



LEARNING TO LAMENT

A SIX-WEEK PROGRAM
FOR GROUPS

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WHO ARE WE?

Elizabeth Lewis Hall (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology) is Professor at Rosemead School of Psychology, Biola University. Liz has been writing on suffering using psychology and Christian theology for 20 years. She has published over 100 academic articles and book chapters. With her husband, Todd Hall, she is the co-author of *Relational Spirituality: A Psychological-Theological Paradigm for Transformation*. Her contributions to the integration of psychology and theology have been recognized in various ways, including the Christian Association for Psychological Studies 2016 Narramore Award for Excellence in the Integration of Theology and Psychology. She teaches regularly for her adult Sunday School class.



Kelly M. Kopic (Ph.D., Systematic and Historical Theology) is Professor of Theological Studies at Covenant College where he has taught since 2001. Kelly has written or edited over fifteen books, including *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering*, which won the Christianity Today book of the year award in the area of Theology and Ethics and World Magazine's Short List award for Accessible Theology Book of the year. In 2014 Kopic received a Templeton Grant to be part of The Center for Christian Thought studying the topic of Psychology and Spiritual Formation. He also served as part of the Core Research Team for the Templeton funded Project Amazing Grace.



Jason McMartin (Ph.D., Religion) is Professor of Theology at Biola University, where he holds a joint appointment at Rosemead School of Psychology and Talbot School of Theology. Jason has co-authored several articles and a book chapter on the role of suffering within the flourishing life. He also writes on virtue, spiritual formation, and theological anthropology, and teaches courses on integrating psychology and theology. He has served as a pastor and urban missionary.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LEARNING TO
LAMENT

WELCOME

We are glad you have chosen to join us in Learning to Lament!

Our purpose in the Learning to Lament program is to discover what biblical lament is and learn how to do it. These sessions will include both knowledge and practice. You can expect to learn or review something about lament each session, but you will also be given the opportunity to practice what you learn. The goal is to connect our heads and our hearts, our faith and our bodies, our fears and our hopes. Some of the material may be challenging or different from what you have done in the past. We encourage you to stick with it to see what God may have in store for you!

So what is biblical lament? Approximately 35-40% of the psalms are psalms of lament, characterized by expressions of complaint, confusion and grief, questioning of God, as well as expressions of the desire to be rescued by God and the expectation that God will be faithful. Most of them also end in praise or worship. They are basically expressions of honest crying out to God during tough times. The psalms of lament provide a pattern for us to follow in order to bring our suffering before God. They help us to express our distress to God, but perhaps more importantly, they help shape us in a way that can bring relief and hope. Theologian Todd Billings said of the psalms that God uses them to teach us, that they are “God’s way of reshaping our desires and perceptions so that they learn to lament in the right things and take joy in the right things” (“Rejoicing in Lament”). Our prayer is that you will find lament to be a valuable companion in your journey through suffering.

