

# *NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY*

PRACTICES OF CORPORATE LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL PARISH:

A RESOURCE FOR PASTORS

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PRACTICES OF CORPORATE LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL PARISH:  
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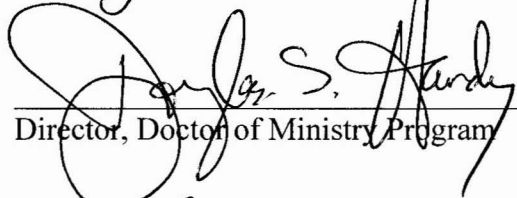
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction .....	4
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	22
<i>Building a Foundation for Our Understanding of Lament</i>	
<i>Biblical Foundations Literature</i>	
<i>Theological Foundations Literature</i>	
<i>Psycho-Social Foundations Literature</i>	
<i>Liturgical Foundations Literature</i>	
<i>Literature Summary and Implications</i>	
Chapter Three: Research Design .....	75
<i>Overview</i>	
<i>The Setting</i>	
<i>The Goals</i>	
<i>The Survey of Pastors</i>	
<i>The Presentation to Pastors</i>	
<i>Presentation to Laity</i>	
<i>Online Discussion Group</i>	
Chapter Four: Research Data and Results .....	88
<i>Introduction</i>	
<i>The Presentation</i>	
<i>The Survey</i>	
<i>The Continuing Discussion</i>	
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions.....	96
Appendices.....	114
Bibliography .....	166

**Chapter One, Introduction**  
***How Long O Lord?: The Lost Language of Lament***

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes,  
or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed;"  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalm 13  
(New Revised Standard Version)

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**INTRODUCTION**

Sometime in the early hours of Friday, December 14, 2012, Adam shot and killed his mother, Nancy. He grabbed three weapons and headed to the elementary school where she served as a teacher. With 700 students in attendance, sometime around 9:30 AM, Adam shot his way into the school. Over the next horrifying moments he shot and killed twenty children, ages six and seven. With the addition of six teachers, Adam Lanza killed twenty-six innocent people at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. This horrific event impacted not only this small community in New England, but gripped a whole nation as well. This tragedy, which occurred during the time frame of this project, serves as a critical example for us all, bringing to life unimaginable pain, sorrow and suffering.

The event at Sandy Hook is but one example of calamities that impact our collective experience in such dramatic and distressing ways. Memories of these events are

awakened with a simple word or phrase, often simply a location: 9/11, Katrina, Columbine, tsunami, Sandy, Aurora, Joplin, to name but a few. How do we respond to these types of tragedies? How do we process the whole range of calamities and challenges that life brings to us? What is our response as human beings? What is our response as Christians? How does the community of faith respond in moments such as these? How do we truly “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15)? What do we do when there is nothing that can be done? While there may be a variety of responses to these questions, there is one that is biblical, significant, and often missing, especially in the life of the local parish. That response is lament.

In the worship life of the Church, there is a need to rediscover the role of lament, particularly corporate lament. Lament, at its basic definition is *to express grief for or about, to mourn (to lament a death) or regret deeply; to deplore (He lamented his thoughtless acts.); to grieve audibly, to wail, to express sorrow or regret*. It can mean a feeling or an expression of grief; a lamentation, a song or poem expressing deep grief or mourning. The lament expressed in Scripture, that is needed in the Church, and is the basis of this study, includes these definitions, however, as will become clear, additional elements must also be incorporated into a biblical-theological praxis of lament.

Those in pastoral ministry are keenly aware of many great needs present in their congregations. It would seem that trials and tribulations are reaching record levels. The extent of brokenness and dysfunction staggers the mind. We encounter evil at younger ages and confront it at deeper levels. Anxiety and dread due to the state of our economy, death and disease, violence in our communities, our nation, and in our world; all of these are sometimes more than people can endure. While the existence of these issues is not

uncommon, it does seem that the breadth and depth of them is at a new reality. It is also true that as clergy seek to provide pastoral care for their people, they can easily become overwhelmed by the expanse and frequency of the pain and sorrow that so often impact their people.

What is the response of the people of God in these circumstances? Traditionally, it has involved prayer: prayer requests, pastoral prayer, family prayer time, etc. Certainly pastors use the pulpit to bring God's Word to God's people who face such overwhelming need in their lives. This reality is also demonstrated by an increased need for pastoral care and counseling. While all of these are important and good, there is still the need to rediscover the biblical art of lament.

Lament indispensably shapes prayer, proclamation, ministry, and witness for such times. . . . It is our shared conviction that lament, particularly biblical lament, provides the church with a rhetoric for prayer and reflection that befits these volatile times, a rhetoric that mourns loss, examines complicity in evil, cries for divine help, and sings and prays with hope. For indeed, what ultimately shapes biblical lament is not the need of the creature to cry its woe, but the faithfulness of the God who hears and acts.<sup>1</sup>

Pursuing the topic of lament, and the need for lament to be recovered as a lost language and practice, takes place preferably in the context of the local parish, and, as such, is dependent upon the role of the pastor to be able to lead such a recovery. Leadership in this area is based upon the priestly and prophetic functions on the pastoral office and assumes the significance of doxological leadership as a vital means of teaching and of pastoral care. This brings up several questions: What does it mean to be a priestly pastor-shepherd in this day and time? What does it look like to be an authentic

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<sup>1</sup> Sally Brown and Patrick Miller, *Lament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), xix.

worshiping community of faith? What are the missing ingredients for such a community? What key challenges or issues need to be addressed if we are to become the faith community to which God is calling us?

To set a context for this discussion, we begin by addressing the concept of doxological or sacramental, leadership.<sup>2</sup> Across the last two decades the Church has witnessed numerous leadership models come into popularity. These include a CEO model, a Maxwellian leadership model, a Church growth model, a Church health model, and a Missional Leader model, with a host of variations on them all. Certainly, there are important lessons we can learn from each of these, and many of those principles should still be incorporated into our operation and praxis.

There have also been many changes and developments throughout this time in the area of worship. These include the oft discussed “worship wars,” but, fundamentally, there has been a renewed focus to the overall area of worship. While many positive developments have resulted from this emphasis, an intentional integration of the theology and practice of worship within the role of pastoral leadership is essential. In many evangelical traditions, including the Church of the Nazarene there is a fundamental need to rediscover the priestly role of the pastor. Often the term sacramental leadership simply refers to leading corporate worship rather than intentionally leading the congregation toward a desired future, teaching people about personal spiritual formation, shaping their hearts and lives to impact the church and local community through the sacramental life of the people of God.

It is certainly not a new issue or one that has not been significantly explored. In

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<sup>2</sup> This term is used to refer to leading and teaching God’s people through the worshiping life of the people of God, that through services of worship that include word and sacrament, the pastor can help shape the spiritual lives of her or his congregation and provide pastoral care and spiritual formation.

William Willimon's important book, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, the author explores how corporate worship is the environment in which pastoral care can and must take place, and it is a defining role for the pastor. This book was Willimon's "own effort to better integrate the role of priest and pastor and to see some of the many ways in which worship and pastoral care can inform, challenge, enrich, and support each other."<sup>3</sup> While this book provided important groundwork, it primarily focused on four specific services (the funeral, the wedding, baptism, and the Lord's Supper). In our tradition, there has been little emphasis beyond these specific services in the life of the congregation. While there have been discussions in connection with the various elements of worship, there is insufficient discussion of how all this could come together as an integrated whole. It is important to explore how these worship elements can be incorporated into the broader task of pastoral care.

While there have been examples of more formal, liturgical congregations or services in our tradition in recent years, these are the exceptions, usually centered around our educational institutions. Only limited discussion, training, and resourcing exists for congregations whose contexts and cultures would not necessarily move fully in the direction of a formalized, liturgical worship. Whatever the setting, style, or context of worship, there is great value in understanding the ways that worship, sacrament, and liturgy can be a vehicle of pastoral leadership. In all of these settings, the need to provide opportunities for corporate lament exists.

What then is the place of lament within this framework of doxological leadership? We understand the place of lament from our study of the Psalms and we may have even

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<sup>3</sup> William H. Willimon, *Worship As Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 12

preached about it, but do we actually practice lament to any great extent in our settings of corporate worship? Do we give active permission for our people to lament and offer opportunities for lament to take place? Practices of corporate lament need to develop as a part of the doxological leadership of the pastor. And, with the understanding that through our worship practices, we are able to engage in pastoral care and spiritual formation, we may better serve and minister to the people in our churches.

Having set the context of this project at the core of the worship and preaching ministry of the pastor, and given the opportunity to provide care and growth through these means, we should further explore the specific place of lament as an important aspect of pastoral leadership. For this to be accomplished, we must further examine the specific nature of biblical lament.

Lament is a common language of the Bible. While some of the specifics of how lament is present throughout Scripture will be addressed in the next chapter, it is clear that lament is a regular pattern expressed in the Bible. Though present throughout the narrative of Scripture, ironically it still remains a virtual foreign language in the lives of many Christians.

The reality that lament is a language that lacks fluency among many, if not most believers seems strange when we realize how central lament is to the Psalter and how often Christians point to the Book of Psalms as a favorite or significant source of comfort in their lives. It seems that disconnect exists between profession and practice, between claim and conviction. Perhaps the most critical need is to rediscover ways to incorporate the pattern and practice of the psalmist into our own lives. It is important for the psalms to become more than just inspirational writings, but a model for how to navigate our own



times of loss, pain, and sorrow. They must come to be more than prayers we read, but prayers we pray. More than that, they must serve as a model for us to follow. It is what Michael Jinkins refers to in his book, *In the House of the Lord: Inhabiting the Psalms of Lament*, as the need to

[connect] the psalms of lament with those in our contemporary communities who lament so that our voices may be joined to the voices of those who for centuries have cried unto the Lord, and have received assurance that they were heard by the God who shares their suffering and desires for them better things than they can hope or imagine. We discover in these lamentations the remarkable sanity of the psalms, the awareness that God forms and transforms us through the crucible of suffering, that evil and pain will not have the last word, and that God ultimately turns all things to God's own redemptive purposes. The valley of the shadow of death is not our final destination but it is necessary to walk this way if we are to dwell in the house of the Lord.<sup>4</sup>

This ability to authentically live out the example of Scripture begins with the patterns established in liturgy. It is in the worshiping life of the church that we first begin to practice living out the claims of Scripture. “Liturgy as much as any other dimension of the church’s life, writes the ‘lived theology’ of the Christian community – that is the theological vision that most believers live by.”<sup>5</sup>

The challenge is before us. How do we provide a theological praxis for corporate lament? It begins by acknowledging the sorrow and suffering around us. Too often, we limit this awareness to times of prayer, usually in the form of prayer requests. We are more comfortable with praise and thanksgiving and with keeping things “positive.” We have a propensity to move our sorrows to the margin and, in so doing, we communicate

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<sup>4</sup> Michael Jinkins, *In the House of the Lord: Inhabiting the Psalms of Lament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 119-120.

<sup>5</sup> John D. Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows Into Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

much more than we realize about the nature of God, shared life, and Christian community.

Our objective must go beyond mere acknowledgement. To give full expression to lament, we must find ways to give people permission to lament; to say that there is a place and a way to “lift up your sorrow and offer your pain.”<sup>6</sup> To do so can be an act of worship, an offering/sacrifice and an act of trust and praise. We must give opportunities to embrace redemptive suffering (another key concept worthy of exploration) as a way to identify with Christ. In the words of the Apostle Paul, it is to “want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11).<sup>7</sup> We need to allow people to experience and explore the depth of lament in their own journey of faith.

Furthermore, we must find ways to incorporate communal lament into the regular worship practices of the Church. With so few resources available, this is an area of need for the Church to explore. In lieu of such resources, creative care should be used to develop context-specific ways to incorporate lament into the worship life of the church. We must provide opportunities to discover how to express the cries that are “out of the depths” (Psalm 130:1).

The need for theological and pastoral praxis of corporate lament is, admittedly, a broad and complex topic. Nevertheless, it is apparent that such a pursuit can have tremendous impact on the character of the local community of faith, and particularly, our

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Card, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrow* from *The Hidden Face of God*, (Discovery House Music, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version.

worship and sacramental experience. This is another factor that must be acknowledged – the corporate expression of lament has significant implications for the formation of relationships within the context of the church as the Body of Christ. Lament helps to provide the honesty that is required for authentic Christian community. This points again to the central need to incorporate language, opportunities and permission to lament in settings of corporate worship. Failure to do so violates the relationships in the community of faith:

Our failure to lament also cuts us off from each other. If you and I are to know one another in a deep way, we must not only share our hurts, anger, and disappointments with each other (which we often do), we must also lament them together before the God who hears and is moved by our tears. Only then does our sharing become truly redemptive in character. The degree to which I am willing to enter into the suffering of another person reveals the level of my commitment and love for them. If I am not interested in your hurts, I am not really interested in you. Neither am I willing to suffer to know you nor be known by you. Jesus' example makes these truths come alive in our hearts. He is the One who suffered to know us, who then suffered for us on the cross. In all this, He revealed the hesed of His Father.<sup>8</sup>

This failure to lament also keeps us from reaching out to the poor and the hurting of the world. “Until we learn to lament, we have nothing to say to most of the world.”<sup>9</sup> This is a powerful reminder to the Church and speaks to the importance of lament. If we cannot acknowledge the need for sorrow in the face of the evil and brokenness in the world, a reality that those outside the Church can see so clearly, than the incongruity of that gap becomes an almost insurmountable obstacle for the church to overcome. If we do not return to lament, we fail to reflect the honesty and openness that is necessary to have the

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<sup>8</sup> Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

opportunity to speak into the world, and to be the people that God has called us to be. The absence of lament separates us from fellow believers, from the needy and from the world, and so also separates us from God.<sup>10</sup>

This reality becomes all the more significant when we remember that lament includes an element of complaint or protest. “The tradition of protest against God has been largely lost to Western Christianity. This is most regrettable, because there is ample evidence that in the midst of suffering and distress people of faith often express anger against God. The Church needs to offer an adequate pastoral response to those feeling let down by what they experience as the absence of God.”<sup>11</sup> The tendency in the Christian culture is to believe that questioning God in this way is not spiritual, and therefore, not permissible. We forget that the psalms of lament are full of this form of complaint. The question, “How long, O Lord?” is lament as complaint. Believers must come to understand that the Scriptures both permit and even encourage this level of honest conversation with God.

Our struggle with lament does not ultimately come from a lack of knowledge, but rather from a lack of permission. We know *how* to lament, though perhaps not always in the full biblical expression of lament. “What we need is simply the assurance that we *can* lament; that and a fuller understanding of all that it can mean.”<sup>12</sup> This is not to say that there is not a need to provide some lament education, or that we cannot learn better ways to lament or share resources to help in the journey. However, the biggest gap is not one of knowledge, but one of opportunity.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care In Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 32.

In the introduction to his book, *The Hidden Face of God: Finding the Missing Door to the Father Through Lament*, Michael Card begins with a powerful illustration of the role of lament from the life of artist, Vincent van Gogh. Card refers to one painting of the artist in particular, “The Church at Auver.” “What many art critics have commented on is not the swimming colors but the ominous lack of a doorway leading into the church. Vincent painted a church that no one could get into.<sup>13</sup> Having tried all his life to work hard enough to ‘get in,’ it appears that he could not imagine, in this last image of the church, a door that might allow him, with his enormous load of pain, to enter in.”<sup>14</sup> Card uses this metaphor of “the missing door” to begin the conversation about the topic of lament, suggesting that lament is the missing door to the Father. “It is the inescapable conclusion of anyone who looks honestly at the fallenness of the world but fails to perceive that there is a door and that Someone is waiting on the other side. They are all linked -- the missing door, the empty church, and the absent tears. I have come to believe and trust and hope that tears of lament are the missing door, the way into an experience with a God whose depth of compassion we have never imagined.”<sup>15</sup>

Not only does Card draw from the art of van Gogh, he highlights the life and tragic death of van Gogh, including the lament contained in his last words. “In an upstairs room of the Ravoux Inn, on July 27, 1890, two days after his suicide attempt, Vincent van Gogh died of his self-inflicted wound. His brother Theo, who was by his side, reported that the last words he whispered were, ‘La tristesse durera toujours,’ ‘the sadness will last

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<sup>13</sup> While it is true, of course, that there could be a door on the other side, at the very least, this is the perspective that van Gogh chose in painting the church.

<sup>14</sup> Michael Card, *The Hidden Face of God: Finding the Missing Door to the Father Through Lament* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

forever.”<sup>16</sup> This feeling of despair is at the root of lament, and the door to the Father is not to deny the sorrow, but to enter into it, accept it and then allow it to become a path into a deeper and more intimate connection with the very heart of God.

We have already seen the precedent for lament found in the frequency of its presence in the canon of Scripture and in the Christian tradition. Even a cursory reading of the Bible demonstrates how often lament, as the expression of sorrow and complaint, is present in Scripture. We will explore this in greater detail in the next chapter.

We also see the need or longing to lament. The human experience is one that includes tears. From the first cry of a newborn, to the tears shed at the graveside, and along the journey in between, sorrow is a part of human existence, not limited to one’s culture, color, country, or creed. Woven into the fabric of the human psycho-social experience is the need to express the full-range of emotions, including sorrow, grief, and loss.

In spite of the precedent and the need to lament, it is clear that barriers remain to the full expression of lament, at least the forms of lament present in Scripture. Lament is oftentimes something we resist in our day and age, at least in the corporate setting of the local church. We struggle against the openness, honesty, and vulnerability that lament brings. We put up walls and facades to keep others at a safe distance. When asked, “How are you doing?” we quickly answer, “fine!” We resist the path of lament.

One of the reasons for this resistance is the fallen world in which we live. We arrive at an inherent realization that the sources of lament are the broken things of the world, things that surely must be out of place, especially as we believe in the existence of an omnipotent and loving God. “Suffering and God. Superficially, they seem mutually

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

exclusive, like darkness and light, matter and antimatter. What does one have to do with the other? How and at what point could they possibly meet? What would be the result if they did? The place where these two inescapable realities meet is in lament.”<sup>17</sup> We also face the barrier of an over-emphasis within the culture of the church of “positivity.” Many seem to have an expectation that life should always be pleasant and good; therefore they are shocked when adversity or tragedy comes their way. The honesty of lament helps us to realize that sorrow, grief, and loss come to everyone in this life. Not only do hardships happen, there is much to learn in the midst of these negative realities. Part of spiritual maturity is the ability to reflect on lessons learned from these negative dimensions of life. In addition to sorrow and adversity, grief and loss, these include “thorns in the flesh,” frustrations, interruptions, our own human frailties and the like. We find in these areas of life much to lament, but also much to learn. Some of these things, while lamentable, may be unchangeable. Michael Card reminds us that while God always responds to lament, not everything over which we lament may change. “To the two most fervent prayers of lament in the New Testament, God answered ‘No.’ Both Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane and Paul, here in his letter to Corinth, struggled with a God who sometimes refuses to deliver us from suffering. Whether it is the thorn in Paul’s flesh, the thorns of Calvary, or our own sometimes thorny existence in this fallen world, often the suffering simply won’t go away.”<sup>18</sup> When the answer comes as, “no,” we are called to find a place of resolution that, while difficult, is necessary to find peace and purpose. This is especially true when it seems like God is absent, or at least silent. In our lament we may feel as if God is ignoring us, is absent, is waiting to respond, or even unaware.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 115.

We can feel these things and we come to realize that we must surrender our primary understanding of the God whom the Scriptures reveal. This is often the place of lament, in the cry, “How long?” There is another option. “The final possibility is based on a level of trust that is so radical it may seem almost paradoxical: Perhaps God's purpose is beyond our ability to determine or understand. Perhaps He is up to something completely apart from putting an end to pain. Perhaps even He uses pain to transform us. Or possibly even to save the world.”<sup>19</sup>

Closely tied to unchecked positivity, is the barrier of the over-spiritualization of our experience that mistakenly assumes that “if we just had more faith” we would not fall victim to the experience of loss, sorrow, or grief that needs to be lamented. Because we know the end of the story and the ultimate triumph of God over brokenness and over a fallen world, perhaps people believe that in order to “have faith” they must suppress any internal doubt, fear, or feelings of sorrow and loss. This impulse is further evident in the trivial statements often made to persons experiencing grief and loss. Rather than joining them in their lament, and because they feel a need to say “something,” unfortunately at times horrific and insensitive comments are made to those in pain. At a funeral of a young child, someone may say, “Well, God needed another angel.” These and other equally painful remarks demonstrate a lack of biblical and theological understanding as well as any understanding of the psycho-social implications.

A further variation of positivity and over-spiritualization is an over-emphasis on celebration that is present in much of the contemporary, American church. While celebration in worship is an appropriate reality, it must be balanced with the realization

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 117.



that every time we come together, there are those among us who are broken and hurting, and there is a need for lament. Christian worship, like the Christian experience, includes both funeral and fiesta. There is sorrow and joy, mourning and celebration.

The biblical witness demonstrates individuals and communities approaching God, not only in joy, but also in sorrow. Celebration, therefore, needs to be paired with lament, another faithful response of worship to God who should be praised in the midst of both joyful and sorrowful occasions. This giving of worship itself is only possible through the Spirit's operation. Lament, stemming from the Spirit, can be an appropriate way of addressing human failure or loss before God; and celebration, sparked by the Spirit, is an appropriate way of acknowledging God's ongoing care.<sup>20</sup>

When we accentuate the celebration while playing down the brokenness, we do a disservice to both the gospel and the hearts and lives of our people.<sup>21</sup>

What then is the alternative? The practice of lament, and corporate lament in particular, forges another path. In the face of tragedy, lament is often the only appropriate response, at least initially. However, in biblical lament, as we will come to see, there is an implicit journey through to a place of trust and hope, even thanks and praise. This turn, however, must not be hurried, nor the steps that precede it be bypassed.

One helpful element to the path of lament is the place of spiritual memory. If in our lament we will come to a place of trust and praise, if “the turn” is going to happen, it will commemorate God and God’s past faithfulness. “The biblical laments recognize our fundamental flaw of forgetfulness. They recognize that forgetting cannot only be a cause of disobedience; it can also become a reason to lose hope -- just as remembering can

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<sup>20</sup> Luke A. Powery, *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), xiv.

<sup>21</sup> This tendency can be seen when Advent is bypassed for the celebration of Christmas, or Lent for Easter. In the case of the latter, it is further reflected during Holy Week, when churches fail to recognize Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, or Holy Saturday, but skip right to Resurrection Sunday.

become an occasion for finding it again. In the laments we frequently see the forgetful lamenter, who is tempted to give up hope, looking back to remember what God has done in the past and finding there a new hope for the present.”<sup>22</sup> Biblical lament allows for what God has done in the past to enter into the way we experience and interrupt the present. This is critical because it reconnects us to the ever-presence of God. “The power of memory is not that it somehow creates hope by itself, but rather it provides a means of connection to the only One who can provide hope. When the future seems to hold only fear, the past can become a source of real hope. When, in the present moment, the presence of God seems impossibly absent, remembering those times in the past when His presence was palpably real can make today's suffering more bearable.”<sup>23</sup> We must remember that God has not forgotten.

So what then is required? How can this path and language of lament be rediscovered? In the following chapter, we will delve into the topic of lament as a biblical form that was rediscovered years ago with the work of Claus Westermann, Bernhard Anderson, and Walter Brueggeman. In recent years the writings of Michael Card and others have provided wonderful overviews and broader expressions to the topic of lament. There has been an increase of publications on lament, many of which indicate the necessity to recover the practice of lament for the local church. They will give a few general examples of lament practices that could be incorporated. Still, there has not been a more extensive resource for pastors to help lead their people in practices of corporate lament. Clearly lament remains a desperately needed, yet rarely practiced habit. In those instances when it is practiced, it seems to be limited to a brief period or season and focused almost

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<sup>22</sup> Michael Card, *The Hidden Face of God*, 128.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

exclusively on addressing the loss that is experienced in the face of death.

On any given Sunday (or any time the community gathers) there are people on the mountain, those in the valley, or even in the wilderness. That wilderness may be a barren place, but we often experience wilderness in the midst of people who are experiencing a much different reality. Thus, the wilderness may be barren to us, but also have at its core the joyful context of songs of praise. This contradistinction can be a difficult one for people to navigate. Speaking of this wilderness experience, Michael Card writes:

So many of us simply remain, winningly, and willfully abandoned in this wilderness. We do not know where we are. We do not know where we are going. We even lack the language to describe our desolate place in this frustratingly verdant place. Bound by personal sorrows and hurts we leave outside the door on a thousand Sundays, we are left to languish while those around us drink from a fountain that, to our eyes looks dry. We are slaves to what we do not know. And muted by what we find ourselves unable to speak. We are thirsty. We are word-less and way-less. Our best hope of finding our way back to true worship lies along the pathway of lament, a path that promises to provide the only route through the green desert. If indeed we are lost, we must push forward together and take the land, refusing any longer to live as strangers there.<sup>24</sup>

In the award-winning musical, *Les Misérables*, is a song entitled “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables.” The opening, haunting lyrics state, “There’s a grief that can’t be spoken. There’s a pain goes on and on.” At the very heart, it is a song of lament, expressing so very well overwhelming grief and loss. There are times that it seems as if the sorrow will go on forever. While the lyric does provide a powerful expression of lament, it also reveals two critical truths that are central to developing practices of corporate lament for the local parish -- this grief can and must be spoken; it does not need to remain unvoiced. There is a time and space that must be created in the church where it can be spoken;

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<sup>24</sup> Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 29.

spoken without fear of judgment or misunderstanding. Additionally, while we acknowledge the need to lament and while we may feel like the sorrow will not end, the power and hope of the gospel remind us that, in fact, the pain and sorrow will not endure forever. “Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Psalm 20:5). Vincent van Gogh was wrong; the sadness will not last forever.

