

Practices & Study Guide

Lent 2019

Week 6

The Way of

patient
kind
not jealous
not boastful
not proud
not rude
does not demand its own way
not irritable
not resentful
does not keep record of wrongs
does not rejoice in injustice
rejoices in truth
never gives up
never loses faith
hopeful
endures

LOVE

Week 6: Lament

Introduction: Lament

This week we are engaging God through the practice of lament. Lament helps us keep our relationship with God honest. It's about naming and embracing our deepest emotions and bringing them to God instead of ignoring or not dealing with our disappointments. Or dealing with them in unhealthy ways.

Life isn't always butterflies and rainbows. In fact, life is often very painful. Doubt, fear, anger, disappointment and grief are all emotions that play a significant role in our humanity. Sometimes it's tempting to withhold those feelings from God. But the Bible is filled with stories, poems and songs written by and about people who were sometimes very disappointed, and who brought those disappointments to God.

In lament we pour out our emotions to God—pain, doubt, disappointment, grief—and then remind ourselves of God's continued presence. Lament doesn't always finish with a happy ending. Sometimes heartache comes and stays for a long time, but lament always ends with a reassurance of God's presence.

Practice: Reflect on Scripture

1. Each day this week, find a place where you can be free from distractions for a little while. Perhaps light a candle to remind you that God is with you.
2. Read one of the lament Psalms (Psalm 77, 6, 13, 42, 74).
3. Read the Psalm a second time. What words or phrases stick out to you?
4. Give yourself space to consider what God is calling your attention to in your own life.

Reflection Questions:

Use these prompts to reflect on the scripture passage.

1. How would you summarize what this passage says?
2. What does this passage tell us about God?
3. What does this passage tell us about humans?
4. How does this passage challenge respond?
5. How does this passage challenge me to change the way I related to people?
6. How does this passage prompt me to pray?

Practice: Lament

This week, we are invited to write our own psalm of lament. A lament is a prayerful response to the full range of problems in the human condition. The psalms name specifically isolation, shame, despair, danger, physical impairment, and death as cause for lament. Laments are one of the ways that we can bring into God's presence the parts of our lives that are troubling, traumatic, or painful.

Follow the steps on the next page as you draft a psalm of lament.

1. Sit quietly and reflect on a time when you were experiencing some kind of deep pain or protest. Let yourself recall the feelings associated with that time. What were the cries of your heart? What were your questions about where God was at that time?
2. Read Psalm 22 as a guide.
3. Write your own lament about that time. You might include these elements which are part of traditional lament structure:
 - **Opening:** Address God. *“My God, My God,” (Ps 22:1a)*
 - **Complaint:** Tell God your complaints and hurt.
“Why have you forsaken me? What are you so far from helping me?” (Ps 22:1b)
 - **Confession of Trust:** Remember God's character and faithfulness.
“Yet, you are holy... in you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.” (Ps 22:3-4)
 - **Request:** Ask God to meet a need.
“Do not be far from me.” (Ps 22:11)
 - **Praise:** Commit to praising God in the midst of difficulty.
“I will tell of your name... in the midst of the congregation I will praise you” (Ps 22:22)

Noticing God in Your Whole Family

This week our focus is lament. Lament isn't a topic we often spend a lot of time talking about, so below are some ideas to help start conversations within your family about lament.

- Music often helps us articulate our emotions. Take some time to share songs (Christian or secular) that have been significant to you – either songs that have expressed your emotions in a difficult time or songs that have reminded you of the goodness of God. Why were those songs significant to you? Be sure to invite others to share their songs. Be prepared to listen without judgment even if people share songs that you think hold little value (musical or otherwise); this is a time to listen and affirm!
- More than a few biblical characters have experienced disappointment or grief and expressed their lament to God. Read through one of these stories. Talk about how the main character dealt with his emotions. What part of this lament is the easiest for you? Which is most difficult?
 - Job (the whole book, but particularly Job 23:1-12)
 - Abraham (Genesis 15:1-6)
 - Can your family think of other Biblical characters who went through struggles and cried out to God?
- Lament begins and ends with understanding that God is present in the midst of our suffering, but sometimes the middle of suffering is the hardest time to remember God's presence. In 1 Samuel 7, Samuel sets up a stone monument, which he calls an Ebenezer (literally, "stone of help"), to remember the place that God led the Israelites in victory over the Philistines. Talk about any physical reminders of God's presence and faithfulness that you might have. What might it look like to begin a practice of collecting physical reminders of God's faithfulness to your family?

Small Group Questions

1. Share a time in your life where you were distressed, hurt, or discouraged and God seemed far away or absent.
2. **Read Romans 8:38-39.** In what way do these words help us when we are in difficult circumstances and/or when we are angry with God?
3. **Read Psalm 13.** What emotions do you notice?
4. Did anything surprise you in this reading of the Psalm? Do you feel comfortable talking to God in this way?
5. Read the last 2 verses of this Psalm again. Considering that circumstances have not changed, what has changed?

6. **Read Psalm 77.** Create two lists from the Psalmist's in the chart:

Disappointments/Grievances	God's actions/character

7. Write another set of lists. List your doubts, hurts, fears and disappointments. Take courage from the psalmist and don't hold back. Then write a list of what is true about God (his character & attributes and examples of his faithfulness in your personal life.)

Disappointments/Grievances	God's actions/character