GROUP AGREEMENT

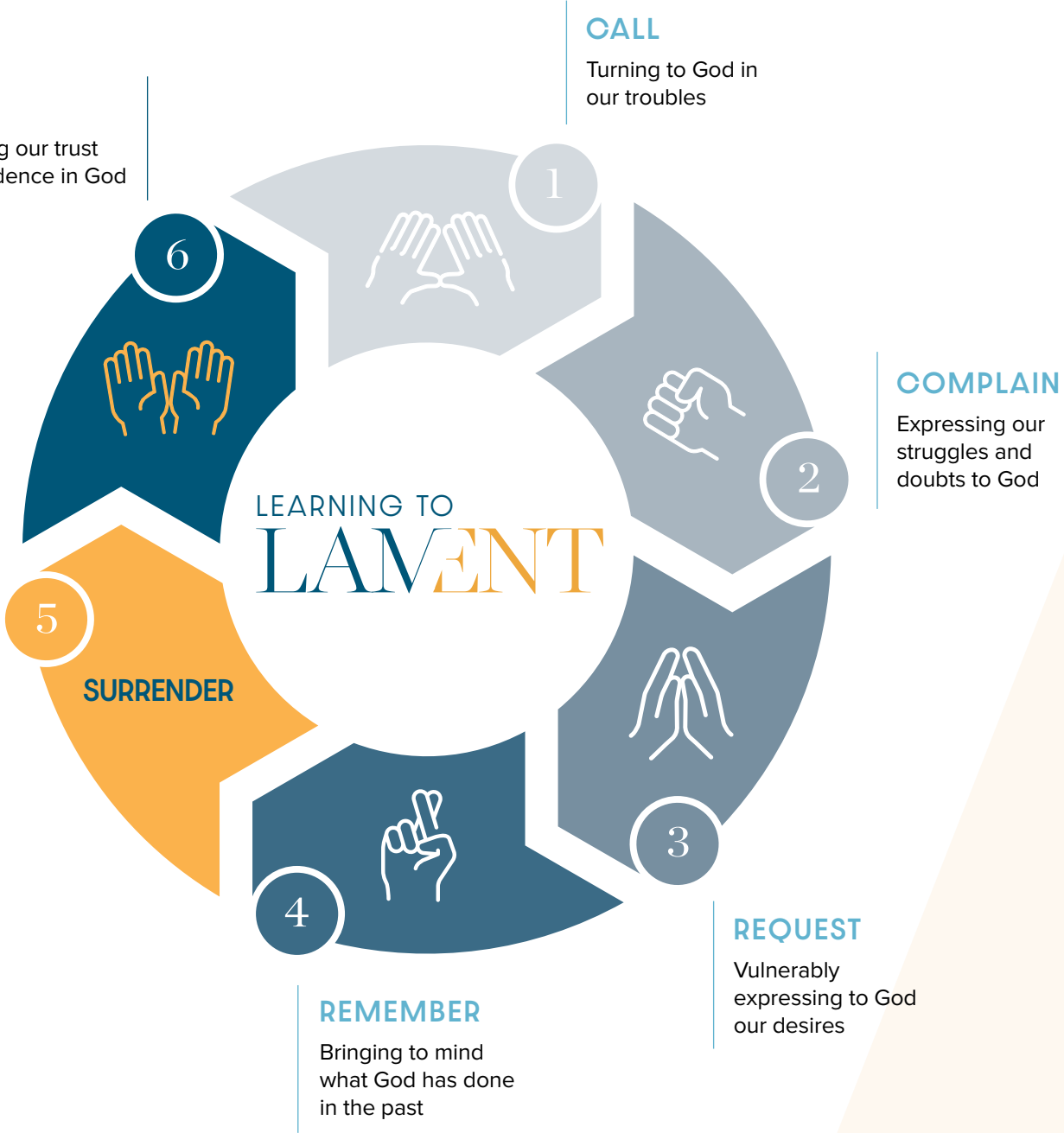
Thank you for taking this time to be a part of this group. In order for the lament group to be helpful to you, a safe environment must be in place. For this reason there are some basic expectations of each of us that will help to make this group successful.

1. **Confidentiality:** Being in an environment where sharing takes place can be challenging. In order for all members to feel safe in sharing their experiences, you are making a commitment to not discuss anything, including others' reactions, with anyone outside of the group. It can be helpful for you to discuss your own emotions and reactions inside and outside of the group, but not those of others. What others say in group needs to stay in group. Let's do unto others as we would have them do unto us!
2. **Attendance:** Although it may be hard to relate to right now, the other participants in the group will come to depend upon you being there. It is very common for another member to identify with your experience and find your insights helpful. In addition, each week's content builds on the content that comes before. Being a part of a group is a serious responsibility that needs to not be taken lightly. Therefore, being a part of this group will require your commitment. Life happens and there may be things that will hinder you from coming to a particular session. In that event, please contact your group leader to let them know you won't be there.
3. **Practice:** Each week you will be encouraged to pray through a psalm of lament throughout the week. Research shows that your learning will be much deeper if you engage in this short daily practice.

By signing this agreement, I agree to maintain confidentiality of all members of the group. In addition, I have read the group expectations and have asked questions for clarity about the items that I do not understand. I understand and agree to them, as evidenced by my signature below.