We must be willing to take such a journey and to provide an environment within the Church of God that gives opportunity to voice our sacred sorrows, where lament can be offered and where even the question, “How long, O Lord?” is uttered and understood. We must take that sorrow to the heart of the God who loves us and who is present even when we remain unaware of the reality. May we shepherd God’s people to trust in God’s unfailing love and to experience the commitment to praise God for His bountiful provision in our lives. When the need arises, we join the psalmist and ask the question, “How long, O Lord?” We willingly embrace the language of lament so that we can offer up to God, even our sorrow and pain, our confusion and doubt, our anger and complaint. We do this knowing that we are welcomed by God and can offer up our lament to God as an offering of worship, an act of trust, and a heart-felt prayer.

*Come lift up your sorrows and offer your pain.  
Come make a sacrifice of all your shame.  
There in your wilderness He's waiting for you  
To worship Him with your wounds,  
For He's wounded too.<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>25</sup> Michael Card, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrow* from *The Hidden Face of God*, (Discovery House Music, 2006).

*Chapter Two*  
*The Streams That Shape the Place of Lament*

**BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR OUR UNDERSTANDING OF LAMENT**

Developing a renewed focus of practices of lament for the local church is best served by building on several foundations that must influence any such endeavor. These various streams of human experience and the Christian tradition, merge together to shape and inform the development of our approach to lament for the local parish. These areas include biblical foundations, theological foundations, psycho-social foundations and liturgical foundations. Across the recent years, in each of these categories, there has been a growing body of literature that has either focused on the topic of lament directly or has contributed to the various sub-themes necessary to explore as we develop a holistic understanding of the place of lament within the context of the local parish. This paper serves as both overview and synthesis of some of the most significant contributions of the literature in each of these foundational areas.

**BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS LITERATURE**

Lament is a common language of the Bible. It is central to the Book of Psalms where a conservative estimate places the number of lament psalms at 57, or 38%, of the Psalter. When you add in other psalms that, while they are praise oriented, derive from a clear experience of suffering and lament, the total increases to 118 psalms, or 80% of all psalms. Lament is critical to other books of Wisdom Literature including Job. It is also central in the Prophets, most notably the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Lament is a theme in the life of Jesus and in the entire essence of the Christological event. It is

present throughout the narrative of Scripture and yet it still remains a virtual foreign language to most Christians.

Any biblical discussion of lament must begin with the psalms, for it was through the study of the psalms that the topic of lament began to emerge as a central topic in biblical studies. Two individuals in particular played a significant role in helping shape and clarify the central role of lament in the Psalms. The first is Dr. Claus Westermann, who was Professor of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg and considered one of the premier Old Testament scholars of the 20th century. His book, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, serves as a central work in confirming the central role of lament in the Psalter. Westermann explored the categories of psalms suggested by Herman Gunkel<sup>26</sup> and suggests that these categories can be reduced down to two more fundamental categories, the hymn (praise) and the lament.<sup>27</sup> These basic categories reveal the two major approaches to praying to God. In both cases, there are examples of individual and corporate (of the people) expressions.<sup>28</sup> Throughout the book Westermann explores Babylonian and Egyptian psalms and the contrasts and similarities with the Psalms of the Old Testament. He makes a fascinating observation that lament does not appear to be present as often in the psalms outside Hebrew culture. “An immediate, loud, distraught cry to God is nowhere to be found.”<sup>29</sup>

Westermann also provides a basic outline of the psalms of lament. For the psalm of

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<sup>26</sup> Gunkel's categories include The Hymn (song of praise), The Prayer of Thanksgiving, The Prayer of Petition, The Didactic Poem, and The Spiritual Song. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1981), 18

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 45.

lament of the people, he suggests five regular components: Address (Introductory Petition), Lament, Confession of Trust, Petition (Double Wish<sup>30</sup>) and Vow of Praise.<sup>31</sup> Following a presentation of various examples of this category of lament (and variations that exist), Westermann lays out the regular components of psalms of lament of the individual. They are, Address (with an introductory cry for help), Lament, Confession of trust, Petition, Assurance of being heard, Double wish, Vow of praise, Praise to God (where the petition has been answered).<sup>32</sup> These base categories and progressions found in the psalms of lament that Westermann identifies have become a standardized way of understanding biblical lament and a way of the organizing these psalms.

Westermann also explores the structure and history of the lament. He states that both individual and corporate lament have three primary subjects; God, the person who laments and the enemy (the person, persons, or situation that is the focus or cause of the complaint).<sup>33</sup> The relationship between these three subjects varies and is informed and shaped by the history, or context of the situation. The lament includes complaint, often in form of the question “why?” or, less frequently, “how long?”<sup>34</sup> “The heart of the lament of the people in ancient Israel lies in these accusatory questions and statements directed at God. There are no laments of the people in which they are totally absent. Indeed, the

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<sup>30</sup> “That is, a wish or petition that simultaneously is expressed in two directions. May God do thus to our enemies; may God do thus to us.” Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 52.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 169. Westermann includes a table listing these three subjects in various lament psalms. There is a table listing examples in psalms of corporate lament on page 174 and a table listing examples of personal lament on page 182.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid* 176.

phenomenon of lamentation is concentrated in this one motif.”<sup>35</sup> This complaint of God is not as frequent in individual psalms of lament as it is in the psalms of corporate lament (or laments of the people), which is a significant observation, and perhaps reversed from what our modern expectations might be.<sup>36</sup>

Near the end of his book, having established the centrality of lament as a form of prayer in the Bible, Westermann shares some significant reflections on its use for today:

At this point we must draw attention to *the difference between this usage and that of Christian tradition in the West*. In both the Old and New Testament the lament is a very natural part of human life; in the Psalter it is an important and inescapable component of worship and of the language of worship. In the Old Testament there is not a single line which would forbid lamentation or which would express the idea that lamentation had no place in a healthy and good relationship with God. But I also know of no text in the New Testament which would prevent the Christian from lamenting or which would express the idea that faith in Christ excluded lamentation from man's relationship with God. Certainly in the Gospels the actions of Jesus of Nazareth are characterized by the compassion he evidenced for those who implored him to help them in their need. The cry of distress with which the afflicted besought him ("Oh, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me") is never rebuffed by Jesus. In the passion story the lament of the ancient people of God (Ps. 22) is placed on the lips of Jesus. Only in the paraenetic sections of the New Testament letters does the admonition to bear suffering with patience and humble self-resignation start to gain the upper hand. It would be a worthwhile task to ascertain how it happened that in Western Christendom the lament has been totally excluded from man's relationship with God, with the result that it has completely disappeared above all from prayer and worship. We must ask whether this exclusion is actually based on the message of the New Testament or whether it is in part attributable to the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 177-17. Again, Westermann points out that this is in contradistinction to lament in Babylonian culture, for example.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 183-184. This fact will be explored later, but we might assume that such complaint against God might be permissible individually, in our personal time of prayer with God, but would not be welcomed in a corporate setting. Westermann is suggesting that actually it is primarily in the corporate setting where such complaint is featured in the Psalms.



influence of Greek thought, since it is so thoroughly consistent with the ethic of Stoicism.<sup>37</sup>

These observations by Westermann demonstrate both the significant place that lament has in Scripture, but also the appropriateness of its continued use as a form of prayer and worship in the life of the people of God.

Westermann also points out the internal transition in the psalms of lament, a move from lamentation toward trust and praise. “There is not a single Psalm of lament that stops with lamentation. Lamentation has no meaning in and of itself. That it functions as an appeal is evident in its structure. What the lament is concerned with is not a description of one's own sufferings or self-pity, but the removal of the suffering itself. The lament appeals to the one who can remove suffering.”<sup>38</sup> Westermann points out that this transition is often indicated by a “but” (*wāw* adversative) that introduces some form of statement of trust.<sup>39</sup> Thus, most laments conclude with a vow of praise.

Westermann's work, *The Living Psalms* is another example of his work with the Psalms, a work that includes a general overview of the Psalms and the Psalms of lament in particular. This work functions as a type of commentary (based on Westermann's own translations) of particular Psalms. As such, it is a helpful example of a resource in exegeting particular Psalms of lament.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 264-265.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 266.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> There are other wonderful commentaries on the Psalms that can serve as helpful guides when exploring the Psalms of lament. There are also significant commentaries on other biblical literature that includes lament, such as a new commentary on Lamentations; Leslie C. Allen, *A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations* (Rand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

Another helpful voice in introducing the Psalms of lament is the classic work by Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today*.<sup>41</sup> His fundamental insight is based on a statement credited to Athanasius that while most of the Scripture speaks *to* us, the Psalms speak *for* us.<sup>42</sup> This includes the whole range of human emotion and experience including the cries “from the depths,” the cries of lament. Thus, the Psalms function as prayer in praise, but in both major and minor keys. The psalms of lament are prayers and praise in “trying times of God’s absence.”<sup>43</sup> Anderson not only points out that “laments far outnumber any other kind of songs in the Psalter,” but that their presence in other books (such as Jeremiah, Lamentations and Job), with the same general form and construction indicates that the writers were “following an accepted literary convention.”<sup>44</sup>

Anderson makes it clear that these laments do not function out of a pessimistic view of life, because of the confidence that the lamenter has in the power of God to intervene and change the circumstance.<sup>45</sup> “Hence the laments are really expressions of praise – praise offered in a minor key in the confidence that Yahweh is faithful and in anticipation of a new lease on life.”<sup>46</sup>

As with Westerman, Anderson provides us with helpful insights into the structure of

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<sup>41</sup> It was this book that first introduced the author to the central place that psalms of lament have in the Psalter.

<sup>42</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak to Us Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 75. Anderson suggests it might be helpful to distinguish between “a lamentation” and “a lament.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*.

the psalms of lament and provides a variety of examples of the various types of laments. A central question he raises is “whether these all too human cries have a place in our speech to God.”<sup>47</sup> This question is particularly significant when we look at the vengeance and cursing psalms. The reason that lament in all forms is an acceptable form of speech is precisely because it is directed to God, a God with whom they have a relationship. “These protests, however, are all based on one grand conviction: the God who is supremely worthy of worship, and to whom people cry out even in the time of ‘the eclipse of God,’ is the faithful God, the God of *hesed*. That basic premise of trust, which is found in all the psalms of lament, releases people to expostulate with God.”<sup>48</sup> There is a unique character to biblical lament that infuses trust into petition:

In the psalms of lament, then, we do not find people shaking their fists in protest at a cold and brassy heaven or resigning themselves grimly to impersonal fate, but people who testify even in times when they walk through the valley of dark shadow, that God is faithful and concerned and therefore hears their cry. It would be a mistake to overemphasize the element of petition in the psalms of lament and to disregard the element of trust. Laments, then, are praises in the times of God’s absence, when God’s “face” (presence) is hidden. These poignant human outcries express a faith that dares to question and even to wrestle with God in situations of suffering and distress . . . The modern awareness of the absence of God is not irrelevant to worship; it may become the occasion for prayer of lament “out of the depths.”<sup>49</sup>

It is important to remember that every cry “out of the depths” is an act of worship and trust.

*In the House of the Lord* by Michael Jenkins is a concise and insightful exploration of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 103.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 103-104.

the Psalms of Lament that calls for greater use of the practice of lament as well as providing examples of how lament is shaped in the canon of Scripture. In the introduction, Jinkins indicates that his journey with the psalms came about, in large part, through reading the work of Walter Brueggemann and especially attending a workshop with him on the topic.<sup>50</sup> His book is organized into three sections: *Inhabiting the World of the Psalms*, *The Church as a Community of Lament*, and *Locating Ourselves in the Psalms of Lament*.

In chapter one, *Inhabiting the World of the Psalms*, Jinkins begins by stating that the “world of the psalmist is a different world from the one that we ordinarily inhabit.”<sup>51</sup> In light of this, he frames the question that serves as the guiding focus of the book, “What would it mean for us to learn to inhabit the world of the psalms?”<sup>52</sup> Jinkins provides three basic answers to this question. First, that to do so would “allow us to enter into a world where we recognize the reign of the Lord.”<sup>53</sup> The phrase oft repeated in the Psalms, “the Lord reigns,” gives voice to a kingdom mentality that drastically reshapes the way life is understood and lived. The second answer is that inhabiting the world of the Psalms “is to practice the habitation of God as a living discipline.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, we would “internalize some qualities or a particular character through habitual practice.”<sup>55</sup> Jinkins sees this happening

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<sup>50</sup> Jinkins, *In the House of the Lord*, vii.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

primarily in a corporate context, specifically, a liturgical one.<sup>56</sup> Through this experience we allow the Psalms to give guidance to the process of our spiritual formation. The function of the Psalms is to “nourish, mold, and re-shape us.”<sup>57</sup> The final answer to Jinkins’ central question, “What would it mean for us to learn to inhabit the world of the psalms?” is “to discern the sacred quality of all life, the whole of creation.”<sup>58</sup> We are invited to view life, in the words of Eugene Peterson, as “the sacred ordinary.”<sup>59</sup> He points out that the Psalms “stubbornly refuse to respect the dichotomy we commonly recognize between the sacred and the secular.”<sup>60</sup>

With this approach to the Psalms as a foundation, Jinkins moves to a discussion of *The Church as a Community of Lament*. He begins by stating that many churches avoid lamentation and yet, quoting the Spanish philosopher, Miguel De Unamuno, “The chiefest sanctity of a temple is that it is a place to which [people] go to weep in common.”<sup>61</sup> Lament is an essential form of worship and “one of the most striking features of the Psalter.”<sup>62</sup> We must not deny ourselves the opportunity to lament for when “we refuse to lament, we effectively deny the faithfulness of God”<sup>63</sup> whereas, the Psalms of lament open us to the greatness of God “who not only can hear, but also can handle

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 36.

our pain, our self-pity, our blame, and our fear, who can respond to our anger and disillusionment . . . and our sense of Godforsakenness.”<sup>64</sup> Truly nothing is off limits in prayer because “nothing human is foreign to God.”<sup>65</sup> Jenkins surveys a number of lament psalms and demonstrates the way in which they function and the characteristics they display. He also shares some examples from the local parish where pastors have provided opportunities for lament to their congregations or parishioners in specific settings. These were times where lament was needed along with celebration<sup>66</sup> and where it was important to allow the liturgy to “take seriously their cause to lament as well as to celebrate, which provides a context of faith in which to doubt.”<sup>67</sup> Jenkins does offer some words of caution in using the psalms of lament. He acknowledges the danger that is inherent in them, especially as they include language of vengeance.<sup>68</sup> He clarifies that it is important to realize that by voicing these genuine feelings the psalmist is, in fact, turning over the desire for revenge to God.<sup>69</sup> Another danger is the problem of self-righteousness; in the psalms of lament, the psalmist typically has no doubt that they are guiltless, a reason for the complaint. Often circumstances are not nearly so simple. As congregations learn to lament, Jenkins suggests, they will not only need to learn to cry out to God, “Where were You?” but also, “Where were we?”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 39.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>66</sup> One of these even included a wedding!

<sup>67</sup> Jenkins, *In the House of the Lord*, 59.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 62.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 68.

The final section of the book focuses on *Locating Ourselves in the Psalms of Lament*. Here Jinkins explores the ways in which individuals and communities can most faithfully express lament. He makes an important clarification that biblical lament is more than “letting off steam,” more than catharsis.<sup>71</sup> It is to believe that God responds to the cries of God’s people and yet this is balanced with a trust in the sovereignty of God<sup>72</sup> “When we pray through the psalms of lament we enter into a world of discourse which understands God as a genuine partner in conversation, one on whom our words are not wasted.”<sup>73</sup> Jinkins suggests that Psalm 13, the shortest of the individual psalms of lament, is a good summary of the three most significant elements of lament. Here we “observe the movement *from* the cry of Godforgottenness, ‘How long, O Lord?’ *to* the description of the pain the sufferer bears, finally *to* the trust that issues forth in the rejoicing song of the psalmist.”<sup>74</sup> The question Jinkins explores is what it means for communities of faith to utilize this pattern in habitual ways.<sup>75</sup> He explores both a series of psalms as well as situations in which the psalms and the process of lament can enter into the life of the local parish. Congregations that do so exist as “a remembering community, a community whose hope is anchored to its prior experience of the faithfulness of God.”<sup>76</sup> To inhabit these psalms, then, we must do so out of an intimate relationship with God; prepared both

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. While beyond the scope of this review, Jinkins discussion at this point is consistent with a Wesleyan understanding of this creative tension in how we understand God’s sovereignty.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 106.

“to be on speaking terms with God” and to risk everything, a risk named, “faith.”<sup>77</sup> To do this liturgically, Jinkins recommends the season of Advent and in the Easter vigil.<sup>78</sup> He also includes a helpful discussion of how to allow lament to enter more intentionally and specifically into times of grief and mourning that surround death. While this might seem to be an obvious step, Jinkins helps us realize that, in actuality, this does not always happen, and certainly not in theologically appropriate or helpful ways. So often in funeral settings, well-meaning people will speak a variety of spiritualized platitudes that perhaps seek to comfort, but can often do more harm than good. Often the process of grief is short-changed when the move toward celebration is rushed.

Michael Jinkins has written a helpful overview to the biblical genre of lament, the theological framework in which lament should operate and the liturgical settings where it can be nurtured. He challenges us to take seriously the task of lament within the context of the worshipping community of faith. There will be significant benefit to the church and the individuals that make it up as they gather *In the House of the Lord* and seek to inhabit the psalms of lament:

Rather, this is pre-eminently a theological work, an inhabiting of the psalms of lament with those in our contemporary communities who lament so that our voices may be joined to the voices of those who for centuries have cried unto the Lord, and have received assurance that they were heard by the God who shares their suffering and desires for them better things than they can hope or imagine. We discover in these lamentations the remarkable sanity of the psalms, the awareness that God forms and transforms us through the crucible of suffering, that evil and pain will not have the last word, and that God ultimately turns all things to God's own redemptive purposes. The valley of the shadow of death is not our final destination but it is necessary to walk this way if we are to

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 109.



dwell in the house of the Lord.<sup>79</sup>

There are several significant elements that we can take away from the biblical literature that we have explored. Certainly there is the validation of lament as a central theme and practice of the Bible and one that is a primary path of prayer and approaching God. A study of lament in the Bible gives permission, even compels, expressions of lament among God's people. It also places such activity as a form of prayer and even praise and as an act of faith. The practice of crying out in lament cannot be denied. Even our questions of "Why?" and "How long?" are acceptable forms of prayer.

Another principle is that biblical lament, because it is an act of faith and is speech directed towards God, has particular characteristics. It may be full of emotion, sorrow, pain and even anger, but if it is biblical lament it is directed towards God. It is not empty lament or generalized despair. It is the faith-full practice of taking such emotions, questions, and feelings, raw though they may be, to the God who allows us to cry from the depths. Biblical lament also includes the "turn" that comes in almost every example, a turn towards present trust and future praise.

Lament is also a practice that has communal dimensions. While there are certainly examples of individual laments, and even these become communal once they are included in the Psalter and shared with the community, there are also significant examples of corporate lament. Lament is not only to be expressed in our private life of prayer, but in our corporate life of worship, prayer and praise. Lament is not foreign to the sanctuary.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 119-120.

## THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS LITERATURE

It is also important to examine some of the critical theological issues that become the focus in the discussion of lament. The challenge is before us. How do we provide a theological praxis for corporate lament? We begin by acknowledging the reality of sorrow and suffering around us. Too often, we limit such awareness to times of prayer, usually in the simple sharing of prayer requests. We are more comfortable with praise and thanksgiving and keeping things positive. We have a tendency to move the sorrow to the fringe, and in so doing, we are saying much more than we realize about the nature of God, life, and Christian community.

Our goal must be more than mere acknowledgement, however. As we have already seen, we must give people permission to express lament. We must find ways to tell people that there is a place and a way to “lift up their sorrow and offer their pain” (Michael Card); that to do so can be an act of worship, an offering, of sacrifice and trust and praise. We must give opportunities to embrace redemptive suffering (another key concept worthy of exploration) as a way to identify with Christ. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). We need to allow people to experience and explore the depth of lament in their own journey of faith.

All of these issues connect to our understanding of God. When we realize this, we will see how theological underpinnings are present in all of the other literature that informs our understanding of lament. Theological foundations are, of course, present in the view of God that is shaped by the biblical texts of lament. Any psychological literature is also

connected to theological perspectives. Liturgical practices also shape and reflect our understanding of who God is. With this recognition, there are some direct theological issues that are important to our exploration of the topic of lament. One of these issues that intersects lament is our understanding of theodicy.

While we can and will explore the topic of theodicy in some specific theological texts, we also will find it helpful to explore how this real-life issue is found in the every day expressions in our communities and culture. The nature of this theological topic is such that it shows up, either explicitly or implicitly, in any discussion of philosophical and theological responses to suffering. In both of these disciplines the issue of theodicy is raised. These issues are then processed further in pastoral theology in a variety of ways including various practices of lament. It is in the questions and declarations of people in crisis, that the theological issue is most readily raised.

A helpful example of this theological intersection is found in a book by John Swinton, *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. In chapter five, entitled, “Why Me Lord . . . Why Me?” the author describes a situation in 1998 when a car bomb went off in Northern Ireland, killing 28 people and injuring over 200 others.<sup>80</sup> Swinton describes going to church expecting for the situation to be addressed in worship and being shocked that it was not even mentioned.

Clearly there are times we have failed to address even obvious suffering and trauma in the world, much less the individual traumas and sufferings in our communities. These are the times when God’s people need to rediscover the practice and language of lament. He

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<sup>80</sup> John Swinton, *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Response to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 91.

realized that they “had no capacity for dealing with the sadness.”<sup>81</sup> Swinton quotes Walter Brueggemann, “The Lament Psalms offer important resources for Christian faith and ministry, even though they have been largely purged from the life and liturgy of the church. Such purging attests to the alienation between the Bible and the church.”<sup>82</sup> Clearly there is a need to address the reality of the suffering and trauma that enters into life, to face it with the resources of faith so that the people of God can do what the Bible is very ready to do; take our suffering and lament, our sorrow and pain, to the very presence of God. In his book, Swinton shares some examples of contemporary lament as well as thoughts about ways that a congregation can incorporate this biblical pattern into the life of their community of faith.

Another arena for the issue of theodicy is to explore how suffering and religious themes within it are portrayed in films. It is so important to reflect on how our culture understands and processes the understanding of suffering and trauma. Movies are at the heartbeat of our culture; they truly reflect so much of what people actually believe about God. In a journal article entitled “Images of God in the Movies,” Andrew Greeley states, “I believe that images of God are symbols of what people believe about life and death and so they tell us something very important about popular culture and religion.”<sup>83</sup> While there are certainly differences in images of God, particularly as it relates to the problem of evil and suffering, we often see in film what people actually believe about these areas. It is often the case that these theological perspectives are in fact not in line with Scripture

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 92.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 90.

<sup>83</sup> Andrew Greeley. “Images of God in the Movies,” *Journal of Religion and Film*, vol. 1, no. 1 (April 1997): 1.

or orthodox faith. It is also true that these are the very perspectives that are also held by people within the Church. We need to be aware of these assumptions so that we can understand what people really believe about God and suffering and work to correct some of the misconceptions that exist.

There are a host of theological texts that explore the issue of theodicy. Because the focus of this paper and project is centered in the local parish, it is helpful to explore a few of the texts that are accessible to the average church member and can be used by pastors-theologians as they lead and teach their people. One resource that seeks to explore this theological issue for the church is the book, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* by D. A. Carson. This book, “written by a Christian to help other Christians think about suffering and evil,”<sup>84</sup> is a helpful overview of the various approaches that have been taken in dealing with the problem of evil. As such it can serve as a good introduction to the topic. He also includes helpful discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Carson explores a series of tragic situations as he begins, that set up the various reflections on the topic. The basic approach of the book is to show the limitations of many of the theories or approaches that have been suggested in dealing the theodicy. Carson also includes a wide range of biblical texts and themes that must be addressed in any attempt to deal with the problem of suffering and the theological commitments that are at the heart of the topic. Ultimately, both the mystery and the apparent contradictions must be embraced. Carson quotes Richard Vieth from his book, *Holy Power, Human Pain*:

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<sup>84</sup> D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections On Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 11.

Believers are trapped in a dilemma. If they seek an explanation for the apparent incompatibility of God and evil, then it seems that they are trying to take heaven by storm. Yet if they rest their case in mystery, they run the risk of naive credulity, or even of believing self-contradictory nonsense. There really is no escape from this predicament, so we must be content with trying to “muddle through,” as the British so aptly put it. There are no final answers, but surely some answers are better than others. So we seek the best answers we can find, all the while acknowledging the circumambient mystery.<sup>85</sup>

This is, indeed, the challenge with which we are left. We can and should seek the best ways to understand and explain the theological dimensions of evil and suffering, at the same time we must realize that we will never be able to do so fully or to eliminate all aspects of mystery. We must acknowledge that we will always understand only in part, at least on this side of eternity.

Carson also suggests that coming to this resolution of sorts is something that we should seek to absorb before tragedy strikes.<sup>86</sup> He suggests that “the best answer” lies with holding both seemingly contradictions as being true, that God is absolutely sovereign, “but his sovereignty never functions in a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized, or mitigated.”<sup>87</sup> So while holding to God’s sovereignty, Carson also affirms that we are morally responsible creatures and are held accountable for our actions, “but this characteristic never functions as to make God absolutely contingent.”<sup>88</sup> Carson argues that Scripture holds these two truths simultaneously and calls this view

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 179.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

*compatibilism*. He then explores a wide range of biblical texts that highlight these propositions. He further explains:

If compatibilism is true and if God is good—all of which the Bible affirms—then it must be the case that God stands behind good and evil in somewhat different ways; that is, he stands behind good and evil asymmetrically. To put it bluntly, God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the bounds of his sovereignty yet the evil is not morally chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents, to secondary causes. On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty, but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents.<sup>89</sup>

While there is more to Carson's argument, it is important to note that his ultimate call is one of trusting God and being comfortable with the mystery of the tension in believing what we cannot fully comprehend. It seems clear that whatever theological construct one ends up with, this call is one that must be present and is the framework for how to approach lament theologically.

