



FOR LAMENT L

**“ONLY WITH EYES
THAT HAVE CRIED”
LAMENT FOR LENT**

A weekly devotional resource
to help you lament and find
hope, by *Dr Cathy Ross*



The call in action

*“Weeping may stay for
the night, but rejoicing
comes in the morning.”*

Psalm 30:5



THANK YOU FOR LAMENTING WITH US THIS LENT

“How are you today?” It’s a question we often ask each other: at work, at church, during a chance meeting while running errands. “Fine thanks” or “Good thanks” or perhaps “Not too bad” we frequently respond.

And yet many of us aren’t fine or good and often things *are* too bad – in our lives and in our world. But where is the space to say so? Not usually at church, where smiles are expected and songs are full of victory. Not in casual conversation, where we don’t want to freak people out. Sometimes not even with loved ones, because while meaning well, they might unintentionally put us under pressure to be positive, with platitudes such as “God won’t give you more than you can bear.”

That’s why we produced this resource. To give us a chance to let the unsaid out in some way. And to discover how we can genuinely be there for each other when things aren’t fine.

As we will see in this study, God isn’t afraid of our grief. He doesn’t cower when we complain. And he does not take our lament lightly. In fact, as our brothers and sisters around the world will tell us and as you’ll see in these pages, he can turn our weeping to joy, our mourning to dancing, our lament into activism...

But that’s getting ahead of ourselves.
We have to start where we are: far from fine.

Naomi Rose Steinberg,
head of communications at Church Mission Society

WEEK ONE

You have made your
people suffer hard things;
you have given us wine to
drink that made us reel.

Psalm 60:3

INTRODUCTION

LAMENT FOR LENT WEEK ONE

*There are things that can be seen
only with eyes that have cried.*

++ Christophe Munzihirwa,
Archbishop of Bukavu, 1994–1996

Recently, I have been thinking about lament. There seems to be much cause for it in our world today – and in our own lives. And yet, the church in the West hasn't always been very good at it, or made much space for it.

Some reading that began to open this up for me has been the work of a Roman Catholic Ugandan theologian, Emmanuel Katongole. His recent book is entitled *Born from Lament: the Theology and Politics of Hope in Africa*. This book looks at the recent cruel violence and tragic suffering in DR Congo. I am sure you know some of the horror: children taken from their villages and told to kill their relatives; a 2011 study indicated that 1,152 women were raped every day during the recent conflict – a rate of 48 per hour. The stories are truly chilling.

Katongole asks, how does one live with this? Can there be a future and if so, what kind? And, where is God? He finds the key to the future in the power and hope of lament.

Katongole believes that in the face of pain and trauma, the church in Africa (and everywhere) needs to learn how to lament. He suggests the church tends to focus on a powerful God, a God who performs miracles, who is mighty to save and who reigns supreme – all of which is true, but that we also need to know how to lament in the

face of suffering and loss. The counterpoint to our almighty God is the crucified God, seen in Jesus Christ on the cross, who continues to understand our suffering as he suffered himself (1 Corinthians 1:23).

As we enter Lent, I think it is an apt time to consider the importance of lament. There are so many things in our world worth lamenting right now: climate crisis, inequality among people, poverty, racism, threats of war. We know that at times Jesus wept and expressed sorrow, and as we focus on his time in the wilderness, up to his persecution and death, lament seems appropriate.

WHAT IS LAMENT?

Someone described it to me like this:

Lament is an expression of a grief, an active process of a soul trying to wear out its pain, outlive it, persist through it to a place of respite and a different perspective on living... It's the expression of a sorrow and a path to a life beyond that sorrow.

Together through this study, we will look at lament as complaint, lament as resistance, justice and innovation, and lament as newness and hope. Like Emmanuel Katongole, we will discover its meaning for our lives.

QUESTIONS:

When was the last time you let yourself lament?

Name up to three things you feel compelled to lament over the next several weeks. These can be political or personal, global or local.

Lamentation.

South Sudan was once a nation full of people but now it has become empty.