Group member's signature

Date



1 CALLING OUT TO GOD



KEY CONCEPTS

Lament begins by *calling out to God*. God invites us to come to him with all our troubles, confident that he will welcome us.

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today's session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group.

- ▶ Take a moment now to go around the room and briefly introduce yourself and what brought you to the lament program. What are your hopes for your time in this group?
- ▶ When you are hurting, what do you tend to do? Do you turn to a trusted friend or loved one? Do you try to distract yourself from your hurt? Do you try to take care of it alone? Or something else? Knowing your “automatic” response can be helpful as you learn to intentionally bring your hurt to God in lament.

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here](#).) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session's video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.

Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.



Use the following questions in group discussion:

- ▶ If you are comfortable doing so, close your eyes and imagine God thinking about you. Pause here to bring this image to mind. What do you assume God feels when you come to mind? Do you feel welcomed? Why or why not? Sit with this image for a couple of minutes before sharing your experience with your group.
- ▶ Why is it better to talk to God about what is currently going on in your life and heart than to not do so?
- ▶ Do you find it hard or easy to talk to God about your particular suffering, struggles, doubts, fears, and frustrations? Why? Do any of the reasons brought up in the video resonate with your experiences?
- ▶ How does thinking about Jesus' interactions with people who were hurting encourage you to tell God about your struggles?

Notice the courage and even confidence found in the start of Psalm 5, where the Psalmist feels welcomed enough to ask God to listen, to know his cry for help will be heard, and even that God will respond, so that with his prayers he can then wait “expectantly.”

In light of this kind of invitation, let's now read/pray through a full lament together.

Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 5. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.

Psalm 5

- ¹ *Listen to my words, LORD, consider my lament.*
- ² *Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray.*
- ³ *In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice;
in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly.*
- ⁴ *For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;
with you, evil people are not welcome.*
- ⁵ *The arrogant cannot stand in your presence.
You hate all who do wrong;*
- ⁶ *you destroy those who tell lies.
The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, Lord, detest.*

- ⁷ *But I, by your great love, can come into your house;
in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple.*
- ⁸ *Lead me, Lord, in your righteousness
because of my enemies—make your way straight before me.*
- ⁹ *Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice.
Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies.*
- ¹⁰ *Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall.
Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.*
- ¹¹ *But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy.
Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.*
- ¹² *Surely, Lord, you bless the righteous;
you surround them with your favor as with a shield.*



Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on divine hospitality, in which we are encouraged to call out to God in lament.

1

GO DEEPER

Take time each day to pray through Psalm 5 in light of your current difficult situation. Practice calling out to God. You may want to set a reminder on your phone each day to remind yourself to do this! Consider taking a picture of the psalm so you'll always have it available.



2

COMPLAINING TO GOD



KEY CONCEPTS

After calling out to God, lament continues with *bringing our complaints to God*. This may include what we are feeling, our doubts, our struggles, our guilt, etc. God wants us to be honest about what is in hearts.

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today's session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group.

- ▶ As you prayed through Psalm 5 this week, did you feel welcomed to call out to God? Why or why not?
- ▶ When you pray about your current difficult situation, what do you pray about?
- ▶ Does this list include telling God about the ways you feel frustrated, angry, disappointed, sad, or fearful? When you pray, do you ever express anger or frustration at God or disappointment with God? If not, why not?

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here.](#)) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session's video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.

Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.

- ▶ Take turns praying these examples of complaint from biblical laments out loud. Read them slowly.

Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Psalm 10:1)

O God, why have you rejected us forever? Why does your anger smolder against the sheep of your pasture? (Psalm 74:1)

How long, LORD, must I call for help, but you do not listen? (Hab. 1:2)

Why do you always forget us? Why do you forsake us so long? (Lam. 5:20)

My soul is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long? (Psalm 6:3)

For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from common human burdens; they are not plagued by human ills. (Psalm 73:3-5)