It may also be helpful to explore texts that are widely read, even if some corrective work may need to be done to help parishioners who have read them. In this later case, the value lies in being able to respond to questions raised following the reading of these kinds of books.<sup>90</sup> One of the books that had such an impact since its publication in 1978 is Harold S. Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. While there is more that could be said about this book one particular relevant issue relates to the question, "why?" The book suggests that we must reframe the question so that instead of focusing on the question of "why?" we instead change the question to "now what?" Rabbi Kushner

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>90</sup> One such recent example, though not discussed in this dissertation, is the book, *The Shack*. William P. Young, *The Shack* (Newbury Park, CT: Windblown Media, 2007).

states, "The question we should be asking is not, "Why did this happen to me? What did I do to deserve this?" That is really an unanswerable, pointless question. A better question would be "Now that this has happened to me, what am I going to do about it?"<sup>91</sup> While it should be acknowledged that question of why is ultimately a futile one, for the purposes of a biblical understanding of lament, we must maintain the appropriateness of the question, while affirming that it is not the final answer. It is important to help people move past the view of blaming God as the source of their suffering to an understanding that God is the source of help in their time of trouble. I found this to be such a key element of what Rabbi Kushner has to say. In chapter eight of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, he writes:

God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck, some are caused by bad people, and some are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws. The painful things that happen to us are not punishments for our misbehavior, nor are they in any way part of some grand design on God's part. Because the tragedy is not God's will, we need not feel hurt or betrayed by God when tragedy strikes. We can turn to Him for help in overcoming it, precisely because we can tell ourselves that God is as outraged by it as we are.<sup>92</sup>

What a burden is lifted when God ceases to become the cause, and therefore the enemy, and instead is the One who shares in our suffering, is equally outraged and joins us in the middle of our experience.

Also, in the category of books that have had a wider audience are two works by C.S.

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<sup>91</sup> Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York, NY: Random House, 2001), 149.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 147-148.



Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed*.<sup>93</sup> In these texts we find Lewis exploring the theological questions of theodicy and the nature of God, but also practically responding to tragedy in his own life through lament. *A Grief Observed*, as well as excerpts from the movie *Shadowlands*, gives us a wonderful example of lament. Honesty and even brutally crying out to God in our pain, on the one hand questioning God's presence and yet, bringing that cry to God, we answer that very question, at least in part. Lewis demonstrates a kind of honesty in suffering that we need to embrace and yet also realize that there is a journey to be taken in our grief and suffering and that, by God's grace, we will not allow us to stay in this place forever.

In *A Grief Observed*, Lewis at times struggles to believe that God is present. He writes, "Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. . . . But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence."<sup>94</sup> Even with this struggle of God's perceived absence, it is not the last word, for in Chapter 4 Lewis states, "Turned to God, my mind no longer meets that locked door." This journey through the chaos of grief and suffering to a place of re-engagement with life and even with God is expressed beautifully in the closing line from the movie, *Shadowlands*: "The pain now is part of the happiness. That's the deal."

As we reflect on these issues and themes from theology there are several conclusions that are key for any discussion of lament. First and foremost is that our understanding of God is connected to how we understand and interpret the tragedies of life. Is God the

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<sup>93</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001), C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001)

<sup>94</sup> C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York, NY: Harper One, 2001), 5-6.

source and cause of the evil of this world? Where is God in the midst of our pain and sorrow? It is important to correct any theological misunderstandings so that people can be invited to lift up their sorrow as an act of worship and trust. This can only happen when our theological understanding about God not only allows for this, but also compels it. There is also the need to not hide from the difficult question of theodicy. While we come to realize that, ultimately there will always be a mystery beyond our full comprehension, we must address the issue, acknowledge the challenge and give enough of a framework to navigate through the challenges these questions bring. A final observation lies in the fundamental realization that because of who God is and because of the reality of evil and tragedy in the world, the pain and sorrow can and must be named and addressed among the people of God. Thus our theological understanding of God and of evil, must shape and inform our ecclesiology so that among God's people, these issues are present and encouraged. In the words of a song by Ken Medema, "If this is not a place where tears are understood, where can I go to cry?"<sup>95</sup> Here ecclesiology and doxology must intersect.

### **PSYCHO-SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS LITERATURE**

When addressing the psycho-social literature that shapes and informs our discussion of lament, there are a wide range of themes including the topics of grief and loss as well as the various themes of pastoral care that seek to address them. We must take seriously the way that people respond to tragedy and trials. The way that individuals and communities respond in difficult times must be accounted for and understood even as the possibility of lament is introduced as a significant, biblically-modeled response.

*Pastoral Care in Worship* by Neil Pembroke is a fascinating study of various ways

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<sup>95</sup> Ken Medama, *If This Is Not a Place* from *Through the Eyes of Love*, (Word Music, 1977). The full text of this song is included in Appendix A.

that liturgy and psychology intersect and provide opportunities for pastoral care within the local parish. Following an introduction to pastoral care in worship, Pembroke explores four main themes that he believes are the most crucial and “take us to the heart of the issue of worship as pastoral care and, furthermore, have an association (direct or indirect) with virtually any pastoral concern that one might choose to name”<sup>96</sup> In each of these four themes, *reconciliation*, *lament*, *hope* and *communion*, Pembroke includes the psychological dimension along with the theological/biblical/pastoral discussion. He also includes sample liturgies that demonstrate how the principles he develops can be expressed practically within the local parish. For the purposes of this review, I would like to focus on Pembroke’s introduction of worship as pastoral care and his treatment of the topic of lament.<sup>97</sup>

Pembroke’s *Introduction* is a most helpful exploration of the connection between worship (particularly liturgy) and pastoral care.<sup>98</sup> Even in this short treatment, he is able to get at the very core issue of the topic. Pembroke celebrates the growth and development of pastoral care in study and practice across recent years, but notes that this has focused largely on the area of pastoral counseling and personal ministry (i.e. by the pastor) to individuals and to family units.

A consequence of this is that other dimensions have received less attention than they deserve. Principal amongst these is the role of the faith community in providing care. The gathered congregation has at its

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<sup>96</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care In Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue* (New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010), 4.

<sup>97</sup> While these areas are the most relevant for this research, his discussion of the theme of *Hope* is a related topic that could also be helpful in the study of lament, since Biblical lament almost always includes this turn, a movement towards hope and trust.

<sup>98</sup> The author was first introduced to this theme through William Willimon’s classic book, *Worship as Pastoral Care*, a book that Pembroke also references.

disposal rich resources to share with those who are in need of care, guidance, and nurture. As the members of the congregation minister to each other, they first of all bring their own personal gifts. And second, they participate in the gifts of prayer and worship, preaching, and the sacraments that are offered by the Church.<sup>99</sup>

Pembroke's insight here is helpful in that it begins the discussion about worship as pastoral care in the larger context of the community of faith. It is the significance of what takes place among the gathered people of God, both informally through relationships and more formally through liturgy, including prayer, worship, Scripture, preaching and the sacraments.

While affirming the role of pastoral care as a part of worship, Pembroke does address a potential objection to this connection, namely that making worship a therapeutic endeavor, it has the potential of moving worship away from a theocentric focus to an anthropocentric one.<sup>100</sup> There is a genuine question here that some may be asking, "How is it possible to talk about worship as pastoral care without falling into using worship for our own ends?"<sup>101</sup> It is true that "God is both the subject and object of worship" and so we must keep the chief end of worship in sight as we explore the pastoral care dimensions that it affords.<sup>102</sup> Pembroke rightly expands the definition of worship to include the dimension of "our response to the gracious initiative of God" and this self-disclosure includes God's desire to communicate love for us and a desire to enter into

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<sup>99</sup> Neil Pembroke, *Pastoral Care In Worship*, 1.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 1.

covenantal relationship.<sup>103</sup> Due to these factors, Pembroke suggests that “the sacrifice of praise is the central act in worship; pastoral care is a support act. Or to change the metaphor, ‘the pastoral care that occurs as we are meeting and being met by God in worship is a significant by-product.’”<sup>104</sup> Said another way, “When people come together faithfully and lovingly to worship God, they create a unique space for the operation of divine grace and mercy.”<sup>105</sup>

Pembroke’s contention that worship as pastoral care is an appropriate topic when we realize that it is a “support act,” is significant. His expansion of the definition of worship is also an important element in the discussion of worship as pastoral care. Pembroke could even go further in making the point that this broadened understanding of worship includes encounter with God, and encounters with God are to include the opportunity for transformation. It is certainly possible that in the refocusing of worship to ensure that God is the center and the focus, there has been an over-correction, one that forgets that while the primary movement is from us to God (remembering that this is only possible because of God’s prior movement to us), there are other dimensions to the flow of worship that include our own transformation, our relationships with others and our mission in the world.

Pembroke’s discussion of lament is explored under “The Therapeutics of Complaint,” the heading he uses for the lament portion of the book. He includes two chapters, “Asserting Ourselves Before God” and “Praying Our Anger.” While Pembroke begins with a short introduction to the topic of lament that includes the recognition of our need

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 3.

for lament, its presence in the Bible and its absence in much of the modern Church, it is in the psychological dimensions of lament that he offers a unique contribution. Pembroke suggests that “there are ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ forms of complaint in the biblical tradition. First we find angry, almost violent, outbursts against God. But at the same time there are prayers of protest with the hard edges taken off.”<sup>106</sup> This milder approach can be in two forms: “prayer in which the complaint is hidden within a petition” or “the protest is covered over with an affirmation of trust.”<sup>107</sup> Pembroke suggests that these milder approaches are easier for western Christians to accept, or at the least, are more helpful when introducing the concept and practice of lament.

Lament practices are missing from much of contemporary worship according to Pembroke. “While worship leaders have been more or less successful in facilitating a joyful celebration of God’s presence with us, they have generally struggled in their liturgical response to the hiddenness of God.”<sup>108</sup> Lament, Pembroke argues, requires a relationship and posture of assertiveness with God. This has not always been acknowledged in much of our theological traditions. He includes a brief exploration of the approach towards sorrow and lament in the theological perspective of Augustine, Calvin and Barth. Augustine’s theology is summarized as a call to confess our suffering, or at least what it signifies.<sup>109</sup> Calvin’s theology is summarized by a call to bear suffering patiently.<sup>110</sup> Barth’s perspective on suffering is characterized by an ultimate move to

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

joy.<sup>111</sup> With these examples of theology that move us away from true lament, it should not be surprising that such practices are lacking.<sup>112</sup>

By exploring psychological research on assertiveness, Pembroke connects lament and the ability in an intimate relationship to be able to give voice to your true feelings. Assertiveness, often misunderstood and therefore seen as a negative, is actually the ability a person has “to actively defend, pursue, and speak out for his or her interests.”<sup>113</sup> Just as this quality is important in a marriage relationship, so, too, our relationship with God is strengthened by its presence.

As has already been mentioned, when we seek to include lament in contemporary worship, Pembroke suggests that in most cases softer forms are adequate. “Moreover, in their wrestling with the hiddenness of God, to have the opportunity simply to put the questions why and how long will be healing and renewing. This will be enough for most worshippers.”<sup>114</sup> Referencing Nancy Duff, Pembroke suggests that just as there is a call to repentance each Sunday, so there should be regular practices of calling people to lament, if not weekly, than at least monthly. “The point is that the practice of lament needs to be a regular feature of our Sunday worship.”<sup>115</sup>

While softer forms of lament will normally be sufficient, Pembroke does make space for certain situations where the hard form of lament, expressions of anger, may be needed.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

To make a space for feelings of anger in worship is to take worshipers into a tumultuous, disturbing, and uncomfortable place. It is not a place that we should go to too often. We don't need to. Let the worship of the Lord be mostly joyful and celebratory. God's boundless grace and love should indeed warm our hearts and fill our mouths with praise. But . . . there are people who are experiencing spiritual vertigo, who have been knocked off-balance by an encounter with the dark and ugly side of life, who are feeling acutely the fact that life isn't fair. They are angry about all this, and they are angry with God. Reclaiming the lament tradition for contemporary worship validates these kinds of feelings and allows for their expression. Such expression, in turn, opens up the possibility of at least partial resolution.<sup>116</sup>

Again, drawing from psychological research on the nature of anger, Pembroke makes another important observation: while venting our anger is healthy, by itself, it does not bring about resolution. It also requires some cognitive reinterpretation.<sup>117</sup> "Our liturgies of anger need to do more than simply give vent to our annoyance with God; they also need to include theological pointers in the direction of resolution."<sup>118</sup> Anger needs to lead to or be accompanied by cognitive changes.<sup>119</sup> Some examples of these are saving Grace and what Pembroke calls, "divine solidarity," that "God does not stand aloof from our pain and suffering."<sup>120</sup> He points out examples from the Psalms of prayers of lament that include both anger and cognitive reinterpretation and suggests that contemporary worship

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 77.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 80.



can include this move from “angry complaint to hopeful praise.”<sup>121</sup> In introducing liturgies of anger, we must have pastoral wisdom and prepare our people by preaching on the topic and having already laid the groundwork of using the softer forms of lament. The chapter concludes with several examples of prayers of anger.

*Pastoral Care in Worship* is a most helpful addition to the literature of worship as pastoral care in general and in particular, lament in worship. Pembroke’s blending of Scripture, theology, liturgy and psychology is done in a balanced and appropriate way, one that provides insight into particular issues that must be faced in the exploration of these themes. He certainly demonstrates that pastoral care can and should be an intentional dimension of worship in the local church.

Another resource that addresses the psycho-social foundations that is especially beneficial is from an article by Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger entitled “Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care.” Two insights are especially helpful. The first is that in any situation of suffering it is vital to remember the uniqueness of the individual and to give credence to the experience of that individual. Hunsinger writes:

Its meaning will be different for each person because our way of making narrative sense of our lives is utterly unique. Thus, feeling overwhelmed or immobilized is a variable that cannot be predicted by either the nature, magnitude or intensity of the triggering event. “Consequently,” writes Carolyn Yoder, “a traumatic reaction needs to be treated as valid, regardless of how the event that induced it appears to anyone else.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>122</sup> Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger. “Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care,” *Theology Today* Vol. 68 (April 2011), 59.

Too often people will minimize losses or suffering in others.<sup>123</sup> We must not try to convince those who are dealing with some loss or suffering, that it really is not a “big deal.” Since people respond differently to loss, we must always accept the possibility that people will respond in different ways.

A second helpful insight from Hunsinger’s article is her focus on lament as a significant and helpful means to respond to suffering or trauma. She writes:

We thus facilitate healing when we help the afflicted cry out their sorrow, rage and tears to God. Prayers of lament—crying out to God for deliverance—seem to be faith’s only alternative to despair. Instead of protecting themselves against the pain, the afflicted are encouraged to go down into it, clinging to God’s promises as they do so.<sup>124</sup>

When we explore lament we are confronted with the universality of suffering. While, of course it would be fairly self-evident that everyone shares the possibility and likely reality of suffering in various degrees, the issue goes beyond even that. We find this theme to be common to every people and time and also inter-connected with the very history of our understanding of trauma, grief and stress. A brief study of the history of trauma can be extremely helpful. We learn from such an inquiry, through the work of authors such as van der Kolk, Weisaeth and Hart, how interconnected this history has been and how conditions such as PTSD<sup>125</sup> had been interpreted and understood (or misunderstood) through various chapters of human history. They write, “Awareness of the role of psychological trauma in the genesis of various psychiatric problems has waxed

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<sup>123</sup> This theme will be one that is developed further in the area of ambiguous loss.

<sup>124</sup> Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger, “Bearing the Unbearable,” 59.

<sup>125</sup> Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

and waned throughout the history of psychiatry.”<sup>126</sup> They go on to explore how further understanding developed through various wars as well as through the responses to abuse and other trauma. While it took time, eventually it was more readily understood that regardless of the source of the traumatic experience (war, rape, domestic abuse, disaster, etc.) the impact and effect of these stressors has some similar ground; this is not to assume that there is homogeneity in every case. There is still the need to understand the unique causes and effects in instances of trauma. What this does highlight is the potential for significant impact of a variety of traumatic experiences and as such, no situation should be minimized or ignored. While we would likely accept the traumatic impact of violent acts, we cannot minimize the potential impact of *any* trauma or suffering. This has particular relevance to our incorporation of lament. We must provide opportunities for lament not only in traumas such as death, but also other areas of suffering that may not be given the same “place” in our thinking. There are many areas of ambiguous loss, that lead to genuine suffering and grief and may also be traumatic in nature. It is to this topic that we now turn.

One of the central voices in the theory of ambiguous loss is Pauline Boss, Emeritus Professor and Clinical Supervisor of Marriage and Family Therapy at the University of Minnesota. She is the author of two primary books on this topic, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live With Unresolved Grief* (2000) and *Loss, Trauma and Resilience: Therapeutic Work with Ambiguous Loss* (2006). In a chapter entitled “Frozen Grief”<sup>127</sup>,

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<sup>126</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, Lars Weisaeth, *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society* (Guilford Press: New York, New York, 1996), 47.

<sup>127</sup> The term “Frozen Grief” is a helpful way to understand ambiguous loss since a primary characteristic is the experience of being stuck because there is no clear way to process the loss that is being experienced.

Boss describes two primary types of ambiguous loss. The first deals with people who are perceived as “*physically* absent but psychologically present, because it’s unclear whether they are dead or alive.”<sup>128</sup> Examples of this type of loss in its catastrophic form include missing soldiers, kidnapped children, but there are other examples as in adoption or divorce. “In the second type of ambiguous loss, a person is perceived as *physically* present but *psychologically* absent.”<sup>129</sup> Examples of this type include people dealing with Alzheimer’s disease, addiction, chronic mental illness or physical trauma that leaves a person dramatically changed. In later chapters, Boss will explore these two types of ambiguous loss with the helpful designations of “Leaving Without Goodbye” (Chapter 2) and “Goodbye Without Leaving” (Chapter 3).

Boss’ basic premise is “that ambiguous loss is the most stressful kind of loss. It defies resolution and creates long-term confusion about who is in or out of a particular couple or family. With death, there is official certification of loss, and mourning rituals allow one to say goodbye. With ambiguous loss, none of these markers exist. The persisting ambiguity blocks cognition, coping, meaning-making and freezes the grief process.”<sup>130</sup> She also believes that it is “a relational disorder, and not an individual pathology. It follows, then, that family – and community-based interventions – as opposed to individual therapy – will be less resisted and thus more effective.”<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Pauline Boss, *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 8.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>130</sup> Pauline Boss, *Loss, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic Work with Ambiguous Loss* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), xvii.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, xviii.

As Boss explores ways to help those dealing with ambiguous loss, she also deals with the need for ritual and the challenge that exists when traditional rituals are not possible or deemed “normal” or “appropriate.” This theme is addressed even in the foreword to the book, written by Carlos E. Sluzki. “Rituals help, *unless* they cannot be performed, as when ambiguity of circumstances make a ritual socially inappropriate and a display of emotion questionable.”<sup>132</sup> The challenge of ambiguous loss is the inherent ambiguity that defies “closure.”

Taking ambiguous loss seriously is important to the exploration of lament because it is vital that we are sensitive to people’s need for expressing their grief, sorrow, and loss even when they have not experienced a more “traditional” loss. People need to express lament in situations other than death. Divorce, disease, trauma, distressing circumstances, all may need to be processed through lament and when liturgies of lament are offered, people with these experiences should be included. The concern for people dealing with ambiguous loss leads to a range of additional issues beyond the examples that Pauline Boss identifies. The loss of a dream, death of a pet, loss of a job, retirement, the inability to bear children, a failure of some kind, all are representative of this broader category to be included in loss, grief, and thus, lament.

There are several conclusions that we can make from the psycho-social literature that we have reviewed. Certainly the realization that loss and suffering are real issues that have unique characteristics must be reinforced. They cannot be simply spiritualized and expected to disappear. There will always need to be a process, a journey through grief, loss, suffering, and pain. This must be understood and time must be given for people to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid, xiv.

go through this process. It will be as unique as each individual is unique. It cannot be rushed and it certainly cannot be bypassed. Lament, therefore, must function in this space and is a vital and necessary part of the process. We must give time and space and permission for the airing of hurt, pain, sorrow, loss, grief, and tears. We also need to heed the reminders from the concept of ambiguous loss that it is not only the more obvious hurts that need this. There are types of loss that people need to grieve that others may not understand or validate. As has already been mentioned, there are a whole range of categories of loss that go beyond the central types that Pauline Boss addresses, all of which are things for which people could and should be able to lament.

### **LITURGICAL FOUNDATIONS LITERATURE**

A final category of literature when looking at the topic of lament is resources that explore how lament can be practiced in the worship life of the church. We must find ways to incorporate communal lament into the worship practices of the church. With few resources seemingly available, this is an area of need for the Church to begin to explore. In lieu of available resources, creative care should be used to develop context-specific ways that give opportunities to learn how to express the cries that are “out of the depths” (Psalm 130:1).

This need is reflected in an article by Alicia Walker entitled, “The Church in Trauma at Worship.” Even this title is telling. There are many times when the people of God together are experiencing trauma, suffering or adversity or at least are aware of and connected to, the suffering of others. It is in this setting that the “revelation of God may take place through scripture, prayer, song, and proclamation, and the congregation is

called to respond both personally and corporately.”<sup>133</sup> In reading about the process that one church went through in planning a service of lament and also seeing the content of that service, I was reminded of how important this aspect of role and responsibility is. Truly, this is worship as pastoral care. Truly, this is a needed dimension of the spiritual life of the community of faith. We need to grieve and lament corporately. Walker writes:

The response of our congregation indicated their deep appreciation of the opportunity to grieve together in community. Our bonds as a church family were strengthened as our staff worked together to shape this service of worship, and as our congregation shared their questions, doubts, fears, prayers, and hopes. Likewise, the congregation was able to offer something of itself, spiritually and tangibly, to people in great need. Within the dialogue of worship, God was revealed as the One who could hear our doubts and fears without faltering in love and compassion for us. We could then respond with our whole selves, pouring out our grief, offering our own compassion for those in devastation, and clinging to the hope that somehow God’s purposes might be accomplished.<sup>134</sup>

What a powerful reminder of how important the people of God gathered in worship is to the journey through trauma and suffering.

*Worship Seeking Understanding* by John D. Witvliet is a series of essays on the practice of Christian worship and seeks to bring together theory and practice. It also attempts to bridge the various threads of theology, Biblical studies, music and worship arts. This is even illustrated in how the book is structured. The book is divided into five parts: Biblical Studies, Theological Studies, Historical Studies, Musical Studies and Pastoral Studies. Witvliet is intentionally bringing together a variety of Christian traditions into this discussion of worship practices, thus making it applicable to a wide spectrum of the Christian Church. The author provides a very helpful resource for anyone

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<sup>133</sup> Alicia Walker, “The Church in Trauma at Worship.” *Review & Expositor* Vol. 105 (Spring 2008), 323.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

involved in the ministry of worship in the local parish as well as a helpful blend of academic insight and practical application.

The focus of this review is on the ways in which Witvliet's book addresses the topic of lament in Christian worship. Lament is directly addressed in one chapter in the book, as well as in other sections where the issue of lament is also raised. My intent is to explore relevant insights that the author shares and to summarize significant principles that the book provides for the practice of lament in the local parish.

Witvliet includes an essay on lament as a part of his Biblical Studies section. This essay, "Praise and Lament in the Psalms and in Liturgical Prayer" serves as a helpful introduction to the place of lament in the worship life of the local parish. Drawing upon Brueggeman's concept of the journey from orientation to disorientation to reorientation, Witvliet seeks to demonstrate how lament serves as a necessary counterbalance to the celebratory praise that often dominates worship in the church.<sup>135</sup> He makes it clear that there is an interdependent relationship between lament and praise, that in the life of the worshipper there is a movement that takes place from the one to the other. "Lament and praise are incomplete without the other, lest praise, particularly general or descriptive praise, be misunderstood as smug satisfaction or lament be understood as a denial or refusal of grace."<sup>136</sup>

Witvliet's thesis is that worship must seek to "broaden its affective range" and that "we must be far more intentional about how we achieve this, learning from the Psalms

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<sup>135</sup> Witvliet, *Worship Seeking Understanding*, 39.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 40.



themselves how to sound our laments and praises with poise and passion.”<sup>137</sup> He summarizes the range that should be included in our worship using language from Nicholous Wolterstorff: “the trumpets of joy, the ashes of repentance and the tears of lament.”<sup>138</sup> This is helpful language as we seek to find authentic ways for all three to be expressed in the worshipping life of the Church. Pastoral care must be given to know how to respond to circumstances in the lives of our people or in our world so that worship does not come across like “a bright façade.”<sup>139</sup> How we handle these moments, when lament is called for, “may say more about the gospel we proclaim than a year’s worth of sermons”<sup>140</sup>

The strategy that Witvliet suggests begins with direct use of the Psalter and then, with jazz-like improvisation, continues by structuring contemporary expressions of lament using the basic pattern that we learn from the prayers of the Psalms. It requires a bold use of lament, bringing theodicy right into the context of corporate worship.<sup>141</sup> The basic pattern he suggests begins with directing prayer to God, continuing with bold lament and specific petition, and concluding with statements of hope, confidence and trust.<sup>142</sup>

Witvliet includes several specific examples and techniques for utilizing lament in worship. In addition to the direct use of the Psalms, he also suggests improvising with the Psalm text or alternating it with direct petition about a current situation, thus creating a

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 44.

type of lament litany. Liturgical prayer also becomes a key way to incorporate lament into worship, as we help guide people through the cycle of lament and praise. It is important to note that these practices not only help the individual, but also, because of the corporate nature of worship, “provides a way for individuals caught up in isolated and lonely struggles with tragedy or injustice to find a voice in a community of worshippers”<sup>143</sup>

There is also a helpful discussion of how lament can be expressed through the liturgical year, demonstrating how the various seasons, such as Advent, Lent, and Good Friday can be effective times of walking through patterns of lament. Witvliet suggests that in the various cycles of the Christian year we find a corresponding pattern to the one found in the Psalms and in the process of lament.