Many children are left orphans, others became street children and have nothing to eat. The enemy has killed all the children whom I carried and raised. Our children had no future, for the enemy had conquered us. Tears flowing down my cheeks no one to comfort us. Oh lord, think this about this! Should you treat your own children this way?

A lament from South Sudan (see over)

Consider: where in Scripture do we see Jesus lament?

Think about the quote at the beginning of this reflection.

What does it mean that there are “things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried”?

REFLECT

When CMS mission partner Ruth Radley was in South Sudan, which has experienced so much horrific violence, she shared the lament on the previous page from someone in a Bible study group. As you read it, note your reaction to the words.



L P R A Y E R M E N T

God of grace

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation. and to weep bitterly in the night.¹ Receive our tears, and hear our cries for this suffering world. So bring your healing now. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

¹ Lamentations 1:2



Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep,
O Lord? Awake, do not cast us
off for ever! Why do you hide
your face? Why do you forget our
affliction and oppression? For we
sink down to the dust; our bodies
cling to the ground. Rise up, come
to our help. Redeem us for the
sake of your steadfast love.

Psalm 44:23–26

A MATTER OF CONFIDENCE

LAMENT FOR LENT

WEEK TWO

When you think of lament, as we defined it in the previous session, do you think of it as something born out of confidence?

Don't we all experience a pressure to "move on" from grief, to "trust that God has a plan" and "everything will work out"? But what if lament isn't from a lack of trust in God, but the opposite? What if lament really shows that we are confident in God?

Taking us to the Bible, Ugandan theologian Emmanuel Katongole, whom I mentioned last session, reminds us that for Israel in the Old Testament, their safety and security are not found in military might and strength, nor in wealth, but in their covenant relationship with God.

The Israelites in the Old Testament praised God but they also protested, railed against injustice and pressed God for deliverance. We see this especially in the Psalms. Of the 150 psalms, 60 of them, or 40 per cent, are known as psalms of lament. There are also psalms of praise, psalms of thanksgiving and royal psalms but the largest category is lament. This meant that the core of Israel's life – social, religious and community – was framed by lament.

There is a generally recognised structure to these psalms of lament with five elements: address, complaint, request, motivation and confidence.

LET'S LOOK AT PSALM 13 AS AN EXAMPLE:

[ADDRESS – prayer directed to God]

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?

[COMPLAINT – description of the problem]

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?

[REQUEST – they ask for a specific response from God]

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

[MOTIVATION – articulates the reason God should help]

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.

[CONFIDENCE – confession of trust in God's help]

I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

These elements of address, complaint, request, motivation and confidence demonstrate a deep intimacy with God. For genuine lament to God to take place, there has to be a relationship of trust, intimacy and love. When the biblical writers lament, they do so from within the context of a solid relationship with God and with their community.

Katongole says that biblical lament is not just whining at God, nor merely angry venting, but rather, there is structure to it. This structure can serve as a guide for intimate, difficult conversations with God when we are hurting.

Another important thing to notice is that lament often moves into praise – the laments and songs of thanksgiving belong together in Israel's worship. They have the confidence to be vulnerable, to

express the entire range of human emotions before God – doubt/faith, sorrow/joy, fear/trust.

This confidence to be vulnerable comes from a deep relationship with a loving God. Being confident enough to lament is also an outward sign of this authentic relationship.

What kind of relationship are we in with God, if we can only express our joy but not our need, our sorrow, our pain? This is a big thing to consider as we move through this study and consider making lament more a part of our lives.

QUESTIONS:

Do you feel confident enough in God's love to lament before him?

If not, what things do you think you can do to be more real in his presence?

Could you try to write your own song, poem or paragraph or maybe draw a picture that shows the five elements of lament? Think about the things causing you to lament right now and make one of those a theme for your writing or drawing. There are extra pages at the back of this book to do this.

REFLECT

Above I said that lament requires confidence in our relationship with God and with our community. Opposite is an example from mission partner Heather Johnstone (right) in Tanzania, about sharing grief in community. As you read it, consider whether you have experienced anything like this?