- ▶ Take a few minutes to write out your complaint regarding what is troubling you in the form of a prayer. Sometimes using imagery to explain to God how we are feeling can be helpful; images help us express what we are feeling in much more powerful ways than just simple words. For example, in Psalm 22, instead of saying that he is afraid and distressed, he says, “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.”
- ▶ If you are comfortable doing so, share what you have written with your group. What was it like to put your feelings into words?
- ▶ Have you found yourself doubting or questioning God because of your suffering? If so, have you felt comfortable bringing these complaints before God? Why or why not?
- ▶ What are the benefits of being honest with God about our struggles?
- ▶ Jesus knew what it felt like to be “overwhelmed with sorrow” (Matt. 26:38), having experienced the pain of difficult circumstances, being abandoned by others, mistreated, misunderstood, and betrayed. He also knew the depth of physical pain, even unto death. Because of these experiences, the author of Hebrews called the risen Christ our “sympathetic high priest” (Heb 4:14-16). Jesus told God about his sorrow in the garden and from the cross. How does Jesus’ example encourage you to honestly talk to God about what you are thinking and feeling?
- ▶ Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 13. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.



Psalm 13

- ¹ *How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?*
- ² *How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
How long will my enemy triumph over me?*
- ³ *Look on me and answer, LORD my God.
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,*
- ⁴ *and my enemy will say, "I have overcome
him," and my foes will rejoice when I fall.*
- ⁵ *But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.*
- ⁶ *I will sing the LORD's praise,
for he has been good to me.*



Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on being honest with God as we bring our complaints in prayer.

GO DEEPER

Take time each day to pray through Psalm 13 in light of your current difficulty. Practice complaining to God. You may want to set a reminder on your phone each day to remind yourself to do this! Consider taking a picture of the psalm so you'll always have it available.

BRINGING OUR REQUESTS TO GOD



KEY CONCEPTS

After calling out to God and complaining to God, lament continues with *bringing our requests to God*. God wants us to be vulnerable with our deepest desires, because our desires reflect a longing for the world God created us to live in—a world characterized by the peace and fulfillment of “shalom.”

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today’s session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group.

- ▶ Last week we talked about how we are invited to engage with God, to be honest about our struggles, frustrations, and feelings with respect to our suffering. As you prayed through Psalm 13 during this past week and in your own prayers, have you brought your complaints to God? If so, how was that experience? If not, what made you hesitant to do so?
- ▶ Being honest with God also involves being vulnerable about our needs and desires. While last week we focused on complaining to God, today the focus is on being vulnerable and specific with God about what we need and desire in the midst of our current difficult life situation. Are there some needs or desires that you feel more comfortable talking to God about than other ones? If so, what areas feel more comfortable to express, and what areas do you find yourself more hesitant to express to God?

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here](#).) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session’s video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.



Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.

Use the following questions in group discussion:

- ▶ In what ways has your suffering reminded you of your vulnerability?
- ▶ What needs and desires with respect to your suffering are weighing on your heart?
- ▶ Do you feel like you can bring these to God in prayer?
- ▶ Consider the following list of requests found in the lament psalms. Take turns reading these slowly and prayerfully out loud. Do any of these reflect your need or desire today? Are there any requests on this list that surprise you? Why?

Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. (Psalm 10:12)

Lead me, LORD, in your righteousness (Psalm 5:8)

But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. (Psalm 22:19)

Help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love. (Psalm 109:26)

Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure. (Psalm 7:9)

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. (Psalm 51:1-2)

Do not hold against us the sins of past generations; may your mercy come quickly to meet us, for we are in desperate need. Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. (Psalm 79:8-9)

Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. (Psalm 69:15)

Restore us, O God; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved. (Psalm 80:3)

Hear my prayer, LORD, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. (Psalm 39:12a)

LORD, you have seen this; do not be silent. Do not be far from me, Lord. (Psalm 35:22)

Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. (Psalm 69:17)

Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. (Psalm 86:11)

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:12)

Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life. (Psalm 143:8b)

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.

(Psalm 143:10)

Let me not be put to shame, LORD, for I have cried out to you; (Psalm 31:17a)

Deliver me from my enemies, O God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me. (Psalm 59:1)

Arise, LORD! Deliver me, my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.

(Psalm 3:7)

Heal me, LORD, for my bones are in agony. (Psalm 6:2b)



Take a few moments to be vulnerable with God, silently writing out your requests to God regarding your present suffering.