Every year, time and time again, we journey from the eschatological lament of Advent to the profound adoration of the incarnate Christ at Christmas and Epiphany, from the baptismal, soul-searching of Lent to the unbridled praise of Easter morning. This yearly journey provides ready-made moments to give voices to the cries and acclamations of people at every point in the journey of faith.<sup>144</sup>

Beyond the broader patterns of the yearly cycle, Witvliet does offer some suggestions, though not as many, for how lament can function in the weekly worship experiences of the people of God. His suggestion is that we can find ways to reflect this same cycle in the way that our weekly worship is structured. While the thrust of the lament cycle is tied to confession (and the classical prayer, *kyrie eleison*) and the praise component (and the classical prayer, *gloria in excelsis Deo*) there is a helpful framework in which to shape

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 50.

and form worship to include space for this range of expressions, lament and praise.<sup>145</sup> It is important to see that confession of sin does function as a form of lament. The author also explores ways that intercessory prayer can serve as a vehicle for lament in weekly services of worship. It is clear that Witvliet believes we must take seriously the reality that on any given Sunday the church, “includes people of praise and people of lament – people whose silence and pain crave release and people whose joy seeks resonance in community.”<sup>146</sup>

In addition to the one essay that directly focuses on the place of lament in the worshipping life of the local parish, Witvliet’s book raises the issue of lament in a variety of other ways. In his section on Musical Studies, he includes an essay on *The Spirituality of the Psalter in Calvin’s Geneva*. Here, the discussion begins with an analysis of the pattern of what types of Psalms were included, with the majority being either wisdom or psalms of confession.<sup>147</sup> Additionally, “the other striking pattern in the early metrical psalms is the predominance of psalms that either lament or reflect on trouble caused by the psalmist’s enemy. In fact, this tendency is so marked that psalms of praise are strikingly underrepresented.”<sup>148</sup> Witvliet suggests that Genevan spirituality was shaped with psalms of lament.<sup>149</sup>

In his essay, *Soul Food for the People of God*, the author explores music as a means of spiritual nourishment. In particular, he focuses on ways that songs of lament and hope

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 209.

can provide help in times of crisis. “Our songs of lament and hope form us as people of faith and hope.”<sup>150</sup> Often music can give voice to the deep cries of the soul, for when “words fail us, music gives us something to say.”<sup>151</sup>

Witvliet’s book concludes with a section on Pastoral Studies and the final essay is entitled *How Common Worship Forms Us for Our Encounter With Death*. He points out how seemingly reticent modern individuals are to discuss death. “We have quarantined death from casual conversation.”<sup>152</sup> Yet, Christians are called to “die well” and “Christianity is nothing if not a way to think about death.”<sup>153</sup> More than once, the author makes the case that dying well requires frank candor and honest lament. He then completes the cycle (or balances the issue) by stating that it also requires resilient hope.<sup>154</sup> Truly the subject of death, as well as our funeral practices, must be shaped and informed by this cycle of lament and hope, trust, praise. Only then can we be authentically Christian.

*Worship Seeking Understanding* is a beneficial work for the broad area of worship studies and practice. It is also a helpful addition to the specific discussion of lament. It shares valuable insight into a variety of worship areas that will benefit pastors, worship leaders and anyone who seeks to broaden their understanding of the theology and praxis of worship studies. Witvliet’s broad and balanced approach adds much to the general topic of worship and also the specific place of lament within worship.

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 292.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 292.

*Lament* is a series of essays by faculty members at Princeton Theological Seminary that explore the place and function of lament within the ministry context of the local parish. This project was born out of the experience of the Princeton faculty through a two and a half-year period where they lost several members and spouses. “Through those months, the seminary community cried out again and again in prayer individually, in small gatherings, and in community-wide worship. We often found in the psalms of lament the most fitting voice for our prayer.”<sup>155</sup> This serves, not only as the context for the book, but also a significant thesis of any study of the place of lament in the local setting. Brown also gives the central settings in which lament can and must be addressed; individually, in small groups and in the body as a whole, gathered together in worship.

In the introduction, Brown and Miller make the case for the need to rediscover the practice of lament, though they point out that this rediscovery of the biblical language of lament began as early as the late 1990’s and into the early 2000’s.<sup>156</sup> They also explore some of the basic features of biblical lament, including the fundamental place of complaint -- complaint that moves to trust. Not only this, but “The complaint is itself an act of trust.”<sup>157</sup>

The core of the book is structured in three parts, *Reclaiming Lament in Christian Prayer and Proclamation*, *Loss and Lament -- Human and Divine*, and *Reclaiming the Public Voice of Lament*. In part one, the focus begins with the chapter, “Rediscovering Lamentation as a Practice in the Church.” There is the need to find biblical ways of

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<sup>155</sup> Brown, *Lament*, xiii.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid*, xiv.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, xv.

dealing with the realities of grief, loss, despair and even anger. One of the challenges for the church is the common notion that faith should not “acknowledge and embrace negativity.”<sup>158</sup> This is a significant challenge facing any serious discussion of lament. It is vital to see that when we genuinely take our grief and loss to God, it is an act of faith. It reminds us that there is nothing we may face in life that cannot be taken to God.<sup>159</sup>

Certainly the question of negativity is critical to the recovery of lament and challenges the contemporary to find balance in its emphasis on celebration and positivity. Neither of these should be denied, but truly there is the need to temper the trend by creating space for lament. Brown and Miller illustrate this need by highlighting the percentage of psalms of lament in the Psalter versus the percentage of readings or hymns of lament in a variety of hymnals.<sup>160</sup> Even in our funeral practices we need to restore lament as well as to provide liturgy for a variety of community and individual tragedies.

Part one of the book includes a discussion of lament as prayer and the various “voices” present in any prayer of lament. According to Patrick Miller, these are the human voice, the voice of Christ and the voice of the world.<sup>161</sup> Said another way, there is the experience of the individual, in a particular context or circumstance, that prays the prayer of lament, but this voice is always joined by the voice of Christ who enters into our pain and sorrow on the very basis of his own experience here on earth, most significantly, on the cross. In a remarkable statement Miller writes, “Jesus died for our

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibd*, 4.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

suffering as much as our sins.”<sup>162</sup> When we listen to Christ’s voice, we realize that our prayer of lament is not the only one. This compels us to hear the voices of suffering in the world.<sup>163</sup> Part one concludes with a discussion of how lament shapes preaching, followed by an example of a sermon on lament.

Part two explores various experiential realities when dealing with pain and loss. Lament is born out of our common woundedness. Because we live in a world “destined for glory yet still unredeemed,” we will “lament even as we rejoice.”<sup>164</sup> This need for lament is not something we will outgrow or a stage to move past.<sup>165</sup> Lament speaks to our vulnerability and thus allows for a level of authenticity that is not possible if lament is denied. There is a sorrow that is tied to the very sorrow of God (Chapter 8, *Jesus’ Cry, God’s Cry and Ours*). This solidarity is part of the basis for the connection between lament and trust. This tension is explored in an excellent article by Ellen Cherry, *May We Trust God and (Still) Lament? Can We Lament and (Still) Trust God?* While much in life would point to a negative response, Cherry seeks to answer in the affirmative, making a case that, in fact, only a believer can truly lament, because “without hope, one cannot lament, for there is no meaningful pattern to be disrupted.”<sup>166</sup> We must seek a theological and experiential tension that acknowledges that life is harsh, yet does not despair of its beauty.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 96.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 97.

The final section of the book focuses on “Reclaiming the Public Voice of Lament.” Here the essays explore lament in the African-American tradition (particularly as expressed through spirituals), the cries of those (particularly women) ravished by war around the globe, and a discussion of Ezra’s lament as a lens through which to see present day circumstances in our world. The book concludes with another sermon of lament, based on the apocalyptic language from the Book of Revelation. These various contemporary applications of the need for and response of lament, give a very compelling example of how lament can and should be recovered in the “pulpit, pew and public square.” Using lament, we do not deny the sorrow, nor do we miss the hope “that is blended with the sorrow.”<sup>168</sup> We find, right in the middle of our despair, that voice of hope, a sacred moment where, perhaps finally, “tears flow at last. These are moments that could bind humankind into one family.”<sup>169</sup>

*Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew and Public Square* is a most helpful series of essays on the topic of lament that help guide such a recovery. Truly there is a need to restore the biblical language and practice of lament for our day. This work by Brown and Miller, et. al. goes a long way to leading such a revival. This lament is not whining, nor a faith-less exercise, rather, a cry from the depths by one “who believes in the truth that despite all you see, God is in control.”<sup>170</sup>

Looking at liturgical foundations for lament must also include the role of preaching. *Spirit Speech* by Luke Powery is a fascinating homiletic text that explores the role of the

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 139.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 149.



Holy Spirit in preaching. Powery is writing to develop “an ecumenical pneumatology for preaching.”<sup>171</sup> Powery makes a significant contribution to the place of lament as well as to the ways in which lament is balanced with celebration. The author suggests that in liturgy and in preaching, such a balance is needed. He states that “homiletical worship is not limited to celebration nor is it tainted by lament.”<sup>172</sup> Much of Powery’s discussion of lament flows from the backdrop of the African-American experience. “One can view the black religious experience as the ‘meeting of God in the depth of despair and loneliness of slavery.’”<sup>173</sup> This tradition of lament can be seen in the music of the spirituals or “sorrow songs” of the black tradition.<sup>174</sup> This connection continues with the longing for a better world, the groans of the Spirit, the future hope that also has a strong eschatological dimension.<sup>175</sup> This is balanced with celebration, which also is dominant in the African-American church, so preaching must include both lament and praise, both crucifixion and resurrection. Quoting James Harris, “Black preaching is indeed exciting and jubilant, but it is also sad and reflective. It represents the ebb and flow of the Holy Spirit that correlates with the ups and downs of life. It reflects the reality of context and experience. Additionally, it is a creative interplay between joy and sorrow, freedom and oppression, justice and injustice. . . . It reflects the power of the church in the presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>176</sup> As these two poles come together, we find, at their intersection, the heart of the

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<sup>171</sup> Powery, *Spirit Speech*, 133.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Good News. It is present even in the language of tears and lament and is a vital part of the journey towards healing, wholeness and joy.<sup>177</sup> In fact, referencing Walter Brueggeman, Powery notes that “if praise does not include pain, it is a false world.”<sup>178</sup>

The biblical witness demonstrates individuals and communities approaching God, not only in joy, but also in sorrow. Celebration, therefore, needs to be paired with lament, another faithful response of worship to God who should be praised in the midst of both joyful and sorrowful occasions. This giving of worship itself is only possible through the Spirit's operation. Lament, stemming from the Spirit, can be an appropriate way of addressing human failure or loss before God; and celebration, sparked by the Spirit, is an appropriate way of acknowledging God's ongoing care.<sup>179</sup>

Powery's work adds a great deal to the discussion of lament for the practice of the local church. His hope is “that Christian preachers who practice lament will embrace these groans of the Spirit as crucial to the development of a mature homiletic. Lament is vital for homiletical studies because it provides a theological language that embraces God and human suffering simultaneously, therefore maintaining the truthfulness and "Christic center" of our preaching.”<sup>180</sup> Those who proclaim God's word and truth need to be committed to nurturing both lament and celebration in preaching, to faithfully provide for God's people knowledge, language and permission for lament to take place.

In *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, Walter Brueggemann lays out a biblical-theological homiletic study that draws upon Israel's experience of Babylonian

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 98.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 134.

captivity and suggests that it can serve as a helpful model for how preaching should operate in our day and age. Brueggemann builds on previous work as he lays out this framework. He states, “I have elsewhere proposed that the Old Testament experience of and reflection upon exile is a helpful metaphor for understanding our current faith situation in the U.S. church, and a model for pondering new forms of ecclesiology.”<sup>181</sup> This work is an extension of previous work and connecting the exilic context to the task of preaching. In this connection, he defines exile as not primarily geographical, but social, moral and cultural.<sup>182</sup> While not universally recognized, Brueggemann suggests that the Church in the United States needs to fully realize the extent to which it exists as an exilic community.<sup>183</sup> The book explores the implications of this reality and how its acceptance should shape the way communication takes place within the community of faith, particularly in the context of preaching. This context includes remembering that we are preaching to the people of God who are in exile. “The future is not to be wrought by our busy, educated hands, but by the faithfulness of God. The community at the margin, when it functions at all, is a community of intense, trustful waiting.”<sup>184</sup>

While *Cadences of Home* is an insightful and helpful resource for the general task of preaching, this review will focus on ways that Brueggeman’s work informs the topic of lament for the local parish. The book connects to the topic of lament in four primary

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<sup>181</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>183</sup> It may be that this point had a greater need to be emphasized at the time of the writing of his book, and that today, there would be broader acceptance of the reality that Brueggemann suggests as the context for his thesis.

<sup>184</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *Cadences of Home*, 105.

ways. First, Brueggemann makes direct references to the topic of lament. At the heart of exile is an experience of loss, a loss for which lament is a natural and necessary response. “Exiles must grieve their loss and express their resentful sadness about what was and now is not and will never again be.”<sup>185</sup> Brueggemann suggests that, as people of exile, we are called to be “communities of honest sadness, naming the losses.”<sup>186</sup> This is precisely what is needed as communities of faith take seriously the call to give time, space and language for people to truly express lament. Brueggemann states that lament is, in fact, one of the first responsibilities of people in exile.<sup>187</sup> “Sadness, pain, and indignation are not inappropriate responses to the loss, either then or now. They require abrasive, insistent speech to be available, and ancient Israel gives us a script for our own daring representation of the trouble.”<sup>188</sup>

Second, Brueggemann focuses on the exile through Biblical texts that include lament (most notably, Jeremiah and Lamentations). Even though Brueggemann is focusing on the period of the exile, there are other Biblical references that include lament. These include the Psalms and Job. In each case, Brueggemann suggests that the candor, sorrow and complaint are relevant and appropriate, then and now. He also points to the future hope that is present in these expressions of lament. Speaking of a poem from Isaiah, “The poem is candid. It acknowledges hopelessness, abandonment, and despair. It concedes that the present moment is a moment of God’s angry abuse and painful silence. That, however, is only for a moment; then the *hesed* of God will be activated and life

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 17.

restored.<sup>189</sup>

A third way that Brueggeman's book connects to the topic of lament is in the basic emotive context. People in exile exist in disorientation and so there is the natural response of lament. Closely tied to this is an inherent longing for a future reality that does not currently exist in all of its fullness. Situations of "exile" often mean that "paradigms of meaning are shattered" and the speech that is needed names a world that speaker and hearer alike have "never known before this utterance."<sup>190</sup> The experience of disorientation, discussed at length in other examples of Brueggemann's writing, is an important piece of his argument here.<sup>191</sup> This despair/disorientation, however, is never the final word. There always remains the promise of hope. This, Brueggemann posits, is the primary means of survival in exile, namely, "the intense practice of hope."<sup>192</sup> Lament also includes this transition to hope.

A final way that *Cadences of Home* is a helpful resource for the topic of lament is that the form of communication that Brueggemann discusses lends itself to preaching, teaching, and worship that is focused on lament. He suggests that the homiletic and pastoral use of the exilic texts give us a way to address people today that face feelings of disorientation, loss and the apparent absence of God. "I suggest that these texts might be useful resources for ministry, if we understand them as a recovery of sacrament as a way to 'host the holy' in a context of profane absence."<sup>193</sup> He goes on to introduce the concept

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>191</sup> Such as Brueggemann's classic work, *The Prophetic Imagination*.

<sup>192</sup> Walter Brueggeman, *Cadences of Home*, 105.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 8.

of “the second addressee,” a reference to others who “overhear” the cry of lament or the prophetic call that is spoken primarily either to God or God’s people.<sup>194</sup> In the case of the time of the exile, this included the dominant system around them (the Babylonian captors). It is interesting to reflect how this concept can be extrapolated to benefit those who may not presently be experiencing disorientation. When they participate in giving voice to the pain and loss of another, or simply overhearing the cries of those expressing their lament to God, this function of the “the second addressee” can be a helpful principle when we discuss practices of corporate lament for the local parish. One of the key challenges for including lament in the parish setting is addressing the reality that some are at a place of *orientation* and others are at a place of *disorientation*, to use Brueggemann’s language. Those facing disorientation may or may not be present in the particular corporate setting. Often it will be necessary for those who are in a place of orientation to initiate the response of lament on behalf of those in a place of disorientation. As lament is addressed and practiced homiletically and liturgically, those who are in a place of orientation may need to function as second addressees.

*Cadences of Home* is a significant text that addresses critical needs for the contemporary Church. It gives a framework for approaching the homiletic task in the world in which we find ourselves. For anyone interested in the topic of lament, it also serves as a helpful resource. Everyone who ministers for Christ’s Kingdom needs to remember that we serve in a disorienting reality. This fact, however, while challenging, is best processed when we remember that we are not the first to experience such a reality. There are lessons to be learned and principles to be applied as we continue to preach and

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 89.

teach “among exiles.”

## LITERATURE SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The resources that have been explored invite us to practice lament throughout the life of the gathered people of God. Lament is an important topic to address in all aspects of worship, from preaching, to prayer, to music, and through a variety of other sacred actions. Sorrow and tears must not be banished from the sanctuary, but embraced as a faith-full act of worship. It may take place in response to tragedies in the life of the community or in broader context of the nation and world. It may be expressed in the midst of personal and family trials. It may be expressed in times of death, but must not be limited to those times. It can take place through giving attention to the full breadth of Scripture, especially the Psalter.

Lament takes place in the nexus of sorrow and complaint, but for lament to be lament it usually includes a turn that involves a commitment to present trust in God and a commitment to present, or at least future, praise. What bridges these two realities is relationship, another key element in biblical lament. “Biblical lament, while it does include tears, pleas, complaints and protests, is something more. It is the experience of loss suffered within the context of *relatedness*. A relationship of trust, intimacy, and love is a necessary precondition for genuine lament.”<sup>195</sup>

Because of these realities, lament is a risk. It risks the world as it is and cries out for a world that is different. There is a “double risk” in lament that Scott Ellington refers to in his book, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament*.

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<sup>195</sup> Scott Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World Through Prayers of Lament* (Princeton Theological Monograph, Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2008), 7.

To lament, though, is to refuse to accept things as they are, to protest God's continued silence, and to press God for deliverance. To lament is to embark on a journey of double risk. First of all, to lament in the face of loss is to admit openly that things have gone horribly wrong. It requires that we turn loose of the ordered world that anchors reality and gives meaning and structure to life. To lament is to cast into doubt, to challenge, and perhaps even finally reject the "standing answers" that heretofore have provided a framework in which to understand God.<sup>196</sup>

Ellington continues, and shares the other risk that lament demands we take. "A second risk taken in the act of lament is that of newness. . . . To risk newness requires a leap into the abyss. Such newness is only a possibility, never a certainty"<sup>197</sup>

Clearly such elements of lament must be planned for intentionally. There must be education, but that must be followed up with faithful practices, practices that are a part of more than seasonal moments. The need for lament must be anticipated and can and should influence many areas of worship including prayer as well as special times of remembrance and celebration. There must be a balance of lament along with the celebration themes that have been more of the regular focus of worship. This calls for honesty in worship that acknowledges the full range of emotions that will likely be present among the gathered people of God.

This survey of the variety of streams of literature that can and should inform any discussion of lament has a number of implications for this project. First, and foremost, it provided the background and content necessary to prepare and conduct the various seminars on lament that were presented to the pastors and lay people of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene. It also informed the resource list that was presented to

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, xi-xii.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.



them for further study and reflection. The literature review also serves as a critical component of future plans and opportunities to resource pastors across a wider context.

The literature reviewed affirms the tradition, validity, need, and significance of lament. This study also demonstrates the universality of lament and yet the specific shape and form that comprises lament in the biblical tradition. The literature shows us that lament must be understood more broadly than simply a response to death. Lament gives voice to a whole range of loss, to fear, anger, despair, pain, and suffering of all kinds. This review also makes it clear that there has been a recovery of the study of lament that has been in place for a longer period of time than the recovery of the active practice of lament. It does show that the conversations about practices of lament have been growing in frequency. It also confirms the reality that there is a greater need for lament than regular practice of lament and that more resources are needed and additional discussion is warranted for lament to be restored to a prominent place within the local community of faith.

**Chapter Three, Research Design**  
***The Sympathizing Tear: A Challenge to Pastors***

**OVERVIEW**

In order to facilitate the long-term goal of creating a resource for pastors to assist local churches in developing practices of corporate lament, it was important to gain input and involvement from pastors in local churches. The plan developed for this project included a series of dialog opportunities with the pastors and leaders of the Mid-Atlantic District of the Church of the Nazarene. This became the context and setting of the pastoral research project.

**THE SETTING**

The history of the Mid-Atlantic District begins with the organization of the Washington District.

In 1908, the very first district assembly in the eastern United States, the first annual Washington District assembly, was held at The Opera House in Harrington, Delaware from April 30th until May 2nd. Reverend Phineas F. Breese was the presiding General Superintendent. At that time the district consisted of only five churches: Bowens, Maryland; Harrington, Delaware; Hollywood, Maryland; the Washington, DC Second Church; and, the largest by far, the John Wesley Church in Washington DC.<sup>198</sup>

The district grew and eventually merged with the Philadelphia District. “In 1911, the union of the two neighboring districts took place, and the new one was now named the Washington-Philadelphia District. This comprised all the territory of the former two districts with a total of twenty-four churches and 1003 members. The Union assembly was held in the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene in Washington, DC from June 28

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<sup>198</sup> Kenneth R. Balch, *100 Years of Moving With God: The Story of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene 1908-2008* (Glen Burnie, MA: Mid-Atlantic District Press, 2008), 7.

through July 2, 1911."<sup>199</sup> As a result of growth across the next decades, discussion grew about returning to two separate districts. "In 1956 it was decided that the next year, 1957, be designated as the golden anniversary year, the Jubilee year, and call it 'These Fifty Years.' The motion was made in the final session of assembly that "we look forward to division," and it was decided that 1957 be the year for division of the district.<sup>200</sup> The 112 churches were divided in half and the Philadelphia district had 3,585 members and, the Washington District had 3,729 members."<sup>201</sup>

The years that followed saw continued growth by both districts. By 2004 the Washington District had eighty-nine organized churches and eighteen missions or church plants, for a total of 107 congregations and 9,601 members. That year the district voted to change its name from the Washington District to the Mid-Atlantic District. "This change reflected the growth of the district far beyond the boundaries of Washington, DC, which was centrally located among the original five churches in 1907. In that assembly, Dr. Kenneth Mills reminded the audience that 'The purpose of the Washington District of the Church of the Nazarene is to advance the ministry of Jesus Christ through the local church.'"<sup>202</sup>

The Mid-Atlantic District is currently composed of eighty-seven organized churches and twenty-four church plants, or 111 congregations, spread across Maryland, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Central Pennsylvania, and three counties in the panhandle of West Virginia. According to the reporting of the 2012 District Assembly, the Mid-

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 55.

Atlantic District has 11,131 members, with an average Sunday worship attendance of 11,188. The district also has a strong Latino and Haitian ministry; of the 111 churches, there are sixteen Latino and ten Haitian congregations.

## **THE GOALS**

This district setting within the Church of the Nazarene served as the basis for this research project. Out of this context input from local church pastors was gained. There were several goals for this project. The first was to gain measurable data concerning fundamental questions regarding the practice of lament within the local churches represented on the Mid-Atlantic District. Is lament a topic that is incorporated into the preaching and teaching ministry of the pastors on the district? Do they offer regular services of lament? Have they read a book on the topic recently? How familiar do they believe their congregations are with lament? How helpful, or relevant, is the topic to their congregations? These questions, among others, were answered using a simple survey tool.

This survey also aided in a second goal of the study—to gain insight concerning anecdotal evidence gained through informal conversations with pastors about the subject of lament in the local church. Almost every time this theme was raised among pastors there was a response of lament being viewed as high need, but having low practice. Would this sense be supported through the research of this project, particularly the survey tool?

A third goal of the research was to gather best practices and resources for incorporating opportunities for lament within the local parish. As the topic was raised the

expectation was that pastors would share experiences, ideas, resources, etc. that they have practiced or come across. It also would provide opportunities for networking, as they may know of others who have developed practices of lament. This would happen informally, through the sessions held with the various pastors of the Mid-Atlantic district, but also with an intentional and structured connection through an online discussion group.

The fourth goal was to gain insight as to additional concerns, areas of study, or other clarifying elements that should be addressed as a lament resource is being developed. While the research and literature review of the project seeks to address all relevant issues, there is great value in looking for additional factors that should be included in order to make this lament resource both relevant and helpful for pastors and churches.

The fifth goal was simply to raise awareness of lament as a significant area to be explored for congregational life in the hopes that some pastors who are exposed to the material will make a concerted effort to explore practices of lament in their local context. While the ability to verify any long-term impact lies beyond the time frame of this pastoral research project, some initial sense can be verified concerning the interest and intent to engage in new opportunities for expressing lament. Certainly, the online discussion group gave the opportunity to encourage this and to gain an initial sense of whether this impact has occurred.

### **THE SURVEY OF PASTORS**

The first step in the process of gaining feedback from local pastors on the Mid-Atlantic District utilized a recurring pastor's meeting. Three times a year, the District Superintendent along with other members of the district staff, meet with local pastors and their staffs on the district in a series of mission area meetings. Permission was given to

join this series of seven separate meetings held across the District and to share a presentation on the topic of lament.