My dad passed away a few years ago at the age of 83. He had been admitted to hospital and I received a message from my siblings to “expect the worst”. CMS were wonderful in encouraging me and enabling me to get back to South Africa as quickly as possible, and I thank God that I was there for a week before he died and had the opportunity to spend time with him, hold his hand and tell him that I loved him.

It is a strong Tanzanian custom to commiserate with/console a bereaved person and visit them at their home and pray with them, sing worship songs together, present them with gifts and remember the happy times. The Kiswahili word for commiserate is pole (pronounced polee), and being “pole’ed” can be a very emotional and yet encouraging time, in a way that I haven’t experienced before. In South Africa, like in the UK, it is very much a case of just getting on with it and coping, but it is very different here. Everyone comes to see you and to nurture you as you grieve. Local women from the diocese came to my home to “pole” me. We had 15 people squished into the front room and what a wonderful occasion it was. Pastors shared a sermon, various women prayed and everyone sang numerous songs with great gusto – the presence of the Holy Spirit was palpable. Gifts were showered on me and I felt thoroughly loved and cherished. What a beautiful tradition.

L PRAYER

M E N T

God of mercy

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation and to know again that your mercies never come to an end.² You know our yearnings for this suffering world. So bring your healing now. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen

²Lamentations 3:22

WEEK
THREE

My God, my God, why have you
forsaken me? Why are you so
far from helping me, from the
words of my groaning?

Psalm 22:1

THE COURAGE TO COMPLAIN

LAMENT FOR LENT

WEEK THREE

In looking at Psalms in the last session, we saw that complaint is a key part of lament. Expressions of complaint in the psalms range from concern to utter desperation to outright protest.

To complain to God seems risky and improper. Some people see complaining as evidence of a lack of faith. However, I think that to complain to God shows we have a relationship with him that is alive, dynamic and open.

It takes courage to protest against God – but we see it again and again in the psalms and in the writings of prophets like Jeremiah. In the psalms of lament, while the writers draw on memories of God’s saving actions in the past, they also challenge God: “How long, O God?”, “Why do you hide your face?” Sometimes they sound downright accusatory.

To complain to God, we have to recognise and believe that he is there to complain to. Lament dares to ask what kind of God remains silent to his people’s pleas. Underlying this daring ask is the acknowledgment that we believe he can hear, speak and act. To complain to God is to appeal to his sense of justice, which we must believe he has, in order to complain to him about unjust things.

Complaint in essence is a refusal to accept the way things are. We know from reading Scripture that God is not pleased with

the way things are either. And so I think he does not balk at our complaints, especially when they reveal that we believe in him, we need him and we want to work with him to move beyond the status quo and to make his dreams for our world come true.

I think we can also take hold of the courage to complain to God because we know, as we mentioned before, that God understands

what it is like to suffer in Christ. Jesus cried out to God “why have you forsaken me?” based on Psalm 22.

Jesus cried out to God “why have you forsaken me?”

African-American spiritual songs, from the days when they were enslaved, contain powerful, plaintive laments to God. They embody a sense of God being with them in their suffering even while they were living in a whirling vortex of God-forsakenness. They believed ultimately God would rescue them, that

things would not always be as they are. They identified both with the slaves in the Exodus story and with Jesus’ suffering and death. I am also told that during the apartheid years in South Africa, the most popular services were Good Friday services because oppressed people could identify with Jesus in his desolation.

These spiritual songs of enslaved people eventually gave birth to the freedom songs of the American civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Jr said: “The freedom songs are playing a strong and vital role in our struggle. They give the people new courage and a sense of unity. I think they keep alive a faith, a radiant hope, in the future, particularly in our most trying hours.”

To complain as part of lament is to be alive to the sense that things can and should be different. To complain is to refuse to accept things the way they are. Which is why “It is not those who lack faith who complain, but those recognised for strong faith who bring their most honest and passionate feelings to God” (Katongole).

QUESTIONS:

We've just looked specifically at the element of complaining in lament. Is complaining an essential part of lament?