If you are comfortable doing so, share your requests to God with the group.

Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 25 that contains many requests to God. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.

Psalm 25

¹ *In you, LORD my God, I put my trust.*

² *I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.*

³ *No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.*

⁴ *Show me your ways, LORD, teach me your paths.*

⁵ *Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.*

⁶ *Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.*

⁷ *Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.*

⁸ *Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.*

⁹ *He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.*

¹⁰ *All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.*

¹¹ *For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.*

¹² *Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.*

¹³ *They will spend their days in prosperity, and their descendants will inherit the land.*

¹⁴ *The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.*

¹⁵ *My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.*

¹⁶ *Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*

¹⁷ *Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.*

¹⁸ *Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.*

¹⁹ *See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!*

²⁰ *Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.*

²¹ *May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you.*

²² *Deliver Israel, O God, from all their troubles!*

Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on bringing your requests to God.

GO DEEPER

Take time each day to pray through Psalm 25 in light of your current difficult situation. Practice bringing your requests to God. You may want to set a reminder on your phone each day to remind yourself to do this! Consider taking a picture of the psalm so you'll always have it available.



4 REMEMBERING WHO GOD IS



KEY CONCEPTS

To this point, we have seen that lament involves calling out to God, complaining to God, and requesting what we want from God. This week's focus is on **remembering**. We remind ourselves of who God is and what God has done.

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today's session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group.

- ▶ Last week we talked about being vulnerable with God about our deepest desires and requests for shalom with respect to our suffering. As you prayed Psalm 25 and in your own prayers this week, have you tried to do that? If so, how was that experience? If not, what made you hesitant to do so?
- ▶ What does it mean to have hope? Define it in your own words. Do you have hope in your current circumstances? Why or why not?

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here](#).) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session's video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.

Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.



The psalms of lament include many different reminders of who God is and what God has done. Take turns prayerfully reading through the following examples together out loud:

In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame. (Psalm 22:4-5)

I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done. (Psalm 143:5)

You are God my stronghold. (Psalm 43:2a)

Save me because of your unfailing love. (Psalm 6:4b)

Use the following questions in group discussion:

- ▶ Thinking back across your life, can you identify times when God showed up? What are some examples of things that God has done for you in the past? What are some things that God has done for other people that you know and love?
- ▶ What examples of God's saving activity or gracious character from Scripture are especially powerful to you? Why?

Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 42 that contains several moments of remembering. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.

Psalm 42

- | | |
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| <p>¹ <i>As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God.</i></p> <p>² <i>My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?</i></p> <p>³ <i>My tears have been my food day and night, while people say to me all day long, "Where is your God?"</i></p> <p>⁴ <i>These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and praise among the festive throng.</i></p> | <p>⁵ <i>Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.</i></p> <p>⁶ <i>My soul is downcast within me; therefore I will remember you from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar.</i></p> <p>⁷ <i>Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.</i></p> |
|--|--|

⁸ *By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me—a prayer to the God of my life.*

⁹ *I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?”*

¹⁰ *My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?”*

¹¹ *Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.*



Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

The last verses of this psalm play out an internal dialogue, in which the psalmist asks himself, “Why, my soul, are you downcast? Why so disturbed within me?” (5, 11). He then engages in a kind of self-talk, saying: “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.” Using your answers to the questions above, write out a self-dialogue:

“Why, my soul, are you downcast?” List the reasons you are cast down today:

“Put your hope in God.” Now encourage yourself by remembering what God has done, which is the basis for your hope. Remember God’s role in creation, the birth, crucifixion and resurrection of Christ, and how God has worked in your own life.

Take some time as a group to share some of the reasons you found to put your hope in God.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on remembering what God has done.

4

GO DEEPER

Take time each day to pray through Psalm 42 in light of your current difficult situation. Practice remembering who God is. You may want to set a reminder on your phone each day to remind yourself to do this! Consider taking a picture of the psalm so you'll always have it available.



5 SURRENDERING TO GOD

KEY CONCEPTS

To this point, in lament we have called out to God, complained to God, requested from God, and reminded ourselves of who God is. Next week we will move into praise and worship. But this requires that we **surrender** to God's sovereignty and put our troubles into his hands.

