

Workshop for Leaders

By Joyce MacKichan Walker

Into the Light

Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament

2020–2021 Presbyterian Women/*Horizons* Bible Study

What is this?

A lesson plan for leaders who introduce this Bible study to any group that plans to use it.

Who will find it helpful and why?

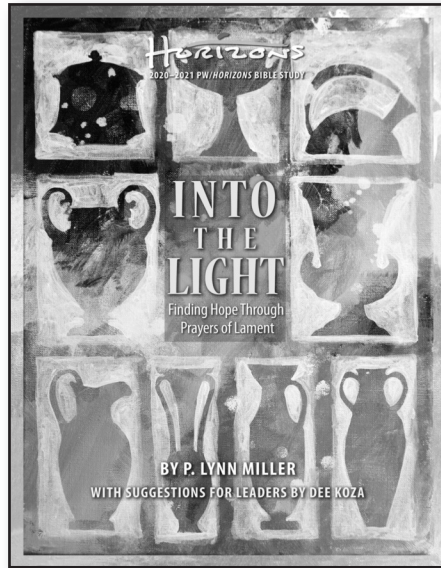
The Workshop for Leaders is written for Bible study leaders who are preparing to lead study groups, pastors and educators who will encourage and prepare others to lead, and presbyteries introducing the study to their congregations. It provides

- a foundational background for the content of the study, including an outline of the study format used in each lesson,
- a description of the design of the Suggestions for Leaders, and
- activities for generating interest and building enthusiasm for the study.

What can you expect participants to learn?

Depending on the activities selected, participants will

1. express their ideas about the meaning and occurrence of lament,
2. hear a definition for lament in the Bible and recall examples of biblical lament,
3. examine the structure of the study lessons and of the Suggestions for Leaders,
4. preview one art page and consider the corresponding lesson theme,



5. find resources provided to support leaders and participants, and
6. state their discoveries about the study and a selected reason for the practice of lament.

Room Set-up

The most helpful set-up will be tables with six to eight chairs. Participants at these tables will have their study materials and notebook in front of them; these groups will naturally serve as small groups during activities. An early activity

requires some open space for interaction.

Materials Needed

- A copy of the study for each participant
- Copies of *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* to share at tables
- One copy per person of the lesson summary chart from this workshop, and the litany of lament and hope
- Copies of “Suggested Hymns” handout
- An easel pad, newsprint, and a marker (or something similar)
- Equipment to play a song, and your choice of version of “Take My Hand, Precious Lord,” by Thomas A. Dorsey

Main Idea

In the Bible, lament is a type of writing that expresses great grief or sorrow; it is sometimes accompanied by anger and a clear sense that injustice has been done. Lament is directed toward God because God is the one who has the power to change situations and God is the one we ultimately trust. Exploring laments from biblical sources will demonstrate both the purpose and the power of being completely honest with God, as we also claim, through our faith, that God knows and loves us as we are. As we examine contemporary laments and take the opportunity to practice lament for our own lives and communities, we will discover that lament is rooted in, and draws us toward, hope. God, in Jesus Christ, is to be trusted, and is worthy of our praise!

Lament in Image

(20 minutes) Welcome participants, introduce yourself, and thank them for their interest in preparing themselves or other leaders to explore this oft-neglected topic and practice of lament.

Ask participants to pray in unison the opening prayer in Lesson One, noting that each lesson's opening prayer may be used regularly by study groups, or in the ways that are indicated in the suggestions for leaders.

To introduce the focus of this study, ask participants to form two lines facing each other (in a large group, use any available space to set up lines of about twenty people in ten pairs). Explain that you will ask a question that each person has thirty seconds to answer—a total of one minute for the paired conversation. Then one line will remain where they are while the other line moves one person to the right. The person who moves right to no partner goes to the other end of their line and faces the person standing alone at that end. The movement repeats until all questions are asked. If you have someone with mobility issues, make sure they are in the stationary line, and provide a chair if needed. Unless everyone knows everyone else, ask participants to introduce themselves before they answer the question.

For questions 1–5, one person speaks first, then the second person speaks.

1. About how many times have you studied the Bible in a group, and why do you choose to do so?
2. Would you say the Bible is mostly uplifting and positive or judgmental and negative? Give an example to support your choice.
3. Pick one Bible character who inspires you and explain why you chose them.

4. If you wanted to find comfort because of a distressing situation, what book or specific passage in the Bible might you turn to and why?
5. What is one thing happening in the world right now that distresses you, and why?

For questions 6–10, talk together to answer the question:

6. What do you think it means to lament something that has happened?
7. What are some feelings you associate with lament?
8. What purposes might lament have following, for example, a large natural disaster with loss of life?
9. What purposes might lament have following, for example, a mass shooting in the United States or a devastating terror attack in a foreign country?
10. What questions do you have about a study of lament in the Bible? Be prepared to state one question aloud.