This presentation, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrows: Practices of Lament for the Local Church*<sup>203</sup>, was forty-five minutes long and included an overview of the topic of lament, a survey about practices of lament<sup>204</sup>, a challenge to explore lament in their local setting, and an invitation to participate in additional opportunities to discuss the topic of lament. These opportunities included a follow-up workshop at the District TEAM Day<sup>205</sup> Leadership Advance (a yearly training day for pastors and lay leaders), as well as an online discussion forum for pastors to share ideas, questions, resources, etc.—all focused on practices of corporate lament for the local parish. This online discussion was launched following the conclusion of the mission area meetings and TEAM Day workshop.

While the primary focus of this research project was to explore practices of corporate lament within the English-speaking congregations of the Mid-Atlantic District, it was important to reflect on the extent to which the topic and approach is transferable to other cultures and language-groups of the churches on the Mid-Atlantic District and beyond. A full development of this project for a Latino or Haitian context was not possible, but through sharing the initial lament presentation with the Latino and Haitian Mission Area meetings, it presented an opportunity to gain some initial observations and insights as to how the topic of lament would need to be developed within these cross-cultural contexts.

The first mission area meeting took place on Tuesday, September 11, 2012 in Bedford, PA. In addition to the four district presenters, sixteen individuals were present. The

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<sup>203</sup> A copy of the PowerPoint slides used in the presentation is included in Appendix B.

<sup>204</sup> A copy of the survey is included in Appendix C.

<sup>205</sup> "Teaching, Equipping And Ministry"

fifteen churches that attend this area meeting include churches from the Central Pennsylvania<sup>206</sup> and Western Maryland<sup>207</sup> mission areas.

The second mission area meeting took place on Wednesday, September 12, 2012 in New Freedom, PA. In addition to the four district presenters, nineteen individuals were present. The seventeen churches that attend this area meeting include the Susquehanna<sup>208</sup> and the North Eastern<sup>209</sup> mission areas of the Mid-Atlantic District.

The third mission area meeting took place on Thursday, September 13, 2012 in Milford, DE. In addition to the four district presenters, eighteen individuals were present. The sixteen churches that attend this area meeting make up the Delmarva North<sup>210</sup> and Delmarva South<sup>211</sup> mission areas.

The fourth mission area meeting took place on Friday, September 13, 2012 in Ellicott City, MD. In addition to the four district presenters, thirty-one individuals were present.

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<sup>206</sup> Bedford, Burnham Freedom Way, McConnellstown, Mount Tabor, Orbisonia, Petersburg, Pleasant Ridge, Ryot, and State College Bethel.

<sup>207</sup> Berkeley Springs, Cumberland Bethel, Cumberland First, Frostburg, Hancock Grace, and Oakland.

<sup>208</sup> Carlisle, Chambersburg Mosaic (Church Plant), Dover Mountain Grove Chapel, Gettysburg Harvest Field Community, Hanover Trinity, New Cumberland, New Freedom Trail, Shippensburg, and York Stillmeadow.

<sup>209</sup> Bel Air, Delta, Elkton, Fawn Grove, Havre de Grace The Great Commission, Newark, North East, and Rising Sun.

<sup>210</sup> Chestertown, Denton, Dover The Cross, Easton Real Life Chapel, Felton, DE Life Now, Lewes Living Hope (Church Plant), Milford, Sandtown, and Smyrna Faith.

<sup>211</sup> Berlin The River, Cambridge, Hurlock United (Church Plant), Laurel, Salisbury Cross Pointe, Salisbury Deaf Church (Church Plant), and Seaford.

The twenty-one churches that attend this area meeting make up the Metro Baltimore<sup>212</sup> and Mid-Maryland<sup>213</sup> mission areas.

The fifth mission area meeting took place on Tuesday, September 18, 2012 in Upper Marlboro, MD. In addition to the four district presenters, sixteen individuals were present. The eighteen churches that attend this area meeting comprise the Metro DC<sup>214</sup> and Southern Maryland<sup>215</sup> mission areas.

The last two mission area meetings took place on Saturday, September 29 at the Mid-Atlantic District Missional Resource Center in Glen Burnie, MD. The day began with meeting pastors from the Latino congregations across the Mid-Atlantic District. The district has sixteen Spanish-speaking organized churches and church plants. In addition to district staff, nineteen individuals were present. For this meeting, the power point presentation was translated into Spanish and the Mid-Atlantic District Latino Coordinator served as translator. While it was not possible to translate the full survey into Spanish, an alternate approach was used to gain some feedback. The presenter asked a series of three basic questions of the group, and polled the responses on the spot. The other change made to the presentation included less emphasis on the English-language resources that were shared with the other mission areas.

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<sup>212</sup> Baltimore Brooklyn, Baltimore Dundalk, Baltimore Lighthouse Community, Baltimore Parkville, Columbia Alive Community, Ellicott City Crossroads, Glen Burnie, Glen Burnie Corridor (Church Plant), Halethorpe Connections (Church Plant), Jessup New Generation, Severn Grace Pointe Community

<sup>213</sup> Clarksville Wellspring (Church Plant), Damascus (Church Plant), Frederick First, Gaithersburg, Hagerstown, Hagerstown Hope Bridge (Church Plant), Martinsburg, Mount Airy New Beginning, South Carroll, Westminster

<sup>214</sup> Annapolis, College Park, College Park African, College Park Healing Temple (Church Plant), College Park New Leaf (Church Plant), Laurel Fellowship (Church Plant), North Potomac (Church Plant), Rockville, Silver Spring Living Water International, Washington Community of Hope, Washington Church of Faith in Jesus Christ (Church Plant), Washington Grace, Washington Mosaic

<sup>215</sup> Hollywood, Indian Head, Leonardtown, Melwood, St. Charles LifeStream



Additionally there was a meeting with pastors from the Haitian congregations of the Mid-Atlantic District. The district has ten Haitian organized churches and church plants. In addition to the district staff, nine individuals were present. This presentation was given in English, however some of the same adjustments were made to this presentation as well. This included the use of the polling format to gain feedback as opposed to the full survey.

### THE PRESENTATION TO PASTORS

In summary, a total of 127 pastors from seventy-four churches<sup>216</sup> participated in the initial lament presentation. The five English-speaking mission areas had a similar format. Dr. Kenneth Mills introduced the presentation indicating the district's desire to include a time of dialog on theological and ecclesiological issues in these fall mission area meetings and that this would begin with a presentation on lament from Rev. John Nielson, lead pastor of the Melwood Church of the Nazarene. The presentation began with a short overview of the goals of the presentation—to raise the issue of lament, to resource pastors and gather additional input, to request help with a survey on practices of lament, and to refer them to additional opportunities to further explore the topic of lament. The survey was then distributed and those present were asked to fill it out. While the survey was being administered, those present listened to a contemporary song of lament, "Psalm 13 (How Long, O Lord?)."<sup>217</sup> Following this, the presenter read Psalm 13:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?*

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<sup>216</sup> Fifty-eight English-speaking congregations, nine Latino, and seven Haitian.

<sup>217</sup> The song lyrics can be found in Appendix D.

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes,  
or I will sleep the sleep of death, and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed;"  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalm 13  
(New Revised Standard Version)

The presentation continued with an introduction to the topic of lament. Using the example of Psalm 13, the presenter shared the basic elements of lament and explored the function of lament as it moves through this Psalm. Following this, the presentation continued with some general information about the place of lament in the Old Testament (in the Psalms, other Wisdom Literature, and the Prophets) as well as in the New Testament (in the ministry and emotional life of Jesus). While lament is a common expression in Scripture, the presentation explored the minimal practice of lament within the life of the contemporary church. These four basic elements of lament include:

- Lament is a form of worship and prayer.
- Lament is both sorrow and complaint.
- Lament involves a turn to trust and even praise  
(with the possible exception of Psalm 88).
- Lament is expressed both individually and corporately.

The presentation also included a challenge to pastors regarding the place and practice of lament. This challenge included five fundamental components:

- The need to restore a place for lament.
- The need to educate and model lament.
- The need to provide language & opportunities for lament.
- The need to give people permission to lament.
- The need to discover ways to lament ourselves.

The challenge was framed with the call for the church to be a place where lament can happen. The presenter shared the lyrics of a song by Ken Medema entitled, “If This Is Not a Place.”<sup>218</sup> This song expresses a longing for the church to be a place where tears and sorrow and questions and honesty are understood and embraced. Participants were invited to take a sheet with the lyrics of this song, available on a resource table.<sup>219</sup> This table also included a handout of selected lament resources, primarily book titles.<sup>220</sup> Copies of most of the books on the bibliography were also present on the table for participants to peruse following the presentation.

The next section of the presentation focused on opportunities where lament might take place within the local parish. These include seasonal services (such as Advent, Christmas, and Lent); specific events within the community, nation or world that call for lament (such as the outpouring of national lament following the events of September 11, 2001); funeral services, and in weekly corporate worship services. Also discussed were the ways that lament can become a part of ongoing pastoral care.

The presentation concluded with a time for questions and observations. This often extended beyond the allotted time as participants quickly engaged in comments and questions following each presentation.

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<sup>218</sup> Ken Medema, *If This Is Not a Place* from *Through the Eyes of Love*, (Word Music, 1977).

<sup>219</sup> The lyric sheet is included in Appendix A.

<sup>220</sup> The resource sheet/bibliography is included in Appendix E.

## PRESENTATION TO LAITY

Following this series of presentation given to pastors of the Mid-Atlantic District, the second phase of the research comprised of a second presentation given at an annual leadership-training event on the Mid-Atlantic District called Leadership Advance (or TEAM Day). The district has offered this one-day event for ten years on the district and involves presentations by the District Superintendent, a special guest speaker from outside the district (usually someone with extensive experience who has written about leadership topics), and multiple workshops on a variety of topics related to ministry (led by local ministry leaders from all across the Mid-Atlantic District).

Those who attended this presentation included a smaller group of pastors as well as lay leaders from churches across the district. Because the audience included individuals who had participated in the first presentation and those who had not, the presenter only repeated a short core of the previous material and then expanded the topic further. As with the mission area meetings, this seminar included the use of a PowerPoint presentation<sup>221</sup>. The presentation began with a story related by Michael Card in his book, *A Sacred Sorrow* about the tragic death of artist, Vincent Van Gogh and his final words, “The sorrow will last forever.” This flowed into the words of the song by Michael Card, “Come Lift Up Your Sorrows”<sup>222</sup> as a way to introduce lament as the sacred sorrow that must be expressed, but is not the end of the story. The presenter shared the basic overview of lament from the first presentation in order to orient the participations to the

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<sup>221</sup> A copy of the PowerPoint slides used in the presentation is included in Appendix F.

<sup>222</sup> Michael Card, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrow* from *The Hidden Face of God*, (Discovery House Music, 2006).

basic place of lament in the Bible and its fundamental elements. Rather than use Psalm 13 as the example, Psalm 142 was used to observe the basic flow of a lament psalm.

To show examples of how the same pattern found in the biblical psalms could be used today, the presenter shared a modern psalm of lament from Ann Weems. This was followed by the same challenge from the first presentation, which flowed into a discussion of the times in people's lives, and in the life of the church, when lament would be an appropriate response. These included:

- In the valley of the shadow of death
- In other times of loss (ambiguous loss)
- In the face of injustice
- In response to tragedy
- In confession of sin

Because it may be a new concept to many people, the workshop also explored the psychological reality of *ambiguous loss*. This overview of the concept, though brief, helped demonstrate that the range of issues over which people may lament is much broader than might first be imagined. It is not only death that causes us to lament, but also a whole range of categories of loss and grief.

As the presentation concluded, the presenter offered suggestions for some ways that the participants present could continue to explore the topic of lament. These next steps included:

- Reading Psalms of lament and other similar passages of Scripture.
- Reading a book on the topic of lament.
- Giving yourself and others permission to cry.
- Consider a small group study of lament.
- Consider preaching/teaching on lament.

The presentation concluded with a time for questions and observations with a number of people sharing their thoughts.

### **ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP**

The final stage of research and interaction involved the launch of an online discussion group on the topic of lament. Through the survey tool, pastors who indicated an interest in participating in this form of dialog were identified and invited to join the online group. The group formed as both an online community group utilizing social media (Facebook) as well as an online blog page where people could respond to posts, share questions, resources, best practices, and network additional information on the topic of lament. This opportunity provided additional connection with local pastors to see if they plan to incorporate some lament practices, determine if they did, in fact, do so and hear feedback concerning how it went. While much of the impact and information gained through this endeavor went beyond the time frame of this pastoral research project, some initial observations and insights were certainly gained.

Each of these research opportunities provided the chance to field-test presenting the topic of lament to pastors. They also served to indicate the extent to which there is interest in this topic and what additional factors should be considered in developing a resource for pastors on this topic of developing corporate practices of lament for the local parish. Additionally, data on current attitudes towards the topic of lament and lament practices was collected. This included the opportunity to verify, at least in this particular context, an operational thesis, self-diagnosed by pastors, that lament is a highly needed topic, but one that has a relatively low practice.

***Chapter Four, Research Data and Results***  
***Finding the Missing Door***

**INTRODUCTION**

The research that was conducted with the pastors of the Mid-Atlantic District of the Church of the Nazarene provides a variety of insight into the practices of lament within local churches in this context along with the understanding of lament by the pastors on the district. This research has the potential to both confirm the assumptions made in this project and to inform and guide future resourcing of pastors and congregations for the practice of corporate lament.

**THE PRESENTATIONS**

The presentations that took place among the pastors of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene were well received. There was tremendous receptivity to the topic, positive feedback to the presentation, as well as extensive comments and questions at the close of each presentation. The District Superintendent spoke very highly of the subject matter and how well the presentation was received as he introduced the presentation in each setting.

**THE SURVEY**

The results of the survey given to the pastors of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene produced a wide range of responses.<sup>223</sup> Eighty-nine surveys were filled out. Of this number, fifty were lead pastors, thirty-three were staff pastors, and six whose status could not be identified because they chose to remain anonymous or fit into a

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<sup>223</sup> A full breakdown of the survey responses is included in Appendix G.

different ministry category all together. **The survey began by asking respondents to define lament in just one sentence.** This question garnered a wide range of responses. Generally they indicated a proper biblical understanding of lament. It should be noted that the administration of the survey took place after a brief introduction, but before the core of the presentation. The full list of the responses received is available from the author, but the following are a sampling of responses that were received.

- "A cry of sorrow from the heart, the soul."
- "Anguish, deep grieving, sadness over loss of something, someone."
- "Crying out (to God) in sorrow and complaint."
- "A complaint - a cry from the depths of the heart over injustice, confusion, suffering, grief, doubt."

The definitions captured many of the important elements of lament. In particular, the concept of lament *as complaint* was present. In several cases the idea of complaint was connected to the theme of *injustice* or the simple fact that lament often occurs when there is a variant between *the way things are* and *the way that things should be*, or at least of *what a person's expectations are of how things should be*.

- "A sorrow related to the way things are."
- "Crying out to God over that which should be but isn't."
- "Being confused, frustrated, perhaps even angry when life does not go as you hoped or thought God's plan should pan out."
- "Expressing the void between the world as it appears and the world as it was created to be (and is becoming)."

Responses also included the ideas of *isolation* ("Lament is the feeling inside of darkness as the rest of the world looks the other way."), *community* ("The faith community's response to God when life is not good."), and *questions* ("In a state of



sorrow, calling out to God, why?"). Many responses indicated that the characteristic of *honesty* was a key aspect of lament as well as the recurring statement that it was something one expressed "to God." One response was clear and simple -- "sorrow expressed." There was one response that did not offer a definition, but did acknowledge that lament is often misunderstood and that people assume that it is not appropriate for believers: "Don't have a good one . . . I would think that those in the congregation practice lament, but in doing so think it as untrusting and not right for a believer and would not freely admit their true feelings." This was also expressed in another response: "I believe we have been shamed into believing lament is out of place in our culture. Often we have been made to feel an outward show of lament is socially unacceptable." There were just a few responses that seemed to hold to this perspective. One that described lament as something "general" as opposed to "spiritual" and one that defined lament as "Sorrow + complaint – trust." Trust, as we have seen, is actually a necessary component of biblical lament. With these few exceptions, the definitions were largely on target and demonstrated a healthy understanding of the nature of lament.

**The second question of the survey asked if the respondents had ever preached a sermon on the topic of lament.** Of the eighty-nine participants in the survey, forty (44.94%) responded that they had done so and forty-seven (52.81%) responded that they had never preached a sermon on the topic of lament.<sup>224</sup> Of those who responded

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<sup>224</sup> There were two who did not offer a response to this question. Of the total number of pastors who responded that they had preached a sermon on lament, thirty-two were lead pastors and six were staff pastors. Of the total number of pastors who responded that they had not preached a sermon on lament, sixteen were lead pastors and twenty-seven were staff pastors. Of the six respondents from the other category, two responded that they had preached a sermon on lament (One in the last year) and four had not done so.

affirmatively, only twenty-two (24.72%) had preached a sermon on lament in the past year.

**The next two questions dealt with services of lament.** Of the eighty-nine pastors who participated in the survey, seventeen (19.1%) responded that they had planned or led a Service of Lament.<sup>225</sup> When asked if they have a Service of Lament at least once a year, twelve (13.48%) indicated that they did while seventy-five (84.27%) indicated that they did not have a Service of Lament each year.<sup>226</sup>

**The survey then explored the extent to which lament was a regular practice in the churches of the respondents.** When asked if they include opportunities for lament in regular corporate worship, twenty-five Lead Pastors (50%) said *yes*, twenty (40%) said *no*, and five (10%) *did not respond*. Of those who answered *yes*, the majority cited examples of pastoral prayer times or other prayer opportunities. In most cases anything beyond that was not practiced weekly, but ranged from monthly to a few times a year.<sup>227</sup> For the staff pastors, fourteen (42.42%) said that they did include opportunities for lament in regular corporate worship, while seventeen (51.52%) said that they did not. Two did not respond. Again, the examples largely focused on prayer times or sporadic practices. For those respondents who were in the “other” category, one individual (16.67%) indicated that she/he includes opportunities for lament in regular corporate worship, four (66.67%) did not, and one (16.67%) did not respond. Those who responded

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<sup>225</sup> Of those who had planned or led a service of lament, ten were lead pastors, four were staff pastors, and two were others. Of those who had not planned or led a service of lament, thirty-nine were lead pastors, twenty-eight were staff pastors, and four were others.

<sup>226</sup> There were three surveys with no response to this question.

<sup>227</sup> A list of the specific examples given is available from the author.

that she/he includes opportunities for lament in regular corporate worship, indicated that this happens in the context of prayer times.

**When asked if they had read a book on the topic of lament in the past two years,** sixteen out of eighty-nine (17.98%) indicated *yes* to reading a book in that time period and seventy-one (79.78%) indicated *no*. Of the sixteen individuals who indicated *yes*, nine were lead pastors, six were staff pastors, and one was from the other category. If they had read a book, the survey asked for the title. Ten were able to identify the title of a book on lament that they had read in the past two years.<sup>228</sup> A list of the titles is included in Appendix H.

**The next two survey questions focused on the familiarity the pastors believed that their congregation had with lament and the relevancy of the topic.** The survey used a scale of one to ten, with one being *not at all familiar* and ten being *very familiar*. While the exact breakdown of the responses can be found in Appendix G, forty people (44.94%) placed the familiarity of their congregations with lament as *low* (a response of one to three), thirty-nine (42.82%) placed it as *medium* (a response of four to seven) and only six (6.74%) placed it as *high* (a response of eight to ten). Interestingly, no one marked their congregation's familiarity with lament as a ten and four people did not respond to this question.

When asked to rate the relevancy of the topic of lament for their congregation<sup>229</sup>, three people (3.37%) placed the relevancy of their congregations with lament as *low* (a

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<sup>228</sup> Two more responses listed an author and one response listed the Book of Psalms.

<sup>229</sup> Again, the exact breakdown of the responses can be requested from the author.

response of one to three)<sup>230</sup>, twenty-four (26.97%) placed it as *medium* (a response of four to seven), and fifty-eight (65.17%) placed it as *high* (a response of eight to ten). Four people (4.49%) did not respond to this question.

**The survey concluded by asking the responders to indicate their interest in further exploration of the topic** through an *upcoming seminar* on lament, an *online discussion group*, and through receiving *additional resources on the subject*. Seventy-one (79.78%) indicated that they would be interested in attending a seminar, while thirteen (14.61%) stated that they would not be interested. Five people did not respond. Fifty-two (58.43%) expressed an interest in an online discussion group, while thirty-five (39.33%) were not interested. Two people did not respond. Eighty (89.89%) requested additional resources on lament, while six (6.74%) were not interested. Three people did not respond.

For the Latino and Haitian pastors meetings, the full survey was not employed due to language and context constraints, however a simple poll was utilized. This poll was conducted at the conclusion of the presentation on lament. The presentation to the Latino pastors was conducted through the use of a translator along with a PowerPoint presentation that was translated into Spanish. The presentation to the Haitian pastors was conducted in English. The first question was “Have you ever preached a sermon on the topic of lament?” For the Latino group six out of nineteen (32%) said *yes*. Of the nine Haitian pastors present, only one indicated that they had preached a sermon on the topic of lament (11%). The second question was, “Do you believe your people are very familiar with the topic of lament?” Three Latino pastors (16%) and one Haitian pastor (11%) responded in the affirmative. The final question was, “Do you believe that a

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<sup>230</sup> Only one person gave the relevancy a One. It came from a survey that was anonymous and either skipped the question or answered NO to everything.

greater understanding of lament would be especially helpful for your people?” There was a unanimous response in the affirmative from both the Latino and Haitian pastors.

### THE CONTINUING DISCUSSION

The final phase of the project has begun, but is just getting underway. Those pastors who expressed an interest in this follow-up opportunity were invited to join an online discussion group on the topic of lament. The majority of those who indicated an interest also use Facebook and were added to a Facebook group called *The Sympathizing Tear*. Those who were not already members of the Facebook community, were sent an e-mail invitation to follow an online blog of the same name. The group currently has forty-six members. Resources are being posted on these sites and pastors have shared some initial questions. This phase serves as a helpful transition from *engaging* the pastors of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene to *resourcing* pastors in the area of developing practices of lament for the local parish. While this online dialog is only in the emergent stage, engagement is developing as pastors have asked for resources, made additional observations about lament, and even scheduled time to dialog about how they could begin to effectively incorporate lament into their own ministry contexts. One pastor scheduled a time to discuss how they could best develop an Advent series that focused on lament. This ongoing dialog with pastors has also provided the occasion for them to share ideas, resources, and literature on the topic of lament.<sup>231</sup>

Additionally, contact was made with some pastors who include lament opportunities in their own churches in an effort to continue to gather sample services and other best

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<sup>231</sup> For example, a helpful book on prayers of lament (*Risking Truth: Reshaping the World Through Prayers of Lament* by Scott Ellington) was added to the bibliography of this project which came as a suggestion from this ongoing dialog with pastors.

practices for corporate lament.<sup>232</sup> The practices and services gathered primarily focused on those dealing with grief and loss, and the services that were offered tended to be during the Advent/Christmas seasons. A full overview of this material, along with sample resources, is included in Appendix N. These practices and services represent the types of material that will be included in the lament resource for pastors.

As this project continues to include dialog with pastors, as increased opportunities to resource pastors expand, as additional lament resources are collected, the project's long-term goal will be enhanced all the more. This resourcing, begun on the Mid-Atlantic District, will continue to develop and branch out to engage other pastors in an effort to share lament resources with the broader Church of the Nazarene. One such opportunity has already been presented in a request to write an article for *Grace and Peace Magazine*<sup>233</sup> on the topic of Practices of Lament for the Local Church. There has also been an invitation to speak on the topic of lament at a week-end event for another Nazarene congregation. It is hoped that more of these opportunities will develop in an effort to engage, educate, and resource pastors and congregations on this important topic.

The research for this project has been effective in launching a longer-range goal of providing an extensive lament resource for pastors that will help them lead their congregations in practices of lament. It has brought together a variety of streams that inform lament and has provided a platform to engage a group of pastors with this critical topic.

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<sup>232</sup> The majority of these practices came from pastors on the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene, but a few were included that came from individuals from other parts of the country.

<sup>233</sup> *Grace and Peace* is a quarterly dialogical magazine for pastors and ministry practitioners in the USA/Canada Region of the Church of the Nazarene. Its purpose is to increase ministry effectiveness, stimulate theological and missional reflection, and promote healthy dialogue among its print and online readership. (From the *Grace and Peace* website, [www.graceandpeacemagazine.org](http://www.graceandpeacemagazine.org), accessed April 30, 2013).

***Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions***  
***Come Lift Up Your Sorrows: A Call to Lament***

Through the review of literature as well as the research completed among pastors on the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene, we can affirm that the topic of lament is indeed relevant for the local church and one that is the process of being rediscovered. The anecdotal observation when the subject of lament was brought up among pastors that there was both interest and resonance in the topic has been confirmed through the research of this project. The subject of lament is central to the biblical narrative and significant to the Christian experience. However, it is also a topic that has widely been neglected, misunderstood, and is additionally an area that has been under-resourced. Consequently, an intentional strategy to address lament in the local church is necessary.

There are, however, many encouraging signs that the practice of lament is being rediscovered. A simple look at the number of books published on the topic in the last several years suggests this trend. In general the biblical form of lament appears to be understood by those surveyed for this project. While additional research would verify this further, we could expect that this basic understanding would be shared by other pastors in the Church of the Nazarene and among other traditions as well. Responses to the survey utilized for this project, indicated that, in general, pastors have a good foundational grasp of what lament is. However, there were also examples of the misunderstanding that lament is not actually something that people of faith should practice. It is likely that this perspective expressed by a minority of Nazarene clergy in the survey, would be encountered as a more dominant perspective among laity. Thus, this reality would suggest the need for more intentionally in developing practices of lament for the local

parish. A companion survey of the attitudes towards lament and understanding of lament among laity would be a helpful addition to the research of this project.

