



New Life

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Sunday 22 March 2020
A TIME TO LAMENT

This resource on lament has been prepared for NewLife. You could use it in one time of prayer and reflection or spread it out over the day. There are parts you could share with others and adapt to include children.

Begin by watching the video: *Where Is God In COVID-19?*

Link: <https://vimeo.com/399045985>

Biblical lament is more than a complaint or an opportunity to vent: it is an expression of deep pain and sorrow. For the believer it is an expression of repentance (turning away from sin) and faith (turning to God in prayer). To lament is to cry out to God in our deepest of doubts and troubles, all the while fully trusting in His power and provision to deliver us from despair. We lament when we see brokenness in our own lives. We lament when we see brokenness in people around us. We lament when we see brokenness in the world.

In his book *A Praying Life*, Paul Miller says:

We think laments are disrespectful. God says the opposite. Lamenting shows you are engaged with God in a vibrant, living faith. We live in a deeply broken world. If the pieces of our world aren't breaking your heart and you aren't in God's face about them, then ...you've thrown in the towel.

There is no such thing as a lament-free life...To love is to lament, to let your heart be broken by something. If you don't lament over the broken things in your world, then your heart shuts down. Your living, vital relationship with God dies a slow death because you open the door to unseen doubt and become quietly cynical. Cynicism moves you away from God; laments push you into his presence. So, oddly enough, not lamenting leads to unbelief. Reality wins, and hope dies. Put another way, the reality of a broken world triumphs over the new reality of a redeemed world. You miss resurrection and get stuck in death.

Consider your need for lament. What's breaking your heart? What reality of your life or our world is just too much to bear on your own? What's causing you pain, disappointment or fear that you're trying to ignore instead of acknowledging it before God? Rest in the reminder that our God wants to hear those things. He wants to hear the deepest cries of your soul. Don't open your eyes one day and realise you've become quietly cynical. Talk to Him. Be honest with Him. Find your hope in Him.

[Read Psalm 91 aloud]

Psalm 91

Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High
will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,
my God, in whom I trust."
Surely he will save you
from the fowler's snare
and from the deadly pestilence.
He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.
You will not fear the terror of night,
nor the arrow that flies by day,
nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,
nor the plague that destroys at midday.
A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.

[While you reflect on this next question listen to *Psalm 91* sung by Sons of Korah:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLf3i9p3HpXZlpOEGMO02GM82I0IISeVWU>]

Bring to mind sin and hurts that God would have you be aware of in your life right now.

Bring to mind sadness and hurts you are feeling burdened by in the world.

[If you are doing this with others share what you are thinking about. Children can be helped by child-friendly news service and/or asking children what they have heard and are feeling about coronavirus. Allow them to bring up other concerns. Now might be an appropriate time to talk about tensions, disappointments and conflicts in your home/family relationships.]

[Read this prayer aloud; take turns to read a paragraph each if you are with others]

A prayer of lament

based on resource by 9Marks

Father, we come to you deeply distressed and troubled. Our souls are overwhelmed with sorrow by the difficult circumstances that have come upon us and our world. Circumstances that seem to have no end in sight. Lord, we are sad that so many people are dealing with sickness, death, an uncertain future and fear. Oh God, we grieve. We confess that we don't understand. Questions fill our minds: Why is this happening? How could you allow it? Where are you in the midst of it?

We're also filled with sorrow over the relational difficulties in our lives. We think of the challenges of marriage, friendship and family. Oh God, these daily difficulties wear on us until we feel too exhausted to go on.

God, we're also exhausted by the physical, mental and emotional trials in a broken world. We think of those who are battling physical and mental illness, disease, and disability. We grieve the anxiety that ravages our lives, the darkness of depression that bleeds into every part of our soul, the highs and lows that destroy our relationships, all of it, makes us feel less than human. We HATE it. We hate it God. And we confess that we often struggle to see you in the midst of these trials.

But, of course, Lord, when it's all said and done, we acknowledge that many of our trials have been brought on us through our own sin. We've gone after the false gods of comfort and convenience. Oh God, our sin makes us miserable. We hate it and yet often we keep going back to it. We feel trapped.

All of these things fill our hearts with sorrow and grief. And yet we do not grieve as those who have no hope. On this side of the cross, we know that all of our grief, sorrow, and sin has been borne by another for us. For there, on the cross, Jesus the ultimate grief-bearer, took our sins and sufferings upon himself so that we might not be consumed by your wrath or by the suffering that comes in this broken world. Because of his atoning work on our behalf, we not only experience salvation amidst sorrow, but we also have great confidence that one day all of our sorrow will be wiped away when Jesus returns to right all wrongs and cause us to walk with you in unbroken fellowship on a renewed earth.

Oh Lord, we have great hope because of Jesus. And so we continue to submit ourselves to you just like Jesus did, trusting in your goodness and relying on the Holy Spirit to help us when we feel too exhausted to go on.

Strengthen us now in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

[Read Matthew 6:19-34 aloud]

Matthew 6:9-34

"Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.'

For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

"And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Bring to mind areas of your life that God would have you be aware of in your life right now.

Listen to *He Will Hold Me Fast* sung by Keith and Kristyn Getty: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLf3i9p3HpXZlpOEGMO02GM82l0lISeVWU>

Conclude by reading Philippians 4:4-9

Philippians 4:4-9

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.