Why or why not?

When you complain to God, is it usually on your own behalf or others'?

When you complain, do you think God understands how you feel? How do you know?

CMS sometimes receives complaints from supporters about various things. While this can be discouraging at times, it's also an indicator that people know that we are here and they think we can help them with their problem. If God had a supporter care team or complaints department, what would you put in an email to him right now?

REFLECT

Following is a short diary snippet from Chris and Suzy Wilson, CMS mission partners providing theological education in Ethiopia. Are you encouraged by this story of complaint? What do you want to bang on the door about?



Chris and Thiol, a prisoner freed

8am: Simon, one of our students who is a refugee from Sudan, preaches on a story Jesus told about a man who receives unexpected guests. He has nothing to give them and so he bangs on his friend's door at midnight. Despite his friend's complaint that he and his household are asleep, the man refuses to stop banging until his friend acquiesces. Simon connects the story with the community here, where guests do arrive at night, where hosts are expected to have something to put before them and where most people bolt

up the door and sleep. Simon concluded: “If you know the person has the means to help you, then you will keep banging on the door. This, Jesus tells us, is how we should pray to our heavenly father.”

8:20am: In response to Simon’s message, all the students stand together. We pray for Thiol – our brother and fellow student – who is in prison. Many of us have been making frequent visits to the prison. For more than three months, we have been hearing that he should be released from prison “this week”. We are all fed up. All 20 of us stand and raise up our voices to heaven, crying out that the judge would go to work (even on this rainy day) and that Thiol would be released and be able to rejoin us.

7pm: Simon, Barnaba, Jeremiah, Jacob and Pastor Isaac (all students who are refugees from Sudan/South Sudan) come for our usual Friday night together. They ask if I have heard the news. Thiol was released from prison this afternoon! I check my phone and I have four missed calls from different students trying to tell me the same. It is hard to put into words how good that felt. A special day.

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God of peace

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation. Is it nothing to you? Will you just pass by?³ See our sorrow, and hear our complaints for this suffering world. So bring your healing now. In Jesus’ name we pray.

Amen

³ Lamentations 1:12

WEEK FOUR

Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

Psalm 85:8,10–11

JOIN THE RESISTANCE

LAMENT FOR LENT

WEEK FOUR

So far we have talked about lamenting mostly as individuals. What about collective lament, lamenting with others, such as in your church or small group? And what about lamenting for others? What good does that do?

Theologian Walter Brueggemann says that lament is largely absent from our Western churches. He says this is because we are often reluctant to face suffering or to embrace negativity in our Western world.

Glenn Pemberton suggests that the church in some ways has become increasingly embarrassed by the earthy and gritty language of lament:

... we have chosen to live protected lives in insulated communities... with a fortress mentality. Our lack of solidarity with those in need is what causes us to wonder why these prayers are in the Bible and question who would ever need them.

Quoted in Katongole, Born from Lament, p180

In many cases, people don't want to be reminded of their own vulnerability or suffering or the vulnerability and suffering of others. Lament seems dreary. But refusing to acknowledge suffering and engage in lament can lead to a hardening of our hearts, a lack of empathy. To lament is to recognise that something isn't right and to refuse to be okay with it.

In his essay, *The Costly Loss of Lament*, Brueggemann concludes:

A community of faith which negates lament soon concludes that the hard issues of justice are improper questions to pose at the throne, because the throne seems only to be a place of praise. I believe it thus follows that if justice questions are improper questions at the throne... they soon appear to be improper questions in public places, in schools, in hospitals, with the government, and eventually even in the courts. Justice questions disappear into civility and docility.

If we don't face suffering, there is little chance we will work towards alleviating it and more of a chance we will isolate ourselves.

Lament can be a form of resistance. We have already noted that African-American slave spirituals were a form of resistance, and part of a movement that eventually changed society. When we choose to lament, it's a way of standing with those who are suffering. And so lament invites us into more action.