Undoubtedly, there is a reawakening to the value of lament in the Christian experience, both individually and corporately. Obviously there are circumstances that arise that cause an increase in the receptivity and prominence of certain elements of lament. These would include national or global tragedies, seasonal times (both in life and in the calendar), and anytime death invades people's lives. During the writing of this project, the senseless slaying of twenty children and six teachers in Newtown, Connecticut brought both an opportunity to lament and openness to the practice of lament. However, it must be acknowledged, that for the broader community, these windows do not seem to last very long, and any brief focus on lament is soon lost.

Although lament is a topic that is coming into greater prominence, gaps in the literature remain and there continues to be a lack of lament resources. While there are wonderful resources introducing lament from biblical, theological, psychosocial, and even liturgical perspectives, there are very few that synthesize all of these for pastors and for the local church.<sup>234</sup> It is true that many of these resources stress the importance of returning lament to the life of the local parish. In some cases there are some introductory ideas presented as to what that would like, often calling for and including elements of lament in worship and holding special services where lament can be expressed personally and corporately. With all of this, there remains a dearth of specific examples, suggestions, and resources to assist the local parish in carrying out this call. Resources can be found when a concerted effort is made to seek them out. These materials are

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<sup>234</sup> It is also important to note that most of the resources that are available are academic and or professional in nature. There are even fewer lament resources that are accessible for the average layperson.



typically a sample service or suggested litany. However, it is rare to find any fully developed resource for lament or certainly any holistic plan for incorporating lament into the life and practices of the local parish.

One particular resource that is important to highlight is music. Music for lament is severely lacking in the modern Church tradition. A survey of the major hymnals in print certainly shows this.<sup>235</sup> Of the 654 song themes on the CCLI website<sup>236</sup>, lament is not included. A search of the term “lament” on the CCLI site does bring up 122 results, but only sixty-three of these have lyrics, indicating that the rest are, most likely, not in current use. The website includes chord charts and or lead sheets for the songs that are most used in the modern church. Only four of the 122 results include these resources, and to call a couple of these selections songs of lament would be a stretch.

Often the music that is available, while helpful, focus on themes related to the trials and hard times that we experience. These themes, such as God seeing us through the storms of life, are related to the topic of lament, but may not be laments properly understood. They may serve as part of the lament process, but more often the later stages of the journey of lament. Music that expresses complaint, that cries out to God in the middle of doubt, despair, and anger, are rare indeed. With few exceptions, such as Michael Card’s album, *The Hidden Face of God*, there is simply not enough music for the church that expresses lament. A resource that could gather the limited musical selections into a collection for lament would be a wonderful service to the Church.

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<sup>235</sup> A graphic representation of one analysis of lament hymns is included in Appendix I.

<sup>236</sup> Christian Copyright Licensing International (CCLI) is the premier clearinghouse of music for the church. [www.ccli.com](http://www.ccli.com).

Another observation about the lament resources that are available is the majority focuses on grieving the death of a loved one. While this certainly a valid area for lament, as we have seen, the need covers a much wider scope than those dealing with death. This reality must be acknowledged when we take a look at the few churches that offer an occasional opportunity for lament. A majority of churches do not have any regular, intentional opportunities for lament, and the few who do, focus on only one aspect of the wide range that lament encompasses. Similarly, many of these churches offer this kind of service during the Advent/Christmas season. These times of the year are certainly appropriate times to focus on lament, and may be one of the best opportunities to initiate an emphasis on lament. Having said this, surely a few weeks out of the Christian calendar are not the only occasions when lament is needed. As such, the practice of lament for the local church is often incomplete if it is present at all. Certainly, pastors and churches who include these opportunities should be commended, but we recognize that the majority of pastors and churches still need to take the first steps on a journey of lament, and those who have taken some initial steps should be encouraged to move beyond the progress they have initiated.

From the information gathered from the survey, the original hypothesis of the research project is validated; namely, among pastors and churches of the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene the topic of lament is seen as highly needed, but rarely practiced. Overall, the pastors surveyed understood of the nature of lament. Their education and experience had clearly given them a basic concept of the essence of biblical lament. There were indications, however, that a broader concept (such as lamenting realities other

than death) and the need for corporate expressions of lament were only moderately understood.

In order to further clarify this fundamental understanding of the lament among pastors, the research addressed if they were involved in additional learning about the topic. Relevant to this question, the survey asked whether the respondents had read a book on the topic of lament in the last year. Almost eighteen percent had done so. When the specific examples given were analyzed, we found that only some of the pastors could identify a specific title, and of those that could, a few were books on a related topic (such as grief) or a general response (such as the Book of Psalms). While the pastors had not read much recently on the topic of lament, generally there was an interest to learn more about the topic by attending the additional workshop, participating in the online discussion group, or receiving additional resources. Almost ninety percent indicated an interest in obtaining additional resources.<sup>237</sup>

It was also clear from the survey that pastors rated the topic of lament as being very relevant for their people and something that called for further exploration. Over sixty-five percent of the pastors ranked the relevancy/need of lament as high, and when we add those who ranked it as a medium significance, ninety-two percent of those surveyed believed that lament was of medium or high relevancy for their congregations. The poll taken among Latino and Haitian pastors also reported lament as being relevant with 100% of the respondents indicating that lament would be a helpful practice for their people. Thus, the research suggests that the vast majority of pastors believe lament to be a relevant topic and practice for the people in their churches.

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<sup>237</sup> Interestingly, however, not many of the pastors who attended the lament presentation at the District area meetings took the resource list that was available at a resource table, so one might wonder about the extent to which this interest connects to action.

It was clear from the research that while pastors have a healthy understanding of the basics of lament, and while the pastors viewed it as a high need among their people, generally, lament is not commonly understood nor is it a regular topic in preaching or in worship. The research indicates that less than seven percent of the pastors believed their congregations had a high familiarity with lament and almost forty-five percent ranked the familiarity as low. When polling the Latino and Haitian pastors, only sixteen percent of the Latino pastors and eleven percent of the Haitian pastors indicated that their people were “very familiar with the topic of lament.” So, while lament is seen as relevant, it is not something with which people are very familiar.

The research also demonstrates that lament is not a dominant topic in most churches nor is it a regular practice. Only forty-five percent of pastors surveyed had ever preached a sermon on lament, though among lead pastors, the percentage was higher at sixty-four percent. Additionally, among these lead pastors, only thirty-four percent had preached a sermon on lament within the last year. Only nineteen percent of the pastors surveyed had ever led a service of lament and only a little over thirteen percent lead such a service on a regular basis. These responses show that the majority of churches on the Mid-Atlantic District Church of the Nazarene do not have regular services of lament. When looking at lament practices during regular worship, the results could be misleading. At first glance, it would seem that practices of lament take place somewhat regularly in that fifty percent of lead pastors indicated that they did include opportunities for lament in their regular worship services (forty percent indicated that they did not). And yet, when asked to give specifics, it was clear that in most cases, these opportunities were not weekly and did not include anything more specific than a prayer time when requests were shared.

Thus, we can conclude that lament is not a regular feature in the worship services of churches on the Mid-Atlantic District.

*In summary, the research for this project demonstrated that while there is generally a satisfactory understanding of lament among the pastors of this district and an interest in learning more about it, it is not a topic that is regularly addressed in preaching or in practice. This, in spite of the fact that there is a high sense of the need for and value of lament for the people of their congregations.* The results of the research were in line with the expectations that were held going into this project. There were no real surprises, though it was encouraging to see that the pastors surveyed had a good fundamental grasp of the essential elements of lament. At first it was somewhat surprising to see responses indicating that lament was a regular practice in their worship experiences given the low number of pastors who offer a service of lament. This anomaly in the numbers is better understood when we view the specific examples given of lament opportunities. The fact that most of these opportunities consisted of sharing and praying for specific requests points to a narrow and generalized concept of a lament practice.

The basic conclusions derived from the research are consistent with expectations. These observations not only give validity to the initial hypothesis of the project, but also demonstrate the need for developing a lament resource for pastors.

Certainly there are significant theological and ecclesiological observations to be drawn from the study of lament, and the results of this research project in particular. As determined, the place of lament and openness to lament as a viable spiritual activity is largely dependent upon one's view of God. Our theological assumptions about what is appropriate speech when talking with God are tied to this understanding. For many

people, including some pastors, it is not spiritually appropriate to bring our questions, doubts, anger, etc. to God, for this would seem to indicate a lack of faith. It must be understood that true lament requires a view of God that sees God as one who allows, even welcomes, such speech. Our theology must provide space for raw honesty before God and time and space for a journey of lament that does not deny the place of anguish and tears.

Certainly, the question of theodicy is another significant theological issue that intersects with lament. It is important to allow people to see lament as one of the primary answers to the presence of evil, suffering, loss, and grief in our midst. Whatever other theological answers we may employ, we must affirm that in these times God weeps, and we should weep as well. We can and must bring our tears and our questions to the God whose weeping begins before our own.

Lament also has important implications for our understanding of ecclesiology. The goal of this project is not simply to encourage lament as a spiritual practice for individuals, but to find ways to express lament corporately as the people of God. To be the full expression of the Body of Christ we “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15) and we give each other time and space to express the deep sorrows of our hearts. This requires open and honest intimacy and community, and it will not happen without intentional effort. It requires setting restraints in how we speak to one another and shifting away from spiritual platitudes to genuinely entering into one another’s suffering, pain, and sorrow. Only then can we be the community of faith that is modeled in the pages of Scripture.

There is also an eschatological dimension to lament. Lament is the response to the reality of the “not-yet-ness” of the redemptive and re-creative work of God. Central to lament is the knowledge that things are not the way that God created them to be, and until the day comes when God brings the Kingdom in all of its fullness, there will be both the opportunity for and the need to lament. The “turn” that is present in almost all biblical lament, is a rediscovery of eschatological hope, that things will not always be as they are now. The ancient prayer, “Come, Lord Jesus” (Maranatha) is, at least in part, a cry of lament.

The research data and results affirm the value and need to develop practices of lament for the local parish as well as the need for pastors to have a variety of resources at their disposal that help incorporate lament into their local ministry settings. It also points to the value of bringing the wide variety of areas of scholarship together for such an endeavor. Responding to this research and utilizing resources that can be made available should lead us to a renewed commitment to continue the process of educating the local church about lament and to continue developing opportunities and resources for lament for the church and for the community as well. These implications are also relevant for a broader arena of ministerial practice including the pastors and churches of the Mid-Atlantic District, the broader Church of the Nazarene, as well as other Christian traditions. The universality of lament is such that the range of applicable arenas is very wide indeed.

As with any research, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study and what the study did not address. The research for this project was limited to pastors on the Mid-Atlantic District of the Church of the Nazarene. Similar studies could be done in other areas of the denomination and, of course, among other traditions. Such data would

be both helpful and insightful, and could verify an assumption that this research would produce similar results. There is anecdotal evidence, primarily gained through opportunities to discuss the topic with other pastors from around the country and from other denominations, that the same experience with lament, as *highly needed*, but *rarely practiced*, would be found there as well.

Another limitation that should be recognized is the possibility of cultural variants. While there was an effort to expand the research beyond the English-speaking congregations on the Mid-Atlantic District of the Church of the Nazarene, it must be acknowledged that cultural variations may exist and additional research would be valuable to further explore how lament is understood and practiced in other cultures. The research did include an opportunity for dialog with pastors from the District's Latino and Haitian churches, but due to limited participation at the Mission Area Meetings, the resulting research was limited to a small sampling.

Even with such a small cross section though, there are some basic findings that are helpful, if only to serve as a series of hypotheses. First, it is clear that the need for lament is universal and not limited to one cultural expression. The responses from the eighteen non-Anglo, non-English speaking pastors had the same response trajectory as the primary survey group. They also indicated that lament was something that would be very helpful to their congregations. Additionally, in conversations with them before, during, and after the presentation on lament, there was a clear understanding of the relevancy of the topic and appreciation for the chance to discuss it in such a setting.

A second observation would be that some cultures have a greater receptivity to biblical lament based, in part, on a cultural openness or practices that are already



ingrained. Both the Latino and Haitian pastors indicated that their people were very open in expressing sorrow. The lament literature reviewed has made reference to cultural differences when it comes to expressing lament. It is important, however, while recognizing an openness to lament, to also realize that this may be limited to openness toward shared mourning or a willingness to express sorrow, which is only one aspect of biblical lament. There is some indication that this perspective may not always extend to the complaint side of lament, namely expressing honest questions, doubt, or anger toward God. The same cultural framework helps one aspect of lament, but there may still be a need to educate and give people permission to express the other side of lament.<sup>238</sup> This reluctance to express this side of human experience is sometimes seen as un-spiritual in certain cultures, but may be more of a reality in others. If this reality were verified, it still would indicate that these cultures might have an advantage in the expression of lament compared with much of the Anglo-American culture.

A final recognition of the scope of this research is one that has already been referenced, but needs to be stated again, and that is that the subject group chosen consisted of pastors and did not include laity. While we could postulate some elements of the understanding and attitudes of laity about lament, through the experience and analysis of the pastors who work with them, there would be great value in further study of how lay people view lament. A deeper understanding of a congregational “baseline” of lament would help create opportunities for lament that would be the most helpful and impactful.

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<sup>238</sup> An example of this occurred during one of the mission area meetings when a Haitian pastor shared that he read Psalm 88 every time he went to visit his wife in the nursing home who had been paralyzed by a stroke. Psalm 88 is one of the most intense Psalms of lament and the only lament that does not turn to praise or trust. This practice was affirmed as a great example of lament. This same pastor then went on to say, in essence, that we must never question God.

There are several additional aspects of the research that could be explored if it was repeated or if others want to build upon it. First, there are the additional research areas already mentioned. These include performing similar surveys of pastors on other districts of the Church of the Nazarene, as well as among pastors of other denominations or Christian traditions. A similar study could also be done among lay people. The follow-up plan for this project includes finding ways to continue educating and resourcing pastors about lament. The long-range goal of this plan is to develop and publish a holistic lament resource for pastors including suggested steps for leading a local parish through an intentional journey of discovering and practicing lament. One additional research area that would have tremendous value would be to study a particular congregation and its understanding of lament, comparing attitudes and perceptions before and after participating in a formalized, congregation-wide lament emphasis. It would be significant to see how a congregation that expands its practice of lament in intentional and guided ways changes in attitudes, understanding, and practices.

It is not the purpose of this research to finalize a holistic lament resource for pastors, nor to present a completed plan for how pastors might intentionally develop practices of lament for their local parish. However, in order to demonstrate the general direction that such an endeavor might take as a result of this research project, it will be helpful to share a basic framework for developing practices of lament with a local congregation. Additionally, examples of resources that are mentioned are included in a series of appendices.

A congregational plan to introduce or expand lament should begin with knowledge and education. The theme of lament needs to be addressed by the pastor. This can take

place through a sermon or, better still, a series of sermons.<sup>239</sup> Preaching on lament could certainly be done at any time, however, it may be especially appropriate during certain seasons of the Church year, such as Advent or Lent or it might be preached in response to times of tragedy or loss either on a local, national, or global level. Another helpful way to introduce lament is as part of a larger preaching series on the Psalms, demonstrating that lament is a significant form in the Psalter. An introductory sermon could be followed up with a more focused series on lament.<sup>240</sup>

Another facet of the knowledge and education plan could include a study of lament in a small group structure. A Sunday School class or other small group discipleship opportunity can be a wonderful way to have people engage with lament at a much deeper level. There are some wonderful small group resources that can be used to help inform and educate a congregation.<sup>241</sup> Providing such an opportunity for further study is a great way to offer follow-up on a sermon or series of sermons on lament.

The next layer of a congregational plan could focus on bringing lament into pastoral care. This can happen in several ways. First, the language of lament can be brought more intentionally into pastoral conversation and prayer with people who are going through difficult times. During hospital visitation, care during times of loss, or any pastoral conversation, the pastor can encourage the practice of lament by acknowledging and modeling it. This can include asking the kinds of questions included in the Psalms of lament, such as, “How long, O Lord?” or acknowledging the perception that God seems distant. It is affirming tears and even doubt. It is confessing our confusion, pain, anger,

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<sup>239</sup> A list of possible lament sermon texts can be found in Appendix J.

<sup>240</sup> A sample lament sermon is included in Appendix K.

<sup>241</sup> Some of these small group lament resources are listed as a section of the bibliography.

and fear. It is using the full biblical model and then coming to “the turn.” “But, we are trusting you Lord. We are going to continue to thank you and praise you.” It is also important to expand our understanding of lament to include areas other than the loss associated with death. Pastors need to realize and respect the broad range of issues over which their people may need to lament. People need to lament broken relationships, barrenness, miscarriage, divorce, the loss of a pet, the declines associated with aging, the loss of a job, children who are away from God, addictions, the loss of a dream, and so on. Acknowledging this need to lament, giving people the freedom to lament, and helping them be able to express their lament is a tremendous pastoral gift.

A second pastoral care focus on lament revolves around the funeral. The pastor who is serious about encouraging lament needs to be intentional about bringing lament into the funeral. While this might seem like something that would happen automatically, there is a tendency among many Christians to assume that true faith means portraying a form of spiritual stoicism that views tears and grief as inappropriate or something for which a person needs to apologize. This attitude may be manifested in a variety of ways. A person may say, “We don’t want to have a funeral; this needs to be a celebration.” Now certainly for the Christian we do not “sorrow as those who have no hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13), but neither do we hope as those who have no sorrow. We understand what it means to be able to celebrate a life well lived when death invades our ranks, but these are times we also need to truly grieve the loss that we have experienced. We may even hear someone say, as one pastor shared, “I don’t want any tears at this funeral.” The pastor may need to be the one to ensure that there is a place for lament when people are facing death and that the voice of lament is heard in the funeral service and message.

A related pastoral care issue for shaping lament into a local congregation is to challenge many of the theologically inappropriate words that are often said to people in times of loss. Phrases like, “God needed another angel,” “It must be God’s will,” “God knew what He was doing,” or “There’s a reason for everything, we just can’t understand it.” These responses are hurtful, unhelpful, and even harmful. They reflect bad theology and run counter to the more biblically sound alternative, which is to lament. Pastors can challenge their people to avoid saying these types of things, but also teach them how to respond appropriately with lament. To help their people know that the best thing we can do when people are grieving is to be physically and emotional present and to join them in their sorrow. This is part of the process of lament.

Another step in a congregational plan to introduce or expand lament is a dedicated service of lament. While not limited to certain seasons, this service can be introduced very effectively during Advent or Lent. A service of lament gives people the opportunity to remember loved ones lost in recent or past days. This service of memoirs might include music, reading of names, lighting of candles, Scripture and other readings, etc.<sup>242</sup> An Advent or Christmas lament service can be a valuable introduction to lament, but once such a service is incorporated, it would be important to expand it further to include broader categories of lament. Some form of lament service can be a wonderful yearly addition to the worship life of the local parish.

A final step in a congregational plan to introduce or expand lament would focus on ways to bring lament into the regular, ongoing, worship life of the church. Including elements of lament through music, prayer, Scripture, litanies, etc., in corporate worship

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<sup>242</sup> A sample Christmas Lament Service is included in Appendix N.

acknowledges the reality that on any given week when the church gathers, there are people who are grieving some real or perceived loss, and they need to lament. While these regular practices of lament might not be included every week (though a sensitivity to this need would always be in order), certainly including them on a regular, perhaps monthly, basis would be an effective way to encourage lament in the lives of the people of God. These standard practices of lament must go beyond prayer time each week. While these times of pastoral prayer can be infused with elements of lament, it will not happen automatically; it must have intentional focus to guide it. It is this aspect of corporate lament that can be the most challenging, but it is also most needed. It is also here where the fewest resources are available. Resources can be obtained, but it requires diligent searching of a wide range of sources.<sup>243</sup>

September 11, 2001, the Tsunami of 2004, Hurricane Katrina, the tornado in Joplin, Missouri, the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings, these are representative of the tragic events that life can bring. Add to that, personal tragedies, the deaths of the young and the old, divorce, the death of dreams, financial hardships, and broken relationships. These and countless other adversities are faced by our people each and every day. What do we do in response to these realities? What do we say when there are no answers? How do we respond to their questions, hurt, anger, or doubt? Do we pray? Absolutely! Do we seek to bring relief? Of course. But one significant response has been missing far too often. What we need desperately is to lament. This biblical pattern, this theological gift, this language of sorrow, is one that is lacking in the lives of so many people and in so many churches. The lost language of lament must be recovered. If we do not learn to

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<sup>243</sup> An initial collection of lament resources can be found in Appendix M.

lament we are doing a disservice to the faith we profess. We must remember again the words of Michael Card, “Until we learn to lament, we have nothing to say to most of the world”<sup>244</sup>

This study of lament has made it abundantly clear that lament is a desperate need in the lives of individuals and for the church corporately. We have seen that there is a strong biblical tradition and precedence for lament. Lament is theologically appropriate. It is psychologically and socially relevant. It is needed liturgically. It is vital to a pastor’s homiletical ministry. The research has shown that the pastors surveyed see it as highly relevant for their people and yet believe that their people do not have a strong understanding of lament, nor do they regularly engage in biblical lament. Certainly, lament happens, but without intentional guidance, the biblical understanding of lament will not necessarily be practiced. In fact, it likely will not. The research has also shown that while the pastors surveyed had a satisfactory understanding of the basic nature of lament, they did not regularly preach on lament nor offer intentional and expanded opportunities for lament in their local settings. The need for lament is so great that we must seek to change these realities.

An increased awareness must continue if we are to develop the important practices of lament for the local parish. Additional steps need to be taken to engage pastors with the topic of lament. Additional resources need to be created and current resources need to be made available in consolidated forms. The research for this project calls for both of these responses and gives much of the foundational framework for further development of a lament resource for pastors. The work of this project has not only gathered valuable

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<sup>244</sup> Michael Card, *A Sacred Sorrow*, 29.

information to that end, but has also engaged 130 pastors about this vital topic and has challenged them to develop additional opportunities for lament in their local settings. It has also provided a framework and continuing conversations with other pastors, churches, and districts about the critical need for engaging the church more fully in the practices of lament.

May more pastors and congregations see the need to provide dedicated opportunities for corporate lament and to give people space, permission and language to express the cries of their heart. May the church not rush the process, but allow sorrow to be expressed. And while there is the need to offer words of comfort and hope, may we take the time to sit awhile and join them in their sorrow. May we share in their burdens, their woe, and allow for another to flow “the sympathizing tear.”



APPENDIX A

*If This Is Not A Place. . .*

*If this is not a place where tears are understood,  
Then where shall I go to cry?*

*And if this is not a place where my spirit can take wings,  
Then where shall I go to fly?*

*I don't need another place for trying to impress you  
With just how good and virtuous I am.*

*I don't need another place for always being on top of things;  
Everybody knows that it's a sham.*

*I don't need another place for always wearing smiles,  
Even when it's not the way I feel.*

*I don't need another place to mouth the same old platitudes;  
Everybody knows that it's not real.*

*So if this is not a place where my questions can be asked,  
Then where shall I go to seek?*

*And if this is not a place where my heart cry can be heard,  
Where, tell me where, shall I go to speak?*

*So if this is not a place where tears are understood,  
Where shall I go, where shall I go to fly?*

-- Ken Medema<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Ken Medema, *If This Is Not a Place* from *Through the Eyes of Love*, (Word Music, 1977).