After everyone returns to their seats, ask participants to state questions they have about a study of lament in the Bible. Briefly summarize the questions on newsprint and tell participants although they may get some answers in this time together, these are worthy questions that will be explored in the study.

Lament We Bring

(5 minutes) In order to experience biblical lament and the hope that is its motivation and result, lead the group in a litany of lament and hope using the handout provided. If possible, invite those who arrive early to be prepared to read one of the laments that are included. The whole group reads the bold parts in unison.

Lament in Scripture

(45 minutes) Direct participants to the introduction to the study and the chart of lessons handout. Encourage them to read the introduction carefully before they lead the study. Emphasize this important background:

1. The author begins with an answer to two basic questions:
 - a. Why study biblical laments?
 - b. Why bother to lament?

Her response: A study of biblical lament, and reclaiming the practice of lament, can help us engage the real world with our faith in this time between the establishment of the Lordship of Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, and the complete fulfillment of God's reign. In a nutshell—times can be hard; lament can help us through!

2. Ask, “What are some words you might use to define lament?” After hearing some responses, offer these aspects of the author’s definition of biblical lament.

Laments

- a. are emotional statements of sorrow or grief;
- b. concern the past, present, or future;
- c. are directed toward the one who has the power to change the situation or right the injustice—God;
- d. are in the form of spoken, sung, or otherwise communicated, prayers.

Ask participants, considering this definition, to take a couple of minutes at their table to list examples of laments they recall from the Bible, including those they remember that invite a violent response from God against enemies. Offer some prompts, as this might not be an easy task, such as, “Think of people in Old Testament stories who express their distress to God, psalms that capture a sense of danger or injustice, or people in the Gospels who express their sorrow or grief, including Jesus.” Invite six to eight examples, enough to provide a sense of anticipation that there is a breadth of instances of lament in the Bible. Give them a couple of minutes to look at the beginnings of two or three lessons and find the printed texts of laments, along with the interpretive notes and discussion of those texts.

3. Invite participants to turn to the chart of lessons on pages 6 and 7 and find the titles across the top of the page. These show the structure of each lesson:

- a. the main idea of the lesson
- b. the laments explored
- c. an important insight or highlight
- d. the contemporary example of a lament that illustrates the lesson
- e. the lament practice offered for use individually or in the group
- f. an additional biblical text that reminds us of the constant hope we have as Christians called and loved by God.

Invite pairs of participants to choose a lesson and look for these six sections, then respond to this question: “How might this structure help us learn from biblical laments how to better understand the practice of lament and use it in our own time?”

Direct participants’ attention to the column “Contemporary Lament” and note the variety of

songs cited as examples of lament. Find a version of “Precious Lord, Take My Hand” by Thomas A. Dorsey on www.youtube.com or a music streaming service. Invite participants to listen for the lament within the song as you play it for them. They can find the lyrics in *Glory to God* (hymn 834).

4. Invite participants to find any one of the art pages that face each lesson. Offer them this description of what they can expect to find in the art:

The artist, who is also the author of this study, has created a painting for each lesson that includes symbols or scenes for the lesson subject, a background that represents the whole of the subject, and carefully chosen colors to complement the theme. You will also find within each picture the shape of a classic vessel whose properties are intended to convey something related to the lesson. You will find the artist’s interpretations of each piece in the “About the Art” section of the study book.

Give table groups, or small groups of three to four, five minutes to find the main idea for one lesson of their choosing, then talk about what they see in the art that might illumine their exploration of that main idea.

5. Ask participants to find a page containing the suggestions for leaders for any session. Note that the pattern of sections for each suggestions page, each section with a particular purpose, will make a leader’s planning easier. List the six sections and their purpose, as follows:

- **Main Idea**—a statement of the main content of the lesson
- **Lament in Image**—an activity to enter the day’s focus by responding to:
 - questions from “Before You Begin,” and/or
 - the art for the session, and/or
 - a song from “Contemporary Lament”
- **Lament We Bring**—an activity to encounter the focus scripture for the day, or the theme of the lesson
- **Lament in Scripture**—activities to dig into and respond individually and communally to the day’s learnings about lament
- **Lament in Life**—examples of ways people have expressed lament and ways participants can, too
- **Lamenting Together in Hope**—time to summarize what they have learned and express insights in words, song, art and/or prayer