Let me offer you a dramatic example of this now by telling you Maggy Barankitse's story. Maggy is a Tutsi and was caught up in the ethnic massacres in Burundi in 1993. In October 1993, during an attack, she hid in the local bishop's residence while soldiers massacred 72 people, including one of her best friends. Amazingly, her seven children all survived the massacre by hiding in the church. Emmanuel Katongole narrates her story:

After the massacre, Maggy crawled into the chapel. She prayed as she cried, "My mother taught me you are a God of love. She lied to me. You are not love... God, why was I not killed? Why am I here? Why O God?" As she prayed and cried, she heard Chloe... The children had escaped by hiding. Bribing the militia with money, she managed to save another twenty-five children from the burning...

Maggy eventually set up *Maison Shalom* – houses for children, farms, businesses, a swimming pool, a cinema, a hospital, a nursing school, a micro-credit finance union and a university. From a cry of lament came a restlessness and a refusal to give in to life-destroying forces around her. She survived, confronted her pain and ultimately resisted despair. And became an activist.

QUESTIONS:

Throughout this study so far, have you been lamenting an injustice of some kind? In your life or in your community, or in the world? Can you see ways to turn your empathy into energy?

Do you think sometimes people are too quick to move from grieving to activism? What could be the results of this?

How good would you say your faith community is at lamenting? Does your community make enough space for lament? Is that something you could speak to someone about?

REFLECT

Below, the CMS director of mission education, Jonny Baker (right), shares how lament and anger turned to action to help stop sex trafficking. Does this story inspire you to get together with like-minded people to lament and make a difference?



A friend of mine, Si, had a concern about sex trafficking – in fact more like a raging anger following visits to bars where girls were visibly being picked up. He got to know a few sex workers in his local area, built friendships and helped them as individuals. But it didn't take long to realise that the problems were pretty broad ranging.

Chatting with friends he got connected with a few other people who were involved in care for sex workers or political campaigning. A few emails, Google searches and coffees later, he began to build up a picture of the scene and the various economic, immigration, political and cultural factors at play. Crucially, he also connected with some others who caught the vision for doing something and a small team was formed.

The team quickly found themselves part of an informal network of people collaborating together. An idea began to form – no one seemed to be working at the customer demand end of things, with men who pay for sex. Via a few networked connections, a design agency got involved and a beer mat and poster campaign was born called The Truth Isn't Sexy.

One side of the beer mat has a seductive image and phone number but flip the card over and the message is about sex trafficking with the story of the sex worker. Shocking

but brilliant! The goal was simple – to get these into pubs around Britain and get people to reconsider paying for sex.

Through informal relational connections, a website, emails, friends blogging and yes, more coffees and conversation, money was raised and the printing done. Groups were found through the different networks to go on pub crawls in their cities to persuade pubs to join in the campaign.

I am involved in an alternative worship community, Grace, in Ealing. We did a pub crawl through Ealing.

In all, 200,000 beer mats were distributed in city centre pubs and NUS bars. There ended up being quite a bit of media attention. MPs across the country praised the campaign for addressing the demand side of the issue.

Aside from printing, this campaign cost virtually nothing. It wasn't spearheaded by an organisation. Volunteers made it happen as networks of people shared the idea, cooperated and joined in collective action.

L PRAYER M E N T

God of faith

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation. Remember, O Lord, what has befallen us⁴ and help us to resist all that deals destruction. Renew us in vigorous action for this suffering world. So bring your healing now. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

⁴Lamentations 5:1

WEEK
FIVE

Have regard for your covenant, for the dark places of the land are full of the haunts of violence. Do not let the downtrodden be put to shame; let the poor and needy praise your name.

Psalm 74:20–21

LAMENT AND LOVE

LAMENT FOR LENT WEEK FIVE

In the last session, I told you about Maggy – how she turned trauma and lament into creative action for children. There are some important things to note about Maggy’s story in the context of lament.

After the massacre she experienced incredible energy, determination and anger – all of which she turned into setting up Maison Shalom. But the key driver for her was love. In her words, “Love made me an inventor.”

