblical Lament

Church may lament big issues but what about daily losses? "ordinary" losses? Unresolved grief?

The practice of lament needs to be recovered in the church and that psalms of lament can be used to encourage the Christian church today to allow room for true lamentation in our corporate and individual lives of prayer and worship. Psalms of lament

- Challenge our inability to acknowledge the intense emotions that grief entails
- Free us to make a bold expression of grief before God and in the presence of others, and
- Allow us to rely on God and the community to carry forth hope on our behalf when we ourselves have no hope in us.

--Nancy Duff

### **3. A biblical response to grief and pain is not denial.**

Often, I see denial of grief and pain and somehow people twist their denial into a spiritual super power.

### **4. Experiencing lament is not spiritual weakness**

*Vs. 19-20. "Remember my affliction and roaming, the wormwood and the gall. My soul still remembers and sinks within me."*

Jeremiah did not prescribe positive thinking for this deep affliction.

He actually felt it useful to remember the sorrow, to understand it for what it was, and to not pretend it wasn't there or didn't happen.

### **5. In midst of lament you may feel distant from God.**

Verse 8-9

### **6. Lament may express feelings that don't seem very spiritual...especially to other Christians**

We are reminded in Psalm 13 King David.....

Many times, as chaplains we give permission for Christ followers to express feelings of anger even towards God.

And we are reminded we are in good company as Jesus cried out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"

## **7. We can completely trust God and engage in Lament**

Honest pain turns into honest trust.

Now we know honest cries of pain are not the end of the story.

There is another kind of honesty which continually finds itself in close proximity to the pain of God's people.

## **8. Honest pain turns to honest trust.**

Jeremiah continues in chapter 3, "But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."

- 1. Bring healing and resilience**
- 2. Bring unity to the church**
- 3. Point us and the world to Jesus/Comforter/Father**
- 4. Moves us to action**

### **Group Sharing:**

This has been a tremendously difficult time for us all.

What has been the most difficult part of this journey for you personally? Your family?

How have you experienced loss?

Can you allow yourself to engage in lament?

## **Lament in Jewish Tradition**

**Onen**--The Jewish understanding is that an onen cannot focus on anything other than the immediate issue of the burial, and should not be expected to be capable of any ritual observances, even those that might otherwise be performed on a daily basis (such as reciting the Shema).

**Shiva**--The first week after the funeral is known as shiva (literally, “seven”). During this period, the mourners are treated with the utmost care and respect. Their needs are met by the community — both their physical needs, such as meals, and their spiritual and emotional needs. During this time, mourners mostly remain at home and a service is held daily in their home. Friends, relatives, and community members visit and bring some food for the household. The shiva period gives the mourners a time to withdraw from the business of the world and begin to integrate and accept their loss. At the close of shiva, friends or family traditionally accompany the mourner for a brief walk (e.g., around the block) to symbolize the start of re-entry into the world.

**Sheloshim**--(literally, thirty). This 30-day period is counted from the day of the funeral (and so includes the period of shiva). Following shiva, the mourner returns to work during sheloshim but is still not completely back in the world. This ongoing mourning is expressed by avoiding parties, concerts, and other forms of public entertainment.

**Shnat Ha-Evel**--the First Year of Mourning. Traditionally, mourners who have lost a parent say the Mourner’s Kaddish daily for eleven months (or a full year), whereas mourning for all other relatives ends with the sheloshim. In modern practice, mourners may recite the Mourner’s Kaddish for 11 months for other immediate relatives as well. This is a time we are encouraged to get back into life fully, while honoring our dead on a daily basis through the saying of the Mourner’s Kaddish.

**Unveiling**--There is a traditional obligation to create some form of matzevah (“monument,” usually a gravestone) to mark the site of the grave. The “unveiling” is a formal ceremony following the placement of the tombstone.

**Yahrzeit**--The yearly anniversary of a loved one’s death (traditionally observed on the Hebrew calendar). We observe yahrzeit at home by lighting a yahrzeit candle (which burns for 24 hours) in memory of the deceased. In the synagogue, we observe yahrzeit by saying the Mourner’s Kaddish at services.