APPENDIX B

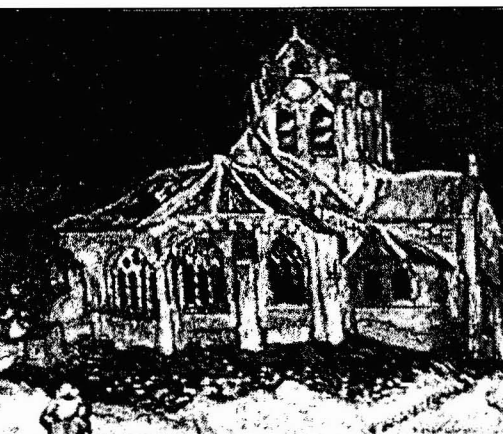


*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church

1



2



3



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church

4

*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE WORDS OF LAMMIE IN THE ORIGINAL FILM

*Come lift up your sorrow, and be free, with patience  
 Come and let us see if we can't find  
 The way to peace and love  
 The way to peace and love  
 The way to peace and love  
 The way to peace and love*

**"Come Lift Up Your Sorrow"**  
 Words and Music by Michael Card

5

*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE WORDS OF LAMMIE IN THE ORIGINAL FILM

**An Overview**  
*of Lammie's Life*

6

*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE WORDS OF LAMMIE IN THE ORIGINAL FILM


*1. Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 2. Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 3. Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 4. Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 5. Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge*

7

*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE WORDS OF LAMMIE IN THE ORIGINAL FILM

*Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge  
 Lammie's early years in the mountains of the Blue Ridge*


8



**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

*Look and see,  
 there is no one of my afflictions  
 whom I have not seen  
 I have seen them  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem*


9



**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

*Look and see,  
 there is no one of my afflictions  
 whom I have not seen  
 I have seen them  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem*


10



**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

*Some have said that  
 there is no one of my afflictions  
 whom I have not seen  
 I have seen them  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem  
 in the streets of Jerusalem*


11



**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

*Lament is a theme in the life of Saul and in the  
 entire essence of his. Christ's tears were  
 His tears of sorrow for the suffering  
 suffering, and the suffering  
 suffering, and the suffering  
 suffering, and the suffering  
 suffering, and the suffering*

12




**Come Lift Up Your Sorrows**  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Biblical Lamentations**

1. In the valley of the shadow of death
2. In the night of grief and mourning
3. In the midst of the storm of affliction
4. In the presence of the Lord's wrath


13



**Come Lift Up Your Sorrows**  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Modern Lamentations**  
 Again We Lament

14




**Come Lift Up Your Sorrows**  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

**The Challenge**

1. We need to restore a place for lament
2. We need to affirm our individuality
3. We need to possess the words of our affliction
4. We need to give our grief a voice
5. We need to be open to the possibility of hope

15




**Come Lift Up Your Sorrows**  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

**Times for Lamentation**

1. In the valley of the shadow of death
2. In the night of grief and mourning
3. In the midst of the storm of affliction
4. In the presence of the Lord's wrath
5. In the hope of restoration

16




**Come Life Up Your Sinner**  
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

**Abilities and Assets**

1. Physically absent due to inability to work
2. Physically present but unable to work due to inability to work
3. Unemployed
4. Unemployed due to inability to work
5. Unemployed due to inability to work

17




**Come Life Up Your Sinner**  
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

**Establishment Activities**

1. Read Prayers of the Lord and the Lord's Prayer
2. Read the Bible and the Lord's Prayer
3. Attend church services and other religious activities
4. Attend school or other educational activities
5. Attend other activities of interest


18



**Come Life Up Your Sinner**  
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

**Resources**

19

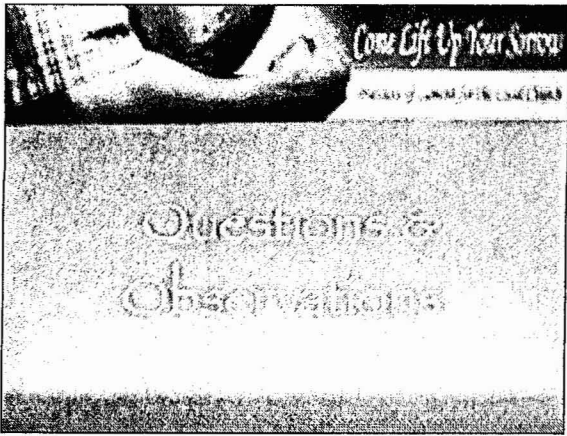


**Come Life Up Your Sinner**  
FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

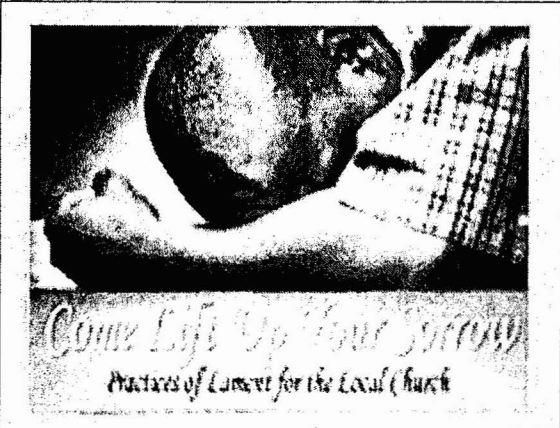
**Remedial Activities**

1. Attend school or other educational activities
2. Attend church services and other religious activities
3. Attend other activities of interest
4. Attend school or other educational activities
5. Attend other activities of interest

20



21



22



APPENDIX C

*A Place For Lament*

A Survey of Pastors on the Mid-Atlantic District

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Church \_\_\_\_\_

1. In just a sentence, how would you define lament?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

For each of the following questions, please circle the appropriate response:

2. Have you ever preached a sermon that directly addressed the topic of lament? Yes No

3. If you responded yes to question #2, have you preached on the topic of lament in the past year? Yes No

4. Have you ever planned or led a Service of Lament? Yes No

5. Do you have a Service of Lament at least once a year? Yes No

6. Do you ever include opportunities for lament in regular corporate worship? Yes No  
If so, how often? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Have you read a book about lament in the past two years? Yes No

If so, what was the title? \_\_\_\_\_

8. On a scale of 1- 10 (with 1 being not at all familiar and 10 being very familiar), how familiar do you believe your congregation is with the topic of lament?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. On a scale of 1- 10 (with 1 being absolutely irrelevant and 10 being extremely relevant), how would you rate the relevancy of the topic of lament to the lives of people in your congregation?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Would you be interested in attending a seminar on the topic of lament? Yes No

11. Would you be interested in participating in an online discussion group on the topic of lament? Yes No

12. Would you be interested in receiving additional resources on the topic of lament? Yes No

Please include any additional questions, comments on the back.

Prepared by John W. Nielson in conjunction with a Doctor of Ministry project at Nazarene Theological Seminary



## APPENDIX D

### *Psalm 13 (How Long, O Lord?)*

How long, O Lord,  
Will You forget me?  
How long, O Lord,  
Will You look the other way?

How long, O Lord,  
Must I wrestle with my thoughts  
And ev'ry day  
Have such sorrow in my heart?

Look on me and answer  
O God my Father,  
Bring light to my darkness  
Before they see me fall,  
(O Lord.)

But I trust in Your unfailing love,  
Yes my heart will rejoice.  
Still I sing of Your unfailing love,  
You have been good,  
You will be good to me.

CCLI Song # 3721852

Brian Doerksen | Daphne Rademaker | Karen Mitchinson | Steve Mitchinson  
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CCLI License # 252493

## APPENDIX E

# *Resources for Corporate Lament*

*Prepared by John W. Nielson*

### BOOKS

- Allen, Leslie C. *A Liturgy of Grief: A Pastoral Commentary on Lamentations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011.
- Anderson, Bernhard W. *Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak to Us Today*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.
- Bell, Rob. *Drops Like Stars: A Few Thoughts On Creativity and Suffering*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009.
- Boss, Pauline. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
- Brown, Sally and Patrick Miller. *Lament*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007.
- Brueggeman, Walter. *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.
- Brueggeman, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1984.
- Brueggemann, Walter, with Steve Frost. *Psalmist's Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament*. Kansas City, MO: The House Studio, 2010.
- Card, Michael. *A Sacred Sorrow: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2005.
- Card, Michael. *The Hidden Face of God: Finding the Missing Door to the Father Through Lament*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2007.
- Henderson, Frank. *Liturgies of Lament*. Chicago, IL: Archdiocese of Chicago Liturgy Training Publications, 1994.
- Hudson, Jill. *Congregational Trauma: Caring, Coping & Learning*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1998.
- Jenkins, Michael. *In the House of the Lord: Inhabiting the Psalms of Lament*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998.
- Lee, Nancy C. *Lyrics of Lament: From Tragedy to Transformation*. Minneapolis, MI: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2010.
- Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*. New York, NY: Harper One, 2001.

O'Connor, Kathleen M. *Lamentations and the Tears of the World*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Pembroke, Neil. *Pastoral Care In Worship: Liturgy and Psychology in Dialogue*. New York, NY: T & T Clark International, 2010.

Powery, Luke A. *Spirit Speech: Lament and Celebration in Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2009.

Smith, Harold Ivan. *A Decembered Grief: Living With Loss While Others Are Celebrating*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1999.

Smith, Harold Ivan. *When Your People Are Grieving: Leading In Times of Loss*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2001.

### SMALL GROUP STUDIES

Bell, Rob. *Drops Like Stars*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010. [Book and DVD]

Brueggemann, Walter, with Steve Frost. *Psalms' Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament*. Kansas City, MO: The House Studio, 2010.

Card, Michael. *A Journey With Jesus Through Hopelessness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Day of Discovery, 2007. (DVD)

Card, Michael. *A Sacred Sorrow Experience Guide: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament*. Colorado Springs, CO: Nav Press, 2005.

### MUSIC

*The Hidden Face of God (Album)* – Michael Card (Especially, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*)

*Psalm 13 (How Long, O Lord?)* – Brian Doerksen

*Blest Be the Tie That Binds* – John Fawcett

*I'll Help You Cry* – Larnelle Harris

*If This Is Not a Place* – Ken Medema

*Hard to Get* – Rich Mullins

*My, God, My God, Why?* – The Psalms Project

*My Cry Ascends (Album)* – Gregory Wilbur

APPENDIX F



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church

1



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church

Thanks &  
Introduction

2



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church


3



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
Practices of Lament for the Local Church

1. Raise the issue
2. Resource pastors
3. Request your help with a survey
4. Offer your own unique opportunities


4



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

# SURVEY


5



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

*How long, O Lord?  
 Will you forget me forever?  
 How long will you hide your face from me?  
 How long must I cry for help and  
 how long will I seek for help,  
 but I have not heard,  
 nor have I seen you.*


6



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

*Consider and answer me, O Lord my God,  
 Give an answer,  
 for all the people stop and wait  
 for you, O Lord, and they  
 cry out, "Why is this so long?"*


7



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE VOICE OF LAMENT FOR THE LORD'S PEOPLE

*But I trusted in your steadfast love,  
 my heart shall rejoice in your salvation,  
 O Lord, do not delay,  
 for my soul is weary.*


8



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS BY THE LORD'S SERVANT

# An Overview of Lament


9



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS BY THE LORD'S SERVANT

1. Lament is a common language of the Bible.
2. Central to the Book of Psalms (67 out of 150).
3. Broad range of subjects, from personal grief to national catastrophe.
4. Deeply theological, reflecting on God's character and actions.
5. A form of prayer, often used in corporate worship.

10




*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS BY THE LORD'S SERVANT

Lament is a theme in the life of Israel and in the entire essence of the Christian faith.

It is a cry that reaches to the heart of God, seeking His mercy and grace in times of distress.

It is a form of prayer that is both personal and corporate, reflecting the human condition of suffering and the need for divine intervention.

11



*Come Lift Up Your Sorrow*  
THE BOOK OF LAMENTATIONS BY THE LORD'S SERVANT

### Biblical Lament

1. Lament is a form of prayer that is both personal and corporate, reflecting the human condition of suffering and the need for divine intervention.
2. It is a cry that reaches to the heart of God, seeking His mercy and grace in times of distress.
3. Lament is a form of prayer that is both personal and corporate, reflecting the human condition of suffering and the need for divine intervention.
4. It is a cry that reaches to the heart of God, seeking His mercy and grace in times of distress.

12

**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
Prayers of Comfort for the Covid-19 Crisis

**The Challenge**

1. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 2. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 3. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 4. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 5. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord

13

**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
Prayers of Comfort for the Covid-19 Crisis

**If This Is Not a Place**

14

**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
Prayers of Comfort for the Covid-19 Crisis

**Resource Table**

15

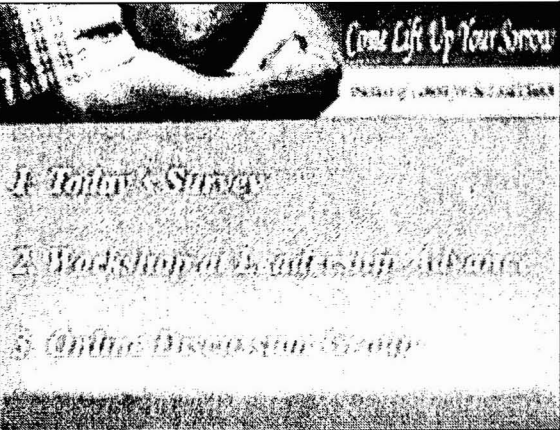
**Come Lift Up Your Sorrow**  
Prayers of Comfort for the Covid-19 Crisis

**Prayers of Comfort**

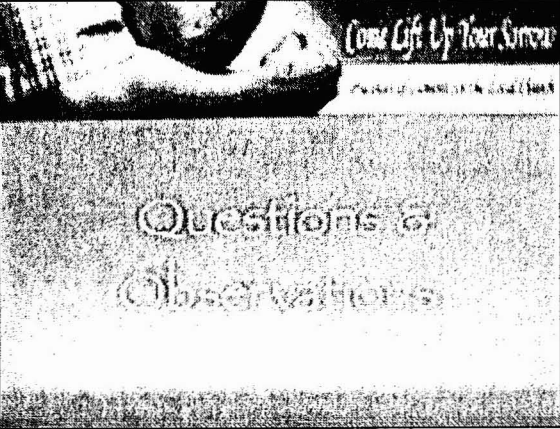
1. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 2. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 3. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 4. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord  
 5. We are called to lift up our sorrows to the Lord

16

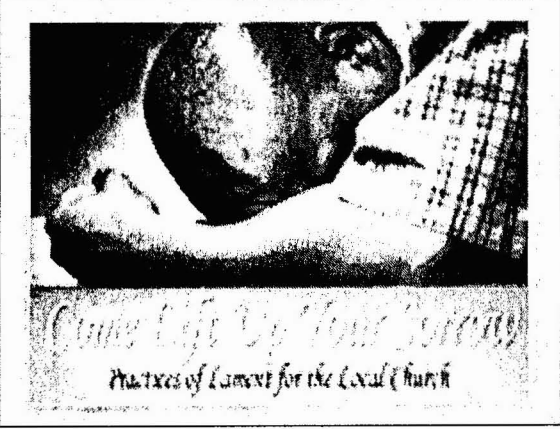




17



18



19



APPENDIX G

**SURVEY RESPONSE SUMMARY**

Question # 1 – In just a sentence, how would you define lament?

A detailed list of the responses is available from the author.

Question #2 – Have you ever preached a sermon that directly addressed the topic of lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	32	6	2	40
NO	16	27	4	47
No Response	2	0	0	2

Question #3 – If you responded yes to question #2, have you preached on the topic of lament in the past year?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	17	4	1	22
NO	19	11	1	31
No Response	14	18	4	36

Question #4 – Have you ever planned or led a Service of Lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	10	5	2	17
NO	39	28	4	71
No Response	1	0	0	1

Question #5 – Do you have a Service of Lament at least once a year?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	6	5	1	12
NO	42	27	5	74
No Response	2	1	0	3

Question #6 – Do you ever include opportunities for lament in regular, corporate worship?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	25	14	1	40
NO	20	17	4	41
No Response	5	2	1	8

Question #7 – Have you read a book about lament in the past two years?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	9	6	1	16
NO	40	26	5	71
No Response	1	1	0	2

Question #8 – On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being not at all familiar and 10 being very familiar), how familiar do you believe your congregation is with the topic of lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	3	1	1	5
2	8	6	0	14
3	10	9	2	21
4	8	6	0	14
5	8	5	2	15
6	4	3	0	7
7	3	0	0	3
8	3	2	0	5
9	1	0	0	1
10	0	0	0	0
No Response	2	1	1	4

Question #9 – On a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being absolutely irrelevant and 10 being extremely relevant), how would you rate the relevancy of the topic of lament to the lives of people in your congregation?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
1	0	0	1	1
2	0	0	0	0
3	2	0	0	2
4	3	0	1	4
5	1	2	1	4

6	7	1	0	8
7	7	0	1	8
8	16	12	0	28
9	4	9	1	14
10	8	8	0	16
No Response	2	1	1	4

Question #10 – Would you be interested in attending a seminar on the topic of lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	40	27	4	71
NO	5	6	2	13
No Response	5	0	0	5

Question #11 – Would you be interested in participating in an online discussion group on the topic of lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	29	21	2	52
NO	19	12	4	35
No Response	2	0	0	2

Question #12 – Would you be interested in receiving additional resources on the topic of lament?

	<i>Lead</i>	<i>Staff</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
YES	47	30	3	80
NO	1	3	2	6
No Response	2	0	1	3

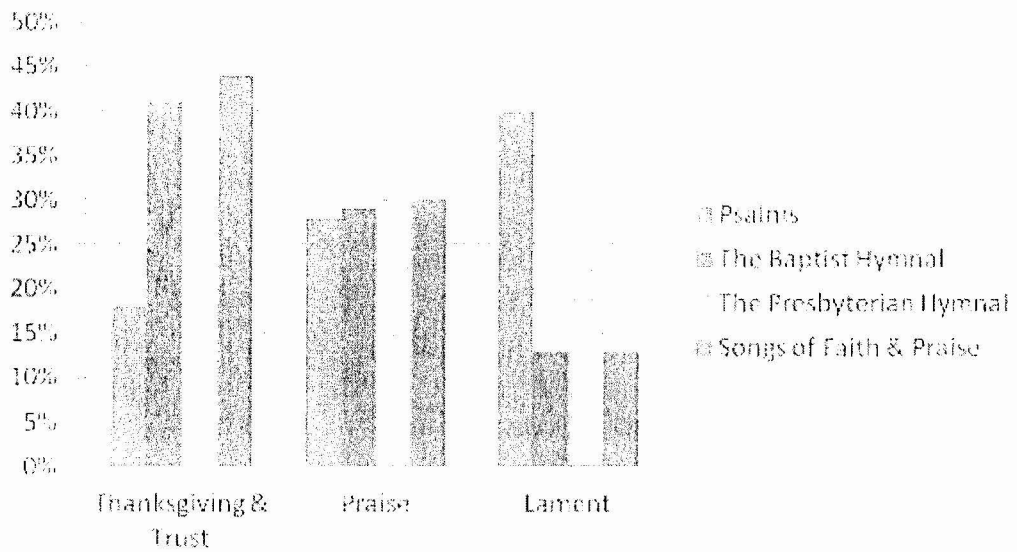
## APPENDIX H

### BOOKS ON LAMENT READ BY PASTORS

1. Something by Harold Ivan Smith
2. *Lamentations, Job, Psalms, Folly of Prayer: Practicing the Presence and Absence of God* by Matt Woodley, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cures* by David Martyn Lloyd-Jones
3. Something by Walter Brueggeman
4. *Out of the Depths* by Brueggeman
5. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* by Philip Yancey, *A Time to Heal: A Grief Journal* by Beth Marshall
6. *When the Mountain Shook*, Brueggeman's series on lament
7. *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis
8. *The Book of Psalms*
9. *Dark Night of the Soul* by St. John of the Cross
10. *Tear Soup* by Pat Schwiebert and Chuck DeKlyen
11. *Drops Like Stars* by Rob Bell
12. *A Grief Observed* by C.S. Lewis
13. *Drops Like Stars* by Rob Bell, *The Shack* by William P. Young

## APPENDIX I

### The Psalms Compared to Songbooks



Adapted from Penberthy & Zeman (2012), *Journal of Music Theology*, 29(2), 10-12, pp. 11-12.

## APPENDIX J

### LAMENT SERMON TEXTS

#### The Psalms of Lament

##### Communal Laments

12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

##### Individual Laments

3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36, 39, 40:12-17, 41, 42-43, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 70, 71, 77, 86, 89, 120, 139, 141, 142

##### Penitential Psalms

6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143

##### Imprecatory Psalms

35, 69, 83, 88, 109, 137, 140

#### Advent/Christmas Lament Texts

Matthew 2:13-18

#### Lent/Easter Lament Texts

Matthew 27:45-46

Luke 19:41-44

Luke 22:39-46

#### Misc. Lament Texts

Job 3

Jeremiah 15

Habakkuk 3

Mark 7:31-35

John 11:33-36

## APPENDIX K

### LAMENT SAMPLE SERMON

Sermon Title: *There's a Grief That Can't Be Spoken*

Sermon Text: *Psalms 13*

Author: John W. Nielson

The song *Empty Chairs at Empty Tables* is one of the truly haunting songs in all of *Les Misérables*. Marius returns to the place where he and his companions had talked and laughed and sang and planned and debated and dreamed. He is the only survivor of the band of brothers following the devastating slaughter that takes place on the barricade. A gripping phrase begins his song, "There's a grief that can't be spoken. There's a pain goes on and on." Marius is experiencing traumatic loss, sorrow, both grief and guilt. He faces unimaginable loss. He asks unanswerable questions:

- Why am I alive and my friends are dead?
- What was their sacrifice for?
- Did any of it even matter?
- What do I do now?

Marius is singing a song of lament. A lament is a cry of sorrow and grief, but it also includes our questions and confusion. Lament is a language of complaint. We ask questions like, "Why did this happen?" "How long will this go on?" Lament is a common language of the Bible. It is central to the Book of Psalms where a conservative estimate places the number of lament psalms at fifty-seven, or thirty-eight percent, of the Psalter. When you add in other psalms that, while they are praise oriented, derive from a clear experience of suffering and lament, the total increases to 118 psalms, or eighty percent of all psalms. Lament is also critical to other of the Wisdom Literature, including Job.

It is also central in the Prophets, most notably in the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. Lament is a theme in the life of Jesus and in the entire essence of the

Christological event. It is present throughout the narrative of Scripture and yet it still remains a virtual foreign language to the narrative of the lives of most Christians. We have lost sight of how to lament, in the biblical tradition of lament. We have certainly forgotten how to lament in community. Lament has become, in the words of Michael Card, “a lost language.” Too often we fail to speak the words of lament, the words of sorrow, grief, and loss. Our Scripture passage today is one example of a Psalm of Lament. Hear the Word of the Lord from Psalm Thirteen:

*How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?  
How long will you hide your face from me?  
How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?  
How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?  
Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!  
Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,  
and my enemy will say, “I have prevailed;”  
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.*

*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.  
I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.*

Psalm 13 (New Revised Standard Version)

### ***The Message of Psalm 13***

Psalm Thirteen begins as most Psalms of lament do, with a complaint. Complaint is central to lament. Lament not only expresses sorrow, but also our questions, doubts, and even anger. Only the God of the Bible allows, and even invites us to bring anything and everything that we feel to the very presence of God. In Psalm Thirteen the complaint has a number of elements. The psalmist cries out to God with a series of statements: It seems like you have forgotten me (verse one). It seems like my troubles will never end (verse two). It seems like everyone is against me (verse two). Implicit in the complaint is the



feeling of being totally alone. The Psalmist feels like Marius does, “There’s a grief that can’t be spoken. There’s a pain goes on and on.”

Psalm Thirteen continues with the psalmist crying out to God with specific requests. The call includes three primary requests:

1. Turn to me and answer me. (verse 3)
2. Give light to my eyes, a request for direction and life and joy. (verse 3)
3. Deliver me. (verse 4)

The Psalm ends as most biblical laments do, with a turn, a commitment to praise God for the answer that is still to come. The psalmist says it this way: I will trust in your unfailing love, I will rejoice because you have rescued me” (verse 5). He also commits to sing to the God who has been good to him. Even in the midst of the sorrow, there is an assurance that God stands with us and cares about our suffering.

### ***We Need to Remember . . .***

We can be honest with God. God can handle anything we need to say. God welcomes our full honesty -- to share our pain, sorrow, anger, hurt; God already knows all about it. We must always take our lament to God. One of the most important features of biblical lament is that even though the Psalmist expresses anger, he expresses it to God. True lament is a form of prayer and trust. When we are dealing with sorrow, pain, loss, grief, anger, disappointment, etc., the one place that we CAN take all of that emotion is to God. This is the nature of biblical lament. We must also realize that we do not see the whole picture. When we are facing times of darkness and pain, we often can only see the storm. Certainly, at the moment of singing this song, Marius was only able to see the loss and sorrow that he had experienced due to the tragic death of his friends. All of that is real,

and we should not ignore or deny it, but it is not the whole picture; it is not the end of the story!

The sorrow and pain will not go on forever. While it often feels like the hard things we face will never end, the Gospel proclaims that there is coming a day when all the pain and sorrow and loss of this world will be swallowed up into the final victory of God.

We must carry our lament into trust and praise. In the Psalms of lament there is always that “turn.” The psalmist expresses his complaint and makes his request, but then he makes a confession of present trust and future praise. Psalm 13 ends with these amazing words, “But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.”

There will be times in life, where we, too, have cause to lament. Like Marius, we will, experience “a grief that can’t be spoken” or “a pain goes on and on.” We may feel remorse, guilt, sorrow, anger, fear, regret, and even despair. The things that cause us to lament may continue to be realities that must be faced and endured, but it is never the end of the story. In this fallen world, we will know grief. Jesus told his disciples that sorrow and trouble would be a part of this life; we can count on it. But we can also be assured that Jesus has overcome the world and that the last word has not been spoken.

Marius would soon find hope and love and a brand new start to his life. While I am sure that the sorrow and loss he experienced at the barricade never fully left him, he did find joy again. But before he moved forward into that new reality, he needed to express the full depth of his loss and sorrow. He needed to lament. He needed to express his heart and the depth of the emotions that he had experienced. It is that bridge from the depth of loss to new hope and life that is often the gift of lament.

There will be times in all of our lives when we experience sorrow, loss, anger, doubt, or grief. We will often feel like it is something that we cannot talk about, not to God and not to others. May we remember that this grief can and must be spoken. We need to speak it to the Everlasting God and we must speak it to the community of faith that God has given to be the physical expression of divine presence and support. When the “pain goes on and on,” call out from the depths to the God who hears, who cares, who understands, and who walks with us through the darkest night. And as we will soon be reminded, “Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise!”

APPENDIX L

SAMPLE CHRISTMAS LAMENT SERVICE

***When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas***

A Service of Lamentation & Remembrance

**SERVICE ORDER**

Prelude

Call to Worship

Invocation

Introduction of the Service

The Old Testament Reading – *Isaiah 9:1-7*

Carol: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

A Reading from the Psalms – *Psalms 77:1-9*

Special Music: *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas*

Video Presentation

The Gospel Reading – *Matthew 2:13-18*

Homily – *A Violence Endured*

Carol – *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*

Candle Lighting Ceremony

Carol: *Emmanuel* and refrain of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

Benediction

Postlude

# *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas*

A Service of Lamentation & Remembrance

## ANNOTATED ORDER

### **Prelude**

The prelude music will include a variety of soft, instrumental carols of the season. The selections include more meditative carols and ones that express God's presence but also acknowledge the darkness and sorrow of life. Examples include, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear* (which will be referenced in the service), *Of the Father's Love Begotten*, *I Wonder as I Wander*, *O Little Town of Bethlehem*, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, *What Child Is This?* and *O Holy Night*.

### **Call to Worship**

The Call to Worship (included below) is really an invitation for those gathered to enter into a time of reflection. It begins with a text from Isaiah 9:2. While it acknowledges the sorrow that we bring, it affirms that bringing it to God is an act of worship. It also expresses hope and a commitment to praise God even through our sorrow. The closing text (in quotes) is from a song by Michael Card called, *Come Lift Up Your Sorrows*.