In the face of trauma she improvised and innovated so the children could not only survive but flourish. She created a new community – not solely Tutsi or Hutu, but a community beyond tribalism. Her love was deepened through grief and lament.

Maggy did what she could with the resources she had. Perhaps we all need to follow her example and passionately resist the idea that we don’t have enough, know enough, aren’t good enough, or have been through too much to create change. Maggy operates from an excess of love. Love that knows what it is to suffer. Out of pain and anger, Maggy found the courage to take risks. She was determined that death and evil would not have the last word and that love would win.

That doesn’t mean the end is always happy. The title of this study was taken from the words of Christophe Muzihirwa, Roman Catholic

Archbishop of Bukavu from 1994–1996: “There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried.” In the midst of civil war in Eastern Congo he worked for peace, justice, forgiveness and love. He was a prophet for a new vision of society but after two years as archbishop, he was assassinated – shot dead at a checkpoint.

In Burundi in 2015 President Pierre Nkurunziza decided to run for a third term. This plunged the country into crisis; thousands fled, hundreds were arrested and many were killed. Maggy had spoken out strongly against the third term, was targeted and fled into exile

where she still is, living and working in Rwanda. The government has shut down all the Maison Shalom programmes. They have also killed some of the children. These events have of course deepened Maggy’s lament. But still she keeps working. This is not a “they lived

This is not a “they lived happily-ever-after” story, yet, somehow, this makes Maggy’s story more poignant for me.

happily-ever-after” story, yet, somehow, this makes Maggy’s story more poignant for me. I want to be like her and do what I can with the resources, knowledge and energy I have.

What we learn from Maggy and Archbishop Christophe is that lament will lead to love if we let it. In fact, we should be careful not to skip over the lament because it can lead to deeper love and generous service. And that sort of thing is contagious. But in a world with crisis after crisis, injustice after injustice, how can love sustain us? We will explore this question in the last session.

REFLECT

No questions today. Let your heart grieve for Maggy, for Archbishop Christophe, for other people of peace you know whose story doesn’t end “happily ever after”. Just grieve.

Following is a story from our local partner Nevedita (right) in Sri Lanka, a country which is well acquainted with grief and needs much love.



Easter Sunday, 21 April 2019. Just before 9am, at least six blasts rocked Sri Lanka, killing 259 people and injuring more than 500. Suicide bombers had targeted Christian churches and luxury hotels. At least 45 of the victims were children.

CMS local partner Nevedita and her team were immediately called upon to support victims and their families. A mental health specialist, Nevedita manages the child protection unit of LEADS, a community development organisation in Sri Lanka. She is responsible for a programme of advocacy, intervention and rehabilitation for children who have been traumatised through abuse and exploitation.

Nevedita says: “My mission is to show God’s love to children who have been through trauma and abuse. Being an ambassador of God’s love for such children is the greatest difference I would like to make in their lives.”

For the first two months after the bombing, Nevedita and her team spent time listening and talking to victims and their families. They dealt with practical needs like finding necessary medicines. They helped people who were confused, frightened and traumatised to negotiate overstretched hospitals.

They provided play equipment for children, and through playing together were able to give the kids much needed emotional support.

Continued over page

One victim of the attack was an 11-year-old boy. The bomb killed his mother and seriously injured his father. Such were the boy's injuries that initially he couldn't be told that his mother had died. He suffered terrible burns, which meant that he had to wear a mask over his face for the next six to eight months, to protect damaged skin.

Nevedita and her team followed up with this boy, who is one of many who have had to adjust to a heartbreaking new normal. His aunt stepped in to care for him, as his father was still too ill. He has recently been able to go back to school, which has really helped him.

Sri Lanka is still recovering from the attack. Although Nevedita's team are experienced in dealing with trauma, for them, like many others, the bomb triggered memories of the country's 26-year civil war and increased anxiety around carrying out the simple tasks of life. Nevedita says, "Some days are stressful, but most days I don't know what else I'd do."