6. Resources

- Resources in the study book (refer to the table of contents for exact locations in your edition of the study book):
 - Find “About the Authors” for an introduction to the women who wrote the study book and the suggestions for leaders. They are both Presbyterian women who have served PW and the PC(USA) in diverse ways.
 - The art in this PW/*Horizons* Bible study was created by the author, Lynn Miller, and is another way to explore the study. Find “About the Art” to learn more about the creation and symbolism of each piece. Thinking about the art leads to good discussions. Flip through the book quickly and find a piece that catches your eye. What is it about that piece of art that intrigues you?
 - Questions for discussion are placed within the text of each lesson. When you come to one, take time to read it and follow where it leads.
 - Brief explanations about resources and why the author finds them helpful can be found in the annotated bibliography. Maybe there’s a book there that you’d like to read to learn more about lament.
- Additional resources
 - *Into the Light* is published in English, Spanish, ecumenical, large-print, and audio editions.
 - A companion DVD includes lesson introductions presented by the author and also includes downloadable resources. Study groups can use the author’s introductions to begin their Bible study sessions or use them as lesson supplements.
 - This workshop for leaders can be used with leaders preparing to introduce the study.
 - The promotional flier and promotional poster can be used to advertise the study. A poster is included with each study book.

- Use the bulletin cover for a meeting or worship service when you install leaders or for another PW or church event.
- The charm/pendant features the study’s art for Lesson Nine and makes an excellent gift for leaders and others.
- The workshop writer, Joyce MacKichan Walker, picked appropriate hymns for each lesson. A list is included with this workshop.

Lament in Life

(10 minutes) If you have twelve people or fewer, ask these questions of the whole group. If more, use the table groups, or small groups of four or five, so more participants have time to respond:

1. What have you discovered that will most help you prepare to lead, or to participate in, this study?
2. What challenges do you imagine?
3. Name something you heard about lament that is new to you.

(10 minutes) Ask participants to bring their study books and gather in a circle. Invite them to turn to “Why Lament?” at the end of the introduction, notice and read the five reasons offered by the author, and select the one that seems the most helpful to them personally. After they have had time to choose one, ask them to say their name, followed by “Why lament? Because lament . . .” and insert their chosen answer. After the last person has spoken, read aloud the three sentences that follow the list of five: “When we lament, we move from suffering to faith. In our faith there is hope. We lament in order to hope.”

Lamenting Together in Hope

Close by singing or praying together “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me,” hymn 775 in *Glory to God*. This spiritual honors both the tradition and practice of lament, and the clear declaration that Jesus is our daily companion and our eternal hope. Note that it is suggested as a closing song for all sessions on the “Suggested Hymns” sheet.

A Litany of Lament and Hope

One: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest (Ps. 22:1–2).

All: Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? . . . If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast (Ps. 139:7, 9–10).

One: By the rivers of Babylon—there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. . . . How could we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land? (Ps. 137:1, 4)

All: For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another (Rom. 12:4–5).

One: The earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers . . . The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant (Is. 24:4–5).

All: The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them (Is. 11:6)

One: God says, My people are bent on turning away from me. To the Most High they call, but [the Most High] does not raise them up at all (Hos. 11:7)

All: How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath (Hos. 11:8–9).

One: [Jesus] . . . wept over [the city], saying, “If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies . . . will crush you to the ground, . . . because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God” (Lk. 19:41–44, selected).

All: For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:38–39).



Into the Light on the web

Bible study helps, including lesson summaries and outlines, as well as the *Workshop for Leaders*, and more, are available on PW’s web pages. Check for the monthly Bible study blog beginning in late summer 2020. Visit www.presbyterianwomen.org.

Order the Bible study and supplemental materials online at www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop or call 800/533–4371, Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM EST. See www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop for additional Bible study helps, encore Bible studies and related items.

2020–2021 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study by P. Lynn Miller

Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament

Lesson	Main Idea	Focus Scripture	Highlight
1	The heart of lament: the perceived absence of God	Psalms 22:1–19 Matthew 27:45–46	Elements and purpose of Individual laments
2	Communities lament.	Psalms 137	Elements and purpose of communal laments
3	Women carry much of the burden of lament.	Jeremiah 9:17–21 Matthew 2:16–18	Learning to lament with others
4	Death deserves lament.	John 11:28–37	Lamenting goes beyond mourning.
5	Sometimes life deserves lament.	Job 3:1–4, 9–19, 24–26	Lament in the “dark night” invites being heard and accompaniment.
6	Destruction deserves lament.	Lamentations 5:1–22 Luke 23:26–31	Loss of community structure leads to despair.
7	Creation laments.	Isaiah 24:4–6, 8, 19 Romans 8:19–23	Destruction of the environment impacts humanity.
8	God laments.	Hosea 11:1–9 Luke 19:41–44 (Matt. 23:37–39; Lk. 13:34–35)	God laments humanity's unfaithfulness to God's covenant.
9	God: One day there will be no more death, tears, lament.	Isaiah 25:6–10 Revelation 21:1–8	To lament is to affirm trust and hope in God.