*"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light;  
On those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."  
In this season of Advent, we remember that Jesus entered a world  
that was cold and dark; a world where sorrow and suffering are very real,  
the kind of world where we still live.  
We are invited to bring the deepest sorrows of our hearts into the very presence of God.*

*So come, come bring your sorrow to the God who is with us.  
"Come lift up your sorrow, and offer your pain.  
Come make a sacrifice of all your shame,  
There in your wilderness, He's waiting for you  
to worship Him with your wounds, for He's wounded too."*

## Invocation

The invocation is a prayer recognizing God's presence among us, even in our brokenness. It continues the theme of the Call to Worship.

*Eternal God, we acknowledge your presence among us.  
We recognize that You are Emmanuel, God With Us.  
We thank you for being here, in this place, with Your people.  
We come into Your presence with so many varied emotions and experiences.  
We offer up to You our joys and our sorrows as an act of faith and worship.  
May You bring hope to our heaviness and light to our darkness.  
May You come and bring each of us a reminder of Your presence,  
Your Power and Your Peace.  
This we pray in the Name of Emmanuel.  
AMEN.*

## Introduction of the Service

The tone of the service has been set with the Prelude, Call to Worship and Invocation, but here there will be a further invocation of the nature and purpose of the gathering. It will focus on giving people permission to express their emotions throughout the service and to allow all the various aspects of the service to minister to them.

## The Old Testament Reading – *Isaiah 9:1-7*

The Old Testament text will be read which is a selection from Isaiah, already referred to in the Call to Worship. It is a messianic prophecy, but also acknowledges the darkness and suffering in the world that is the very reason why a Savior is needed.

## Carol: *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*

The opening song will be the carol, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, which is a haunting melody in a minor key. It expresses the need and longing for a Messiah to come to deliver those in captivity, those who mourn. It asks for God to cheer our spirits, disperse

the gloom and put to flight the shadows of death. It prays for the end of strife. We will sing all of the stanzas, but without the refrain of rejoicing. This will be saved and sung at the end of the service to point the people to the hope of the coming of Christ.

### **A Reading from the Psalms – *Psalm 77:1-9***

This selection is a Psalm of Lament. It is a cry to God from a place of sorrow and suffering. It is a Psalm of brutal honesty in which the writer wonders if God has forgotten him. It gives voice to what many people in the service may be feeling, but may not be able to express. It ends with a question, “Has God slammed the door on his compassion?” The song that follows, and indeed the rest of the service, seeks to answer that question.

### **Special Music: *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas***

The service continues with a song to be sung by a soloist, *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas* (The lyrics are included at the end of this appendix.) The story behind the song will be shared prior to its being sung. People will be encouraged to meditate on God’s presence in their own situation or suffering while they listen to the song.

### **Video Presentation**

Next there will be a video presentation of pictures of family members who have died in the past year (or further back if people choose). An invitation to include these images will take place, in advance, giving people a chance to submit them ahead of time. Additionally, appropriate images of various tragedies that took place over the past year will also be included. These images will be part of a visual presentation accompanied by the song, *Prayer for the Children*.

## **The Gospel Reading – *Matthew 2:13-18***

The text that will be the basis for the homily will be read. This text is part of Matthew's birth narrative and chronicles the slaughter of the infants at the hand of King Herod. It includes the quotation from Jeremiah 31:15, "A cry was heard in Ramah - weeping and great mourning. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are no more."

### **Homily – *A Violence Endured***

The homily, based on the text from Matthew 2 will focus on the reality that suffering and sorrow were equally present in the Christmas narrative as much as the glory and the joy. In fact, it demonstrates the very reason why Christ came. The point made is that the message of Advent is precisely the message that we need when our heart is breaking. Rather than pull back, we should run to the message of Christmas and experience the presence of a God who understands our sorrow, who weeps with us, and who offers us hope and strength. A rough outline of the homily's key points is included at the end of the paper. At the close of the homily there will be a reference to the carol, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, a carol with a message that fits the theme of the service well. There will be a particular focus upon the third stanza:

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load,  
Whose forms are bending low,  
Who toil along the climbing way  
With painful steps and slow,*

*Look up! For glad and golden hours  
come swiftly on the wing.  
O rest beside the weary road,  
And hear the angels sing!*



### ***Carol – It Came Upon the Midnight Clear***

Having talked about the carol and its message for those gathered, it will be sung by the congregation. This is the invitation that those who are experiencing “the crushing load” will “look up” and will find “rest beside the weary road and hear the angels sing.”

### **Candle Lighting Ceremony**

As the carol, *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, continues to be played instrumentally, people will be invited to come forward and light candles representing someone they have lost or some struggle they are facing. Additionally the option will be given for them to speak the name of the individual or the struggle they are facing and name it before the congregation. Some may simply choose to light a candle and return to their seat.

### **Carol: *Emmanuel* and Refrain of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel***

Following the Candle Lighting Ceremony there will be a closing song, the Christmas chorus, *Emmanuel* (Emmanuel, Emmanuel, His Name is called, Emmanuel. God with us, revealed in us, His Name is called Emmanuel.”). This will serve as an affirmation of God’s presence among us, in the middle of our suffering or sorrow. This will flow right into the refrain, skipped at the opening of the service, of *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*: “Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel has come to thee, O Israel.” With this selection the service ends with the promise and the assurance of a word of hope.

## Benediction

The Benediction will begin with a poem written by my father and then move into a closing prayer of blessing that will flow out of the theme of the service but also speak to the hope of Christmas.

Come, Lord Christ as once you came,  
Leaving glory, wealth and fame.  
Come. Amid your people dwell,  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

Come, Lord Jesus from above,  
Be again God's gift of Love.  
Make this earth your citadel.  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

Come, Lord to our needy race  
Once again reveal your face.  
Heal our spirits, make us well.  
Be for us EMMANUEL.

John M. Nielson

May you go, conscious of the Love of God the Father  
Who sent to you the Son, the Prince of Peace.  
May you go empowered by the Holy Spirit  
To live with faith in spite of the turmoil of life.  
May the Advent of our God give you strength.

The Lord bless you and keep you;  
the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;  
the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace.  
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
AMEN.

## **Postlude**

The postlude music will also be instrumental Christmas carols, but will add into the mix some more upbeat selections. In addition to *It Came Upon the Midnight Clear*, *O Holy Night*, *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel* that have already been heard in the service, carols such as *Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus*, *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* and *The First Noel* will also be heard.

## *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas*

When your heart breaks at Christmas, He will be Emmanuel.

In the darkness of the Silent Night, a message He will tell,

That God drew near at Christmas, and so He's near to you.

So when your heart breaks at Christmas, I'll tell you what to do.

Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring you Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill the darkness, no matter where you've been.

In sorrow, He will be your Joy and He'll dry your ev'ry tear.

No matter what you're facing, remember, He is near.

When your heart breaks at Christmas, He will be a Shining Star.

And when you need His Comfort, He'll never be too far.

For God drew near at Christmas, and so He's near to you.

So when your heart breaks at Christmas, I'll tell you what to do.

Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring you Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill the darkness, no matter where you've been.

In sorrow, He will be your Joy and He'll dry your ev'ry tear.

No matter what you're facing, remember, He is near.

Remember, Jesus is Emmanuel, He'll bring me Hope and Peace within.

He is a Light to fill my darkness, no matter where I've been.

In sorrow, He will be my Joy and He'll dry my ev'ry tear.

No matter what I'm facing, I'll remember He is near.

Remember Jesus is Emmanuel, remember He is near.

Yes Jesus is Emmanuel, remember He is near.

When your heart breaks at Christmas, remember, He is near.

## *A Violence Endured*

### *The Forgotten Cast of Christmas*

1. John the Baptist - A Voice of Hope
2. Zechariah - A Vision of Love.
3. Elizabeth - A Visit of Joy.
4. King Herod - A Violence Endured and the Promise of Peace.

### *A Blue Christmas*

1. Christmas is a season of hope, love, joy and peace.
2. Christmas may also be a time of sorrow.
3. Christmas does not change the realities of life.
4. Christmas does change the resources we have to face life.

### *Introducing Herod "The Great"*

1. Herod was disturbed.
2. Herod was deceptive.
3. Herod was depraved.
4. Herod was destructive.

### *A Cry in Ramah*

1. Jesus was born into a sinful and fallen world.
2. Jesus was born because of that sinful and fallen world.
3. Jesus was born into a world of sorrow and weeping.
4. Jesus was born to bring peace and comfort to a world of sorrow and weeping.

### *When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas*

1. Be honest about your tears.
2. Be looking for the signs of God's presence.
3. Be willing to run toward Christmas not away from it.
4. Be ready to receive Christ's comfort and peace.
5. Be committed to community.

## APPENDIX M

### LAMENT RESOURCES

#### MUSICAL RESOURCES

##### Classical Works

*Adagio for Strings*

*Symphony No. 3 – Symphony of Sorrowful Songs* – Henryk Gorecki

*Three Motets* – Carl Nielsen

##### Hymns

*Does Jesus Care?*, Frank Graeff, 1901

*Hiding In Thee*, William Cushing, 1876

*I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day*, Henry Longfellow

*I Lay My Sins on Jesus*, Horatius Bonar

*I Would Not Be Denied*, Charles Jones

*It Came upon the Midnight Clear*, Edmund Sears

*Jesus, I Come*, William T. Sleeper, 1887

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, Latin hymn, 12<sup>th</sup> century

*O Love That Will Not Let Me Go*, George Matheson

*Pass Me Not*, Fanny J. Crosby, 1868

*Precious Lord, Take My Hand* – Thomas Dorsey, 1938

*'Til the Storm Passes By*, Mosie Lister



### *New Hymns of Lament Lyrics*

<http://lectionarysong.blogspot.com/2009/02/songs-of-lament-for-sunday-february.html>

<http://lectionarysong.blogspot.com/2008/08/overdose-awareness-day-song-suggestions.html>

<http://wesleyhill.tumblr.com/post/31946372/songs-of-lament>

### *Contemporary Music*

*Blessings* – Laura Story

*Blest Is the Man – Psalm 32* – Katy Snow (From Album, *My Cry Ascends*)

*Christmas Makes Me Cry* – Mandisa

*From Depths of Woe – Psalm 130* – Gregory Wilbur (From Album, *My Cry Ascends*)

*Hard to Get* – Rich Mullins (From Album, *The Jesus Record*)

*Held* – Nicole Nordeman

*The Hidden Face of God (Album)* – Michael Card

*How Blest the Man – Psalm 41* – Nathan Clark George (From Album, *My Cry Ascends*)

*If This is Not a Place* – Ken Medema

(<http://revitalizeyourchurch.blogspot.com/2009/08/if-this-is-not-place.html>)

*I'll Help You Cry* - Larnelle Harris

*In Brokenness You Shine* – Steve Green (From Album, *Somewhere Between*)

*Job Suite* – Michael Card

*Lord, Hear My Prayer – Psalm 102* – Katy Snow (From Album, *My Cry Ascends*)

*Mourning the Death of a Dream* – Michael Card

*My God, My God, Why?* – The Psalms Project

*Psalm 13 (How Long, O Lord?)* – Brian Doerksen

*Sorrow Mixed With Light* – Steve Green (From Album, *Somewhere Between*)

*Tears of the Saints* – Leeland (From Album, *Sound of Melodies*)

*The Willow* – The Speers

*When the Morning Comes* – Steve Green (From Album, *Somewhere Between*)

*When the Tears Fall* – Tim Hughes

*When Your Heart Breaks at Christmas* – John W. Nielson

### **Popular Music**

*After the Storm* – Mumford and Sons

*Empty Chairs at Empty Tables* – From the musical *Les Misérables*

*Lament* – George Winston (From Album, *Remembrance*)

*Rocky Ground* – Bruce Springsteen

### **LITURGIES AND CEREMONIES**

#### **Lament Litanies**

*A Litany of Remembrance, Lament and Hope*

<http://antiracismcommittee.blogspot.com/2011/01/litany-of-remembrance-lament-and-hope.html>

*A Litany of Victim Lament* [http://www.crcna.org/pages/osj\\_victimlitany.cfm](http://www.crcna.org/pages/osj_victimlitany.cfm)

#### **Lament Prayers**

*Through the Valley: Prayers For Violent Times* by Margaret Anne Huffman. Judson Press, 1996.

#### **Lament Services**

*By the Rivers of Babylon: A Service of Lament*

<http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/riversbabylon.html>

*Crying Unto Heaven: A Service of Lament*

<http://www.irishcatholic.ie/site/content/crying-unto-heaven-liturgy-lament>

## **SCRIPTURE RESOURCES**

Listing of Psalms of Lament by category - <http://www.crivoice.org/psalmtypes.html>

## **ARTICLES & PAPERS**

Apple, Dennis. "Confessions of a Grieving Pastor" – In *Holiness Today*.

<http://www.nph.com/nphweb/html/h2ol/article.jsp?sid=10000011&id=10009907>

Bratcher, Dennis. "Patterns for Life: Structure, Genre, and Theology in Psalms." In *The Voice*.

<http://www.crivoice.org/psalmgenre.html>

Brueggemann, Walter. "The Friday Voice of Faith: A serious theology of the cross requires a serious practice of the lament psalms." *From Reformed Worship*, Issue #30.

[http://209.200.121.40/magazine/article.cfm?article\\_id=709](http://209.200.121.40/magazine/article.cfm?article_id=709)

Deborah van Deusen Hunsinger "Bearing the Unbearable: Trauma, Gospel, and Pastoral Care." *Theology Today* April 2011 vol. 68 no. 1 (Pages 8-25)

<http://www3.ptsem.edu/Content.aspx?id=5138>

Smith, Terry. "*Darkness Is My Closest Friend: Using the Psalms of Lament to Address Grief Issues.*" Presented to the North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW), March, 2007.

<http://www.nacsw.org/Publications/Proceedings2007/SmithTDarkenessClosestFriendE.pdf>

## **VIDEO RESOURCES**

Bell, Rob. *Drops Like Stars*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Psalms: The Hard Road from Obedience to Praise*. Kansas City, MO: The House Studio, 2010.

Brueggemann, Walter, with Steve Frost. *Psalmist's Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament*. MIKO Productions, 2009.

Card, Michael. *A Journey With Jesus Through Hopelessness*.

Shadowlands (Based on the life of C.S. Lewis)

## **HOMILETIC RESOURCES**

### *Sermons on Lament*

- *The Hidden Hope In Lament* by Dan Allender

<http://www.leaderu.com/marshall/mhr01/lament1.html>

### *Seasonal Sermons on Lament*

- *A Song of Lament* by Michael Cheuk

<http://mikesmusings.wordpress.com/2008/12/01/a-song-of-lament/>

## **CHRISTIAN EDUCATION RESOURCES**

Card, Michael. *A Sacred Sorrow Experience Guide: Reaching Out to God in the Lost Language of Lament*. Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 2005.

## **MISC. INTERNET RESOURCES**

Ambiguous Loss (Web page of Pauline Boss)

<http://www.ambiguousloss.com/>

Use of the Lament Psalms in Grief Recovery

<http://www.journey-through-grief.com/grief-journey.html>

## APPENDIX N

### LAMENT BEST PRACTICES

*We share our mutual woes,  
Our mutual burdens bear;  
And often for each other flows  
The sympathizing tear.*

*“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”*

Words by John Fawcett

What follows is a summary of ideas for services or practices of corporate lament that come from several pastors and other individuals. While not included here, samples of worship orders and worship folders or programs have been collected when possible and are available for further study. This collection of best practices is certainly not exhaustive, but is representative of approaches that some churches have taken to provide opportunities for lament to take place. In many cases, lament may not be a term that is used, but the goal is focused on providing opportunities for people to bring their sorrow, pain and loss to the presence of God. They are opportunities for the people of God to come together and express their sorrows and to experience healing. They are moments when together we can shed “the sympathizing tear.”

One category of lament practices includes specific services that help people deal with loss and grief. These are services of remembrances; memorial moments where those gathered can honor those who have died. In the Nazarene tradition there is usually a “Service of Memoirs” as a part of the annual District Assembly. Here names are read or projected on the screen as music is sung or played. Often, prayer and Scripture readings accompany this moment in the Assembly. Sometimes local churches will do something

similar as part of their annual meeting. Another way that churches have provided a similar experience is with a dedicated service, often during the season of Advent, that is designed to give people the chance to remember and reflect on family and friends who have died.

Rev. Ben Spitler, pastor of the Gaithersburg Church of the Nazarene in Gaithersburg, MD, has a yearly service in December that gives people the chance to express grief and experience healing. This service, held later in the Advent season, revolves around the lighting of the candles of the Advent wreath with a refocus of the meaning of each candle. With the lighting of each candle, there is a short explanation for the candle along with a responsive reading. Appropriate carols are used throughout the service as well as times of prayer. To give an example, following the carol, “In the Bleak Midwinter,” the leader says, “The first Christmas wasn’t all merry and bright, nor is it for many today. In the course of this service we’ll light the candles of the Advent wreath, which in this season traditionally represent love, peace, joy and hope. Tonight we pray that each lighting will take on special meaning for you.” Then comes the lighting of the first candle of the Advent wreath. “Leader—This first candle we light to remember those whom we have loved and lost. We pause to remember their name, their face, their voice, the memory that binds them to us in this season (Any who wish to are given the opportunity to come and light a candle in memory of someone they’ve lost, and share their name and/or a memory or word of tribute). All—Surround them with your unending love, O God.”

The second candle gives opportunity to focus on other types of loss. “This second candle we light to redeem the pain of other losses: the loss of relationship, the loss of a

job, the loss of health. We gather up the pain of the past and present and offer it to God, asking for His help and grace (We had a prayer card inserted in the bulletin that gave them an opportunity to write down a request. The pastors prayed over those requests in the week to follow).” It is significant that this opportunity to lament other types of loss is included in this type of service.

The third candle focuses on the fact that God is present with us and the fourth candle focuses on the future hope that is ours as believers. There is also a short announcement at the end of the printed program that invites people to call the church if they need someone to talk to in the days ahead. This service is a good example of an Advent service of lament and could be easily adapted to serve as a non-seasonal service of lament.

The Bel Air Church of the Nazarene in Bel Air, MD also offers a similar service each year during the Advent season called “A Service of Remembrance.” Each year a different theme is selected that combines elements of Christmas and difficult circumstances. Some recent themes have included, “Putting the Pieces Back Together,” “Take Me to the Cross,” “Threads of Grace,” “Just Beyond the Manger,” and “I Will Rise. Often an image and or song is chosen to reflect the theme. The services are characterized by a series of songs, readings and testimonies that explore a variety of sorrows and hardships that people may be enduring. A worship folder contains the lyrics to one of the central songs, giving people the chance to read and reflect on the lyrics even after the service is concluded. Different years there have been other focus areas included in the service, such as prayer for those serving our country in the military (particularly prayer for those serving in war), those who have gone through divorce and other types of loss. The service recognizes that these losses may be even more keenly felt during the Advent and

Christmas season. The goal is to be able to be honest with the sorrow and loss and yet also to point people to the truth that God is present, offers comfort and strength, and is working in our lives even in the midst of grief and loss. One of the worship folders states:

During the Christmas Season, we have been reflecting on the words of the prophet Isaiah proclaiming that God was at work to redeem His people. This redemption is as multifaceted as a beautifully cut diamond. When we are at our lowest, God reminds us that He is at work to free us from what distresses or harms us and to help us overcome that which is detrimental in our lives. In a concert recently by Selah the words of this song were sung, entitled *Unredeemed*. No matter what happens, God's grace is sufficient and we will rise from the situation we are in, if we trust in Him.

These services offered by these and other churches, offer a positive expression of lament at an important time. Advent and Christmas are seasons of hope, peace, joy and love, and yet for many people the season can be an especially difficult time. Often this is due to the loss of a loved one during the holidays or some other tragedy, trauma or experience of suffering. It can be particularly hard because so many other people are celebrating, when their hearts are breaking. There are many people who are hurting during the holidays and, therefore, have a natural tendency to pull back from the celebration/observation of the season. It is important to help people realize that in fact they need to run towards Christmas and the message of a God who enters the darkness with light, our sorrow with peace and the tragedy of a fallen world with "good news of great joy."

The use of candles to remember those who have died is a practice that other churches have incorporated at other times than Christmas. Rev. Jeremy Scott, pastor at North



Street Community Chapel in Hingham, MA, includes this tradition as a part of an All Saints emphasis each year. He writes,

I simply ask each year if people would like to honor anyone who's died with a lit candle on that Sunday (All Saints). We keep them each year and add to them. Then we have them lit that Sunday one way or another. In the past, I've had people come up and light them before/as we receive communion. One year I had them lit and in a semi-circle on a table by the altar before the worship team even got there. I always bring them to mind when we receive communion on that Sunday, remembering that we receive with brothers and sisters in Christ both across the globe today, but also across time. This is the first year that I've had them out and lit for All Hallow's Eve. I'm trying to connect people to All Saints Day.

Not all of these types of services offered by some churches take place at Christmas, or even in churches. Rev. Grady Zickefoose, a prison chaplain shared about a service he led for inmates where they could honor family members they had lost. In a simple ceremony, inmates were invited to come forward, state the name, or names, of those whom they had lost and light a candle in tribute to them. Chaplain Zickefoose writes, "It was a powerful service asking each inmate to enunciate their loved ones name and light a candle. The inmate that lost eleven members of his family tried to hold all of his candles but finally had to have help. There were a lot of tears from an all male congregation." He preached a sermon from the book of Hebrews about the great cloud of witnesses. The impact of such a service in prison, points to the universality of the need to lament and the power of providing moments where it can take place. There is also a clear lesson here in the significance of providing liturgy; tangible actions people can take that give a physical response to their emotional grief.

There are other examples of specific litanies developed to give a congregation the opportunity for corporate lament. One such category is when tragedy strikes a

community. These are times where lament can and should be expressed and when not only can a local church schedule a special service or time of prayer, but also when several churches gather for a joint time of prayer and lament. These moments may allow churches from a variety of denominations and traditions to join together. The Council of Churches of Santa Clara County in California created such a prayer vigil. The simple litany includes prayers, Scripture readings, songs and responsive readings. This is a helpful example of the kind of service of lament that gives a community the chance to come together and grieve a shared experience that has happened in their area. Such a gathering not only helps those who participate, but serves as a witness to the broader community. Whether it is the services that took place following the tragedy of September 11, 2001 or responding to violence or natural disasters, these opportunities for corporate lament serve a vital need for both people of faith as well as those who are not a part of the church.

There are also other ways that local congregations can respond to people who are lamenting sickness, loss and death. Sean Coleman, recently began a new ministry at his church, Bethel Church of the Nazarene in Quincy, MA. The ministry is called the Bethel Healing Choir. Sean's wife, Sue, has experienced a series of strokes and for years has faced a variety of other health and emotional challenges resulting from a brain tumor. Out of his own experience, he began this ministry that consists of members from their congregation who practice a variety of songs and then going to hospitals or homes and sing for (over) the sick and dying. The goal is to enter the hardest times of people's lives and provide presence, prayer and the gift of songs of comfort during their pain. Many of these people know they are near death and may have family members present who know

this. Entering this setting, despite it's pain, and gently allowing presence and songs that have brought comfort to people across many years, is a wonderful gift and serves as a form of shared lament.

Sean recently shared with me an e-mail that he sent to members of the Healing Choir with a message he had received from a lady whom they had prayed for several months ago when she came to Boston for treatment. Sean writes,

As you may recall, the doctors were pretty certain she had stage four lung cancer. Although she was too weak to stand, her attitude was amazing, because it exemplified trust in God rather than resignation to an uncertain fate. She told us, "If I die, I'll be okay, because I get to be with Jesus. If I live, I get to finish my quilt." When we prayed over her, one of our prayers was that she would get to finish her quilt in good health. I made her promise to send me a picture when it was done. Afterwards, the doctors subsequently revised their diagnosis from end-stage cancer to histoplasmosis, which is very treatable. Barbara is now doing fine several months post-surgery, cancer-free and, true to her word, she sent the attached pictures. A few weeks after we sang for Barbara, she shared with me how meaningful it was for her that we listened to her and let her choose the songs we sang. We are listening, first and foremost. We are listening to God for his direction, listening to the people to discern their needs, and listening to each other for strength and encouragement as we step out in faith.

Sean shared more from the e-mail from Barbara. In part, it states, "Many thanks for the hymns sung and prayers prayed for my recovery from a lung cancer scare. As you remember, I had histoplasmosis, a fungus, and I've made a full recovery after lung surgery. . . . I found your hymns, and the attitude everyone displayed, to be spiritually nurturing. . . . I praise God for His goodness to me, and for the encouragement of the Healing Choir of Bethel Church of the Nazarene!"

This ministry is an example of a response to the hurting and suffering that we find all around us. It is one church's attempt not to bypass the pain and sorrow, but to enter fully

into the reality of this suffering and to provide a better response, one of presence, prayer and the power of music to soothe the soul. By entering into the suffering, it offers another example of a way to join in the lament and to offer “the sympathizing tear.”

Reflecting on these few examples of lament practices from some local churches, we can see some helpful principles to keep in mind. First is the need to make space for dedicated time for corporate lament. While many churches do not provide such a dedicated service, it seems that some churches are responding to this need. Many of these have been created for the Advent/Christmas season, which is a natural and fitting time to offer such an opportunity. It should be noted that this is not the only time and more work can and should be done to create and offer opportunities in other seasons of the year as well as in the regular worship practices of the church. Another important key is to provide both litany (words to say) and liturgy (actions to take) in these times of corporate lament. People need to hear God’s Word in Scripture and in song, but they need to enter in as a participant as well. As they are offered words they can put on their own lips, and as they can perform some tangible action, even if it is as simple as lighting a candle, it allows them to truly enter into moments of lament and make it their own. May more and more pastors and congregations see the need to provide dedicated opportunities for corporate lament and to give people space, permission and language to express the cries of their heart. May the church not rush the process, but allow the sorrow to flow, and while there is the need to offer words of comfort and hope, may we take the time to sit awhile and join them in their sorrow. May we share in their burdens, their woe, and allow for another to flow “the sympathizing tear.”

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