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today's session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group.

- ▶ Last week we learned about the importance of remembering who God is and what God has done. As you prayed through Psalm 42 and in your own prayers, have you practiced remembering? If so, how was that experience? If not, what made you hesitant to do so?
- ▶ Over the past few weeks, we have been learning about lament. We learned that we can call out to God because God welcomes us with open arms. We learned that we can bring our honest complaints to God, and that we can also vulnerably bring our requests. We learned that we can gain hope by reminding ourselves of what God has done in the past. Each week we have practiced doing these things—calling, complaining, requesting, and reminding. We only have one more aspect of lament to cover, praise, which we will do next week. To prepare for today's session, silently write out your own psalm of lament about your current suffering, including the first four elements of lament: calling, complaining, requesting, and reminding. Feel free to use what you have written in previous weeks, or change it to fit how you are feeling today. Also feel free to use phrases or images from the psalms you have prayed together as a group over the previous weeks. This may take some time!

Discuss with your group what your experience of writing your lament was like. Did anything surprise you?

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here.](#)) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session's video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.

Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.

Use the following questions in group discussion:

As noted in the video, most psalms of lament turn to trust and praise by the end of the psalm. They do that by drawing a contrast. As a group, take turns reading prayerfully through some of these phrases from the psalms out loud.

But I trust in your unfailing love; (Psalm 13:5a)

But I trust in you, LORD; I say, "You are my God." (Psalm 31:14)

But you, LORD, sit enthroned forever; (Psalm 102:12)

They will perish, but you remain; (Psalm 102:26a)

But you, LORD, are a shield around me, (Psalm 3:3a)

Yet I am always with you; (Psalm 73:23a)

Now spend some time on your own, using these instructions:

- ▶ Return to the lament that you wrote earlier. Now consider surrendering your difficult life circumstances to God. Are you able to move forward with surrender? If not, what is holding you back? What might you do to surrender fully to God? Remember that surrendering to God is not usually a one-time event, but is an ongoing process.
- ▶ Now add the word "but" to your lament, representing your intent to surrender your suffering to God. This word signals that your sufferings are not the end of the story. It's like placing a comma after everything you've said so far, rather than a period. If you are struggling to surrender your suffering to God, you can stop here. Surrender is a process, and may take some time. However, if you're able, following the "but" express your surrender to God in your own words.

Share with your group what your experience was like attempting to surrender your difficult life event to God. What was easy? What was hard? What are the barriers you encounter to surrender?

If you are willing, share your lament with your group. Of course, if you would rather not do so, this is fine! Take time as a group to respond to the person in gratitude for sharing.

Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 31 that contains expressions of surrender to God. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.

Psalm 31

¹ *In you, LORD, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness.*

² *Turn your ear to me, come quickly to my rescue; be my rock of refuge, a strong fortress to save me.*

³ *Since you are my rock and my fortress, for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*

⁴ *Keep me free from the trap that is set for me, for you are my refuge.*

⁵ *Into your hands I commit my spirit; deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.*

⁹ *Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and body with grief.*

¹⁰ *My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.*

¹¹ *Because of all my enemies, I am the utter contempt of my neighbors and an object of dread to my closest friends—those who see me on the street flee from me.*

¹⁴ *But I trust in you, LORD; I say, “You are my God.”*

¹⁵ *My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me.*

¹⁶ *Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love.*

¹⁹ *How abundant are the good things that you have stored up for those who fear you, that you bestow in the sight of all, on those who take refuge in you.*

²⁰ *In the shelter of your presence you hide them from all human intrigues; you keep them safe in your dwelling from accusing tongues.*

²¹ *Praise be to the LORD, for he showed me the wonders of his love when I was in a city under siege.*

²² *In my alarm I said, “I am cut off from your sight!” Yet you heard my cry for mercy when I called to you for help.*

²³ *Love the LORD, all his faithful people! The LORD preserves those who are true to him, but the proud he pays back in full.*

²⁴ *Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.*

5

Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on surrendering our suffering to God.

GO DEEPER

Take time each day to pray through your psalm of lament. Practice surrendering to God. You may want to set a reminder on your phone each day to remind yourself to do this! Consider taking a picture of the psalm so you'll always have it available.