Contemporary Lament	Practicing Lament	Finding Hope
Hank Williams' song "I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry"	Write a lament about feeling God's absence	Psalm 139:7–12 God accompanies and surrounds us.
Public marches as communal lament	Write a communal lament.	Romans 12:4–5 Christian community needs all of us.
Situations and issues for women's engagement	Explore ways to teach and lead lament practices.	Exodus 15:20 Women can lead celebrations of God's power and presence.
Recalling death camps in WWII and the desire to work for a better world	Write a lament of remembrance.	1 Corinthians 15:54b–55 Death does not reign. Christ is risen!
Thomas Dorsey's hymn, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"	Explore ways to accompany people lamenting life.	John 10:10 I am a child of God.
Bruce Springsteen's song "My City of Ruins"	Lament over your community and ask God to act.	Matthew 5:14 God calls us to seek the welfare of our communities.
John Hollow Horn's poem "Some Day the Earth Will Weep"	Write a lament in the voice of creation or a creature.	Isaiah 11:6–9 God's good creation will be restored.
Garth Brooks' song "The Change"	Write a prayer of confession for human actions that cause God to lament.	Romans 8:38–39 Nothing can separate us from God's love.
James Weldon Johnson's hymn "Lift Every Voice and Sing"	Read or sing "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to express lament, hope, and trust	

The following are suggested hymns for each lesson of the 2020–2021 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament*.

All hymns are found in *Glory to God: The Presbyterian Hymnal* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2013). Many may also be present in other hymnals.

For something more familiar, or a hymn that might speak more particularly to your study group, look in the section “Lament and Longing for Healing,” *Glory to God* (GtG).

For a closing each time you meet, you might opt to use “I Want Jesus to Walk with Me,” hymn 775; it honors both the tradition and practice of lament, and the clear declaration that Jesus is our daily companion and our eternal hope.

Lesson One: The Heart of Lament

1. “Lord, Why Have You Forsaken Me” (GtG 210) is a classic individual lament based on Psalm 22, the first focus scripture for this lesson.
2. “O God, Be Gracious” (GtG 776), based on Psalm 4, and “How Long, O Lord” (GtG 777), based on Psalm 13, are both individual laments that move from lament to hope.

Lesson Two: Lamenting Together

1. “By the Babylonian Rivers” (GtG 72) is a simple hymn based on Psalm 137, the focus scripture for this lesson.
2. Similarly, “By the Waters of Babylon” (GtG 784) is a simple lament of remembrance with an easily learned tune that can be sung as a round.

Lesson Three: Women’s Lament

1. “A Prophet-Woman Broke a Jar” (GtG 201) clearly highlights the story of the woman who anointed Jesus in preparation for his dying. The rest celebrates women’s discipleship and unsung wisdom and truth.
2. “For All the Faithful Women” (GtG 324) names the witness of biblical women, including some referenced in this lesson.
3. “Woman in the Night” (GtG 161), verse 4, reminds us that women were “earliest to mourn” Jesus’ death at dawn by bringing care and spices; “Woman, Weeping in the Garden” (GtG 241) honors Mary Magdalene, whose faithful mourning turns to dancing as she proclaims the resurrection.

Lesson Four: Lamenting Death

1. “God Weeps with Us Who Weep and Mourn” (GtG 787) acknowledges the questions, doubts, hopelessness, and rage that can surround death (verse 2), while also acknowledging that God weeps with us as we lament.

Lesson Five: Lamenting Life

1. “Why Stand So Far Away, My God?” (GtG 786) laments the injustice that reigns, from lying to cruelty to terror, and calls on God to help us act.
2. Similarly, “In an Age of Twisted Values” (GtG 345) laments

the great human need and the cruelty of greed, discrimination, prejudice, and division evident in our country. This is lament that leads to confession and cries to God for healing and help so that we can show more love.

3. “You are My Refuge, Faithful God” (GtG 214) laments to God sorrow, pain, strife, misery, and brokenness (verses 3 and 4), but stands fast in proclaiming that our lives are in God’s hands. Another hymn, “When We Must Bear Persistent Pain” (GtG 807), is a prayer that God “hear our complaint” (verse 2) and bring peace and light, since “You [God] are our hope.”

Lesson Six: Lament Over the City

1. “All Who Love and Serve Your City” (GtG 351) offers lament for a city uncared for by those with wealth and plenty, who do not work to help the city thrive. “Risen Lord, shall yet the city be the city of despair?” (verse 4) is answered with the hope that, instead, the city will be called “The Lord is there!”
2. “Save Me, O God; I Sink in Floods” (GtG 478) laments the metaphorical distress of individuals “plunged into misery” (verse 1) but can also recