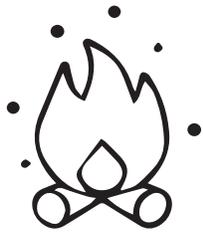


## **PART 2: PRAYING LAMENT**

### **MISSIONAL COMMUNITY DISCUSSION**



#### **Read this Overview Together**

What does a child do when they get hurt? They cry! And their parents (usually) hear them. If prayer at its core is conversation with our Father, then we will cry out to Him in prayer when we're hurt. And just as a loving parent is willing to hear the hurts of their kids, even more so, our good Father is ready to receive our cries of hurt and sorrow. These are our prayers of lament.

Many of us are hanging in there, but many are suffering right now. We may have lost our normal rhythms of life, our jobs, our health, the embodied community we need, retirement savings, and some have even lost our loved ones. We've been trying to be full-time workers, home school teachers, loving parents, good friends, and more. You may be feeling exhausted, anxious, or depressed. Perhaps the "work from home" thing is getting old and you don't feel like you're doing anything well. Moments of isolation and struggle, like our current reality, are not new to God's people. And throughout history, God's people have prayed prayers of lament in seasons of disorientation like many of us are experiencing right now.

We sometimes think it's wrong to cry out to God in pain or lament. We mistakenly think God only wants to hear our praise and only listens when we're happy. The reality is that Scripture is full of lamentation. When God's people hurt, they express their pain to him with honesty. There's a whole book of laments (Lamentations) and the most common Psalm is the Psalm of Lament. These are the songs of the helpless, the broken, the besieged, the drowning, and sometimes the hopeless. These songs are the heart cry of people who desperately need God to bring help and relief in the midst of oppression, darkness, depression, and anxiety. Listen to some of the laments of David:

"My soul also is greatly troubled. But you, O Lord-- how long?" (Ps. 6:3)

"God, are you avoiding me? Where are you when I need you?" (Ps. 10:1)

"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Ps. 13:1)

"I counted on you, God. Why did you walk out on me?" (Ps. 43:2)

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# *Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series*

*MC Discussion Continued...*

David is completely honest. In his present trials, He feels like God has forsaken him, turned His face away from him, and forgotten him. You may not be experiencing the same trial David went through, but your present loss may bring you to the point where you feel abandoned or forgotten by God. David's rawness demonstrates that we can be completely honest with God. Our relationship with God can handle this honesty; in fact the Psalms are His invitation to bring it all to Him. David is able to be completely honest because of his security in the covenant relationship God has with him. He can be completely real with God and cry for help because he knows that ultimately the Father's love for him will never change, even when it feels like it has.

Even as David pours out his lament to God, he also says, "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation." (Ps. 13:5) David didn't just "turn that frown upside down" or stuff his sadness away and force himself into rejoicing. It's possible to both feel abandoned and to cry out in pain to God, while also knowing that God will never leave you or forsake you. It's possible to cling to that promise even when you feel like the opposite. In fact, that promise is what frees you to be truly honest with God about how you feel in the moment. Because you're secure in His love, you can express your pain to Him and know that His love for you doesn't waver.

As he suffered on the cross, Jesus himself prayed the ultimate prayer of lament, reciting another prayer that David first prayed in Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" David, who originally prayed this lament, goes on to say, "Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest." Jesus' crucifixion prayer of lament shows us it's okay to be honest with God and cry out with our real feelings. He feels abandoned and forsaken. He's hurting. This is no sanitized prayer. It's a raw cry expressing the pain and suffering Jesus is really experiencing. When we join Him in crying our prayers of lament, we're actually formed to be more like Jesus, the suffering servant.

Yet, Jesus' prayer of lament has a deeper meaning beyond serving as our example of how to suffer. Jesus experienced real separation from His Father on the cross because He was taking our place and experiencing the just punishment for our rebellion against God...to be separated from Him and receive His wrath.

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# Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series

MC Discussion Continued...

