

# Healing Our Broken Humanity

## Chapter 2: Renew Lament

“The resurrection of the church begins with lament.”—Emmanuel Katongole

“This is difficult for many Americans and others living in the Western countries to grasp. Our culture teaches us to embrace a triumphalistic and success-oriented posture. Thus, we avoid lament. Americans are prone to move quickly to try to fix things, and often we need to lament, mourn, and grieve first to fully experience and understand what has taken place.”

“Scripture teaches us that we can’t move toward hope, peace, transformation, and reconciliation without going through sorrow, mourning, regret, and lament.”

“Prayers of lament are central to Scripture and especially the book of Psalms. More than a third of the psalms are laments...these psalms of lament focus on deep regret and sorrow for the sins and travails of a nation and as a cry for God’s intervention.”

They provide a model for contemporary for lament. In them, the people:

- Address these laments to God.
- They describe a lamentable situation
- Confess their sin and complicity and sorrow
- Call on God to intervene and change the situation
- Offer thanksgiving and praise to God in trust that God can and will bring change

The book of Lamentations consists of five distinct poetic laments regarding the destruction of Jerusalem which follow a similar pattern to the psalms of lament.

Lament is a demonstrative, strong, and corporate expression of deep grief, pain, sorrow, and regret that deals with issues of the heart and paves the way for outer change.

“Lament is about regretting and mourning the past and then moving toward repentance, justice, and new life together...Lament becomes a crucial practice as we embrace the new humanity in Jesus Christ. We must enter lament and repentance to experience reconciliation, justice, unity, peace, and love.”

The genre of lament is that of a funeral dirge. Lamentations deals with a funeral, not a hospital visit. “We cannot pretend that racism is solved by a hospital visit: a quick prayer and the person will leave the hospital eventually. Our racial history is littered with abused, beaten, murdered dead bodies of black men and women. If you do not acknowledge the long history of dead bodies, you are only playing the game of reconciliation.”

The personal nature of lament is important. But lament is best when it’s both individual and corporate. The psalms and Lamentations offer a model for present-day lament and suggest that lament typically consists of nine elements.

Invocation: We address our lament to God

Worship: We describe who God is and how God promises to be with us

Description: We describe the lamentable, sorrowful, and shameful situation

Connection: We connect the lamentable situation with individual and corporate sin

Repentance: We express sorrow for the sins of our people and our desire to change

Confession: We confess our sin, complicity, sorrow, and desire to change

Petition: We ask for God’s intervention and mercy in bringing change and hope

Trust: We express our trust in God (based on God’s character and past actions)

Praise: We offer thanksgiving to God believing that God can and will bring change

## **Practices, Challenges, and Activities for Small Groups**

Write a group lament: Following the nine elements of lament, spend some time in your small group writing and sharing your laments. 1) Choose an issue that angers or grieves the group such as racial injustice or environmental destruction; 2) Brainstorm why the issue is important; 3) Write a lament together structured around the nine elements listed here; 4) Ask one or two people to read the completed lament; 5) Spend time together in prayer over the themes in the lament; 6) At the end of the time of prayer, have someone read the lament aloud again; 7) Distribute the lament to everyone in the group and consider asking your pastor to share the lament a Sunday service

Organize a lament table liturgy: 1) Send out invitations to a small group asking them to join in an evening of lament; 2) Ask those who are coming to write their own lament following the nine steps outlined above; 3) At the beginning of the evening, share a meal around a common table; 4) Create holy space by praying the a liturgy of lament; 5) Commit to finding fresh and creative ways to engage and practice lament.

Further details: <https://www.practicetribes.com/lament/a-lament-table-liturgy/>

## **Discussion Questions**

Why do we need to lament before we can experience reconciliation, healing, peace, transformation, and hope?

Does our church practice lament? Does our culture? Why is lament a foreign idea to so many of us who live in Western cultures? How can we recover lament in our gathered worship and private lives?

What things does our church and culture need to lament?

What needs to change for you and your church to renew the practice of lamenting together?

What steps will you take to apply this practice fully and in the long term? Think about how you can apply this practice in your life, family, small group, church, and neighborhood?