

## HOPE IN LAMENT/LAMENT IN HOPE

**Handout for young adults (17-23) 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.”

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### **Opening Prayer:**

Eternal God, 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 and your world. Receive our laments and enable us to be agents of your peace and hope in this season of grief and despair. 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 crises, 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 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 delegates appreciate the value of lament, an ancient spiritual practice (group discussion);
- To assist them to recover and glean hope-giving resources from the faith tradition (communal/group lament).

### **Summary of the recorded Bible Study:**

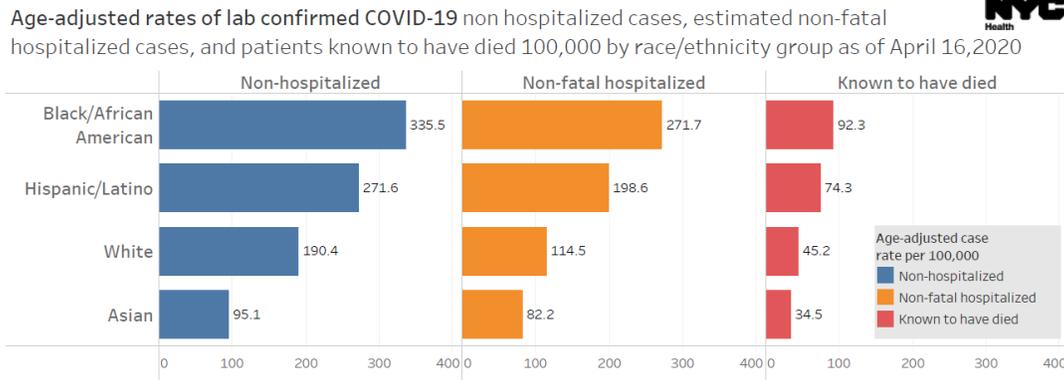
We as a faith community approach Scripture for guidance and direction in the seasons of joy and sorrow. Our location in the journey of faith, our needs, and our dreams provide a lens and raise questions in our reading of the scriptures. We gather today for Bible Study at the General Assembly as a faith community confronted with two fatal viruses, COVID-19 and Racism-1619. We eagerly, gratefully, and respectfully study a lament composed by a 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 video, and read the introduction and summary in this handout.
- II. Read at least the fifth chapter in the Book of Lamentations. Reading the entire book is even better. Pay special attention to the concluding paragraph in 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 case studies to start the conversations. After reading or watching each case, discuss the suggested questions. Please use the same set of questions for all cases. You are welcome to bring your own questions to the table. Welcome group members to bring their own. Every question is valid, but you do not have to discuss all questions. Gratefully receive every question and humbly accept that our time is limited.
- VI. The case studies provide us the context to understand the scripture passage. During the conversation, please make sure that everybody is heard and equally so. Create a safe environment and encourage all 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. Pause when needed and offer to pray.
- 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 and as members of the church. 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.

## Case Study 1



Accessed at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/covid-19-deaths-race-ethnicity-04162020-1.pdf> (date 6/2/2020).

## Case Study 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OLYtwkaK0XA>

“Sikhs in New York prepared and packaged over 30,000 home-cooked meals for Americans in self-isolation. The initiative was taken by The Sikh Center of New York, Inc. The Sikh community was approached by New York's Mayor office for food packages. The packages were handed out to several distributing federal agencies in the area. The home-cooked meal comprised dry fruits, rice and lentils. Sikh Center is distributing and delivering the food to coronavirus affected people in New York. Strict food hygiene practices were observed while the food was prepared. Coronavirus has killed over 16,000 and infected more than 375,000 people worldwide.” Hindustan Times

## Case Study 3

An excerpt from the Brief Statement of Faith

- 27 We trust in God,
- 28 whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
- 29 In sovereign love God created the world good
- 30 and makes everyone equally in God's image,
- 31 male and female, of every race and people,
- 32 to live as one community.
- 33 But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
- 34 Ignoring God's commandments.
- 35 we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
- 36 accept lies as truth,
- 37 exploit neighbor and nature,

*38 and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.  
39 We deserve God's condemnation.  
40 Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.  
41 In everlasting love,  
42 the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people  
43 to bless all families of the earth.  
44 Hearing their cry,  
45 God delivered the children of Israel  
46 from the house of bondage.  
47 Loving us still,  
48 God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.  
49 Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,  
50 like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,  
51 God is faithful still.*

**Questions to guide group discussion:**

1. What does this case tell us about God and humanity?
2. What is disheartening and what is hope-giving in each case?
3. What do you lament about, and where do you find hope?

**Closing:**

Recite the group lament as your closing prayer.