**Jesus was forsaken so that we would never need to be! Jesus was forsaken so that we can never be separated from the love of God (Romans 8:31-39).** And though our pain and suffering is very real, and our Father wants us to bring our cries and lament to Him; we do so knowing that we can never actually be forsaken by Him, even when it feels like we have been.

## Questions for Missional Community Discussion

1. Do you find it difficult to express your sorrow and pain to God? If so, why do you think that is? What might that say about how you view God?
2. What is your default way of dealing with feelings of pain, hurt, or sorrow? Why do you think that is?
3. Growing up, how did your family handle pain or hurt?
4. In this current moment, have you experienced loss, pain, or sorrow? Have you talked with God about this?
5. In times of suffering or pain, how do you feel about God? Do you move toward Him or away from Him? Or Both?
6. What truths of the Gospel help us be able to bring our lament to God?

Pastor Alex, when preaching on the Psalms of Lament in the Fall of 2019, gave us four guardrails for bringing your suffering and heartache to God in Lament. Read through each guardrail together and share one next step you want to take to learn to bring your lament to God.

**Guardrail #1- Use your own words.** You must do the hard work of putting into words to God what you're experiencing in your soul when you suffer.

**Guardrail #2- Be patient.** You must sing your lament until you don't need to anymore. It's our work to wait for God. It's His work to shift our soul towards prayer and praise.

**Guardrail #3- Seek community.** You must invite the participation of your faith community into your experience of suffering. They are a part of how God works to shift our soul toward prayer and praise.

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# Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series

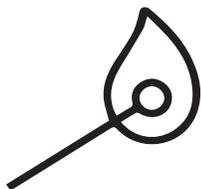
MC Discussion Continued...

## **Warning for Faith Communities:**

- Don't be quick to move people out of their struggle.
- Listen to them.
- Ask questions that draw out their heart.
- Speak to God on their behalf.
- Encourage them to endure.
- Don't forget them.

**Guardrail #4- Praise Him.** And after God shifts your soul, then you must sing his praises until they stop pouring out of you.

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## **INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE: PRAYING LAMENT**

Try praying the lament prayers of the Psalms yourself. Set aside 20-30 minutes to sit and learn how others pray their lament from the Psalms. If you're not sure what prayers of lament look like, these are where you should start.

It may help to try reading these in a different Bible translation or paraphrase. We recommend using Eugene Peterson's paraphrase, *The Message* (can be found online at [www.biblegateway.com/versions/Message-MSG-Bible](http://www.biblegateway.com/versions/Message-MSG-Bible)).

**Pick one Lament Psalm** below to start with. If you're not sure where to start, try one of the bold numbers.

3, 4, 5, 6, 7, **10**, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, **22**, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 38, 39, 41, **42, 43**, 44, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 74, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 86, **88**, 90, 94, **102**, 108, 109, 120, 121, 123, 126, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143

As you meditate on a Psalm of Lament, notice:

- What raw emotions are expressed?
- Which ones resonate with you? Maybe it's anger, fear, helplessness, anxiety, depression, or something else.

**Now, take time to make these your own.** Slow down and use these phrases and words to express your own pain and hurt to our Father.

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# Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series

*Individual Practice Continued...*

**It's okay if you're not feeling any of these.** Thank God if you're feeling happiness and rest in the current moment. While we should be careful not to equate happiness with holiness and sadness with sin; after all, Jesus was the "man of sorrows;" we should still be thankful when God gives us a season of happiness. If that's where you are, it is still helpful to learn the prayer of lament. This will prepare you for the future times when you'll need to know how to express lament to our Father. This will also help you know how to empathize with those who are hurting.

