

HOPE IN LAMENT/LAMENT IN HOPE

Handout for adult Group Discussion (Based on the recorded Bible Study)

Scripture: Lamentations 5:20-21

Time: 50 minutes

“Why have you forgotten us completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old.”

Opening Prayer:

God of hope and of the helpless, enter our midst and fill us with your wisdom. Open our minds, our hearts and our voices to know, understand, and proclaim your Word. Bless our gathering, and grant that your Spirit works through each one of us to transform your church. In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

Introduction

This is a season of lives lost, rites missed, rights denied, including the right to live. Sitting in front of the zoom today, we lament the missed opportunity to meet in person and look into each other’s eyes. We lament the lives lost due to racial bigotry and Corona virus. In times of crisis, our faith ancestors developed hope-giving spiritual practices. Lament is one of them, a practice whose potential we rarely tap into. In this class, we will closely examine a lament from our Jewish faith ancestors, create our own laments, and seek to find our God of hope in this valley of loss, pain, and anger.

Learning Objectives:

- To help participants appreciate the value of lament, an ancient spiritual practice (group discussion);
- To assist them in creating hope-giving resources from the faith tradition (communal/group lament).
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Summary of the recorded Bible Study:

We as a faith community approach Scripture for guidance and direction in seasons of joy and sorrow. Our location, our needs, and our dreams provide a lens and raise questions in our reading of the scriptures. We gather today to study the Word as a faith community confronted with fatal viruses, COVID-19 and Racism-1619. We eagerly, gratefully, and respectfully study a lament composed by the grieving Jewish community after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and recited even today. The Book of Lamentations offers us opportunities to name our losses, memorialize our traumas, and glean for glimpses of hope. The myriad of emotions in Lamentations 5:19-22 —praise, anguish, complaint, hope, appeal, and beyond/backward— describes the anatomy of lament. It also offers us resources in our own lamenting and hoping.

Instruction for Leaders:

- I. Prepare ahead of time. Watch the Bible Study video. Read the introduction and summary in this handout.
- II. Read all the five chapters in the Book of Lamentations and pay special attention to the concluding paragraph, 5:19-22.
- III. Pray. The issues we are dealing with and are invited to name are emotionally excruciating. Please prepare with prayers to lead the group.
- IV. Set aside 40 minutes for group conversation and 10 minutes to draft a communal/group lament.
- V. In the first 40 minutes, you are encouraged to use the suggested questions below to guide the conversation. You are welcome to bring your own. Encourage members to contribute theirs. Every question is valid, but time is limited. You do not have to discuss all questions. Gratefully receive every question and humbly accept the time limitation.
- VI. During the conversation, please make sure everybody is heard and equally so. Create a safe environment, and encourage participants to share their stories and name their feelings. Anticipate and be at ease with long pauses and silences. They open space for the Holy Spirit to heal our wounds, bind us as a group, and guide our conversation.
- VII. Draft a communal lament in the last 10 minutes. Invite the participants to share their lament/s via zoom group chat, not more than 3-4 sentences. The template for the same can be found in Lamentations 5:19-22. Members can improvise. Make sure that members name those issues/feelings that concern them as individuals, congregation members, and citizens. We are aware of the challenges involved, but it would be helpful if the group leader gathers and sums up the laments in a prayer and screen share. The group then reads aloud this communal lament as a closing prayer.

Questions to guide group discussion:

1. In the video we watched, Mary and James identified two viruses they lament about: COVID-19 and Racism-1619. What other viruses do you think they should have addressed to set the context for study? How would they help us see the text differently?
2. Scan through 5:19-22 and share with the group words and verses that caught your attention. If we were to lament today, how different would our lament be?
3. James referred to the sacrament of Lord's Supper and to weekly confessions and absolutions. Scroll your memory and experiences of your worship and prayers—communal and personal—and identify the elements of lament in our liturgies.
4. What does the text tell us about God? What do our Confessions teach us about God? Identify the resonances and dissonances. Where do you see traces of grace and glimpses of hope in our faith tradition?
5. If we were to lament today as our faith ancestors did, what would that be in three verses?

Closing:

Recite the group lament as your closing prayer.