6

PRAISING GOD



KEY CONCEPTS

Lament ends with *praise and expressions of confidence in God*. The process of lament has led us to surrender, facilitating the transition to focusing on God, hopeful of what God will do in our lives. This frees us to praise God.

FOCUS

Take a moment to calm your heart and quiet your mind in preparation for today's session. Your group leader will say a brief prayer after a moment to transition to some initial questions.

ACTIVATE

Jumpstart your learning with these reflective exercises that you will discuss together as a group. Silently read over the psalm of lament that you wrote last week. Consider your experience of praying your lament over the past week. Share with the group:

- ▶ How did it feel to bring your lament to God?
- ▶ Have you made progress in surrendering your current life challenges to God? What has helped or hindered your surrender this week?

WATCH

Discover practical insights about lament that are relevant to your life in a short video ([click here.](#)) Jot down key points, insights, and questions you have about this session's video in the space to the right.

CONNECT

Connect aspects of lament directly to your life through interactive activities and reflection questions that are designed to foster greater application.

Spend a few moments silently talking to God about what you heard in the video and how it relates to your current situation.



Use the following questions in group discussion:

- ▶ Considering the different stages of lament (address, complaint, request, reminding, praise), where would you place yourself right now? Where have you been in the past few weeks during this program?
- ▶ What would help you turn to praise during this season?
- ▶ Has anything changed in your relationship with God since beginning your journey with lament?
- ▶ Has anything changed in the way you experience your current difficulties since beginning your journey with lament?

Take turns reading through these expressions of praise prayerfully together out loud:

But you, LORD, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. (Psalm 3:3)

I will sing the LORD's praise, for he has been good to me. (Psalm 13:6)

For great is your love toward me; you have delivered me from the depths, from the realm of the dead. (Psalm 86:13)

I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you. (Psalm 22:22)

I will praise you, Lord, among the nations; I will sing of you among the peoples. (Psalm 57:9)

Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. (Psalm 71:18)

Take some time now to silently finish your psalm of lament. As you are able, praise God.

As time allows, share your praise to God with your group.

Take a minute to close your eyes and just take deep breaths. Then open your eyes and slowly read/pray together, out loud, Psalm 22, recalling that Jesus prayed this psalm from the cross. Listen for a particular word or phrase that speaks to your current suffering at this moment. Feel free to underline it or mark it in some way.

Psalm 22

¹ *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?*

² *My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.*

³ *Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises.*

⁴ *In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them.*

- ⁵ *To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame....*
- ⁹ *Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.*
- ¹⁰ *From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb you have been my God.*
- ¹¹ *Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help....*
- ¹⁴ *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me.*
- ¹⁵ *My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death....*
- ¹⁹ *But you, LORD, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me.*
- ²⁰ *Deliver me from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.*
- ²¹ *Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.*
- ²² *I will declare your name to my people; in the assembly I will praise you....*
- ²⁴ *For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.*
- ²⁵ *From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.*
- ²⁶ *The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek the LORD will praise him—may your hearts live forever!*
- ²⁷ *All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him....*
- ³⁰ *Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord.*
- ³¹ *They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it!*



Read the same psalm out loud together a second time. As you re-engage the text, let the word or phrase that stood out become your invitation to dialogue with God. Allow the word or phrase to sink in. What is God saying to you in these words? How does this word or phrase connect to your current difficult life event? What do you want to say to God? What feelings do these words raise up in you? Share your answers with God in silent prayer.

TAKEAWAY

Silently write out your primary takeaway from this session with respect to your current difficult life situation. Briefly share your answer with the rest of your group.

Now that we are at the end of our six-week program, what is your primary takeaway from the entire program? What helped you the most to engage with lament? What hindered you?

PRAY

Collectively, in subgroups, or individually, spend a few moments in prayer to close this session on Praising.

GO DEEPER

You have now completed the Learning to Lament program! To continue reaping the benefits of this biblical form of prayer, we encourage you to continue praying through psalms of lament as well as bringing your own suffering to God in lament. Make this a regular part of how you engage with God!