**Now, notice how the Psalm writer expresses hope in the steadfast love of God.** Notice where they, even in the midst of darkness, look to God's promises to them and His covenant love for them. This doesn't just make everything better, but it does show us that even while they are completely honest about the darkness they feel, they cling to the promises God has spoken to them...promises like, "His steadfast love endures forever." Even as we lament, we need to remember God's promises to us. This doesn't mean we gloss over the sorrow we feel, but that even in the midst of the darkness, we know the sun will eventually rise. "Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Ps 30:5)

**What promises from God do you need to hold to for the dark nights that may come?**

**Try writing your own Psalm of Lament.**

(Adapted from Doxa's Journey Groups curriculum, [www.doxa-church.com/journey](http://www.doxa-church.com/journey))  
Now that you've learned the laments of Psalm writers like David, try writing your own prayer of lament.

**Pray that God by his Spirit will lead you in this exercise.** Remember that He is your loving Father who wants to hear your hurt and sorrow. Remember also that you are secure in His love and can be honest with what you're feeling.

**The Psalms of Lament often include some of the following categories:**

- A Call to God for help
- A Complaint about the situation you find yourself in
- A Confession of Sin -or- Assertion of Innocence.
- A Call for God to bring a justice on his enemy
- A Recollection of how God brought redemption in your past

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# Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series

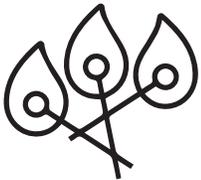
*Individual Practice Continued...*

- An Expression of your Confidence that God will respond in the future
- An Expression of praise & thanksgiving to God for hearing you.

Use the categories above as potential headings over each section you're writing so you stay on topic. But, **use only the categories that help express your lament.** Then, just begin to write and pour out your heart with honesty to your Father.

**Edit, edit, edit.** You can continue to come back to this Psalm and change it if you like. Don't worry about getting it "right" or "perfect," but instead continue to pour out your heart to God through this exercise.

Be prepared to **share your Psalm with others** (family, close friends, DNA group, etc). They will be helpful to you in your pain and you will help them learn how to bring their pain to our Father.

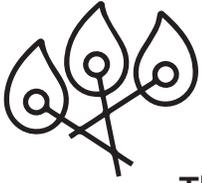


## **DNA GROUP OR PERSONAL REFLECTION**

After you have tried the individual practice, find time to meet with your DNA group. Reflect together on your experience of praying lament. Let the conversation go wherever God leads, but here are some questions that might be helpful.

1. Growing up, how did your father or mother respond when you cried for help or when you were hurt? Do you think that has shaped how you think our heavenly Father will respond?
2. How do you respond to others (friends, spouse, family, your children) when they are hurting? Do you expect that same kind of response for yourself? Why or why not?
3. Do you currently find yourself in a time of lament, pain, or sorrow? What are you lamenting? Take time to share your lament with each other. You may feel the temptation to quickly move each other towards hope or towards God's promises. While we need these, be careful not to rush each other through lament...it's okay to feel the hurt. (It's also okay if you're not in a time of lament, be honest about that too!)
4. If you are in a time of lament, how have you tried to bring that to our good Father? Was that hard? Did God speak to you in any way? (It's okay if He didn't.)
5. What are some of the Father's promises that you are clinging to in the midst of your lament?

# Prayer - discipline two in our spiritual formation series



## PRACTICE WITH KIDS

This section can be used by parents or missional communities to help kids be formed through the practice of prayer.

**The Main Idea:** God created us with emotions, He wants us to take them to Him. Kids can learn that prayer is being with God and being honest with God about how you are feeling. He can handle everything you are feeling.

### Something To Do

For younger Kids: Read first part of "A Dark Night In the Garden" in the *Jesus Storybook Bible* (pgs. 294-3296)

For older Kids: Read Mark 14:32-36 or Luke 22:29-46

### Questions for Kids

1. What emotions did Jesus express to God the Father? Was He honest about how He was feeling?
2. Do you talk to God the Father about what you are feeling?
3. Think about the last time you felt very sad. How can being with God help when you feel this way? Do you think He listens to you?
4. Next time you feel angry, sad, annoyed, etc. take some time to sit with God and express how you feel. When you begin to feel different, spend some time thanking God for being with you.