L PRAYER M E N T

God of love

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation and to know again that your steadfast love never ceases.⁵ Deepen our love for you, and for your world. So bring your healing now. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

⁵Lamentations 3:22

O Lord God of hosts, how long will you be angry with your people's prayers? You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in full measure. Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Psalm 80:4–5,7

LAMENT TO HOPE

LAMENT FOR LENT

WEEK SIX

We saw in an earlier session that in the psalms, lament often turns to praise. However, it's not like this is a simple process. Or a quick one.

We have looked at the idea that it takes courage and confidence to lament, both by ourselves and with others. We have seen how lament can progress to anger, then action. We have seen how lament can lead us to love, and vice versa.

Lament goes even further. Let's go back to the definition of lament that we looked at in session one:

Lament is an expression of a grief, an active process of a soul trying to wear out its pain, outlive it, persist through it to a place of respite and a different perspective on living... It's the expression of a sorrow and a path to a life beyond that sorrow.

Lament doesn't leave us in the same place we started. Lament can take us to a new place in our relationship with God, other humans and ourselves. It can give us a new perspective: "There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried."

This is an important insight – that there is newness and hope after pain – but it will be different and we will only arrive there *because* of the pain. Lament can lead to praise, but it will be a different kind of praise because we have lamented.

Remember the Psalms, where lament often takes a surprising turn to praise. The writer doesn't just put these ideas side by side;

there is a progression. Through articulating pain and lament, new language is also found to express love of God in deeper ways. The praise expressed is different from previous praise. It is a new song.

By letting ourselves grieve and standing alongside those who are suffering, we participate in the mystery of God's own suffering, death and resurrection. Through this, hope is released. Our friend Emmanuel Katongole claims that the African church is a unique gift to world Christianity as a laboratory of hope which "provides a living witness of what hope looks like in the context of violence and war".

Are we able, in our own contexts, to be public laboratories of hope and newness? Only if we can be real and show that we know what it means to lament.

QUESTIONS:

As you have let yourself lament through these past six weeks, are you finding shoots of hope or newness? It's okay if not. Are you seeing anything differently?

By letting ourselves grieve and standing alongside those who are suffering, we participate in the mystery of God's own suffering, death and resurrection.

SPRINGING UP BY MARTIN KING

Something's happening on the Boulevard.
Pops is up to something.
We know it's him, 'cos like when the Springtime
comes along
and things start to grow and flourish,
bringing colour and joy and relief,
it's almost effortless,
like we aren't really doing anything ourselves,
we're just getting up and getting on and it's just sprouting
up all around us.
And it's beautiful.
Yeah, it's Pops all right.
He's on a mission, Pops.
Through the seeds he'd planted long ago,
and the people he'd left in charge of tending the garden,
through the fruit of his spirit, they've persevered,
stood, endured, watched, watered and weeded,
and now that their roots have become nourished deep
in the earth,
it's growing.
Something's happening in the old vicarage.
New gardeners have come, old ones have been re-inspired.
A community of intentional living is starting to sprout.
It went quiet for a while. The birdsong.
But now the sound is back and it's such sweet music
to the ears.
Like that birdsong, it's diverse; many breeds and back-
grounds
all flocking together under Pops' feather,
fed from the fruits of a well nourished soil.
He's got big plans, Pops.
He's using the old vicarage as a beacon,
and expanding his garden here.
He's branching out,

Continued over page

showing the Boulevard that there is hope in community.
He's encouraging the sharing of possessions,
the breaking of bread,
the making of music,
the moulding of character and the shaping of mission.
No matter how long the dark night,
the sun always comes up,
and no matter how bleak the winter,
the Springtime always follows...

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God of love

There are things that can be seen only with eyes that have cried. Give us, we pray, courage this Lent to give ourselves to lamentation. Draw us deep into silence, mouths to the dust of the world's suffering.⁶ Then release us into praise, your compassion seen, our hope renewed.⁷ So bring your healing now. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

⁶Lamentations 3:28-29

⁷Lamentations 3:29

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*There are
things that can
be seen only
with eyes that
have cried.*


++ Christophe Munzehirwa,
Archbishop of Bukavu,
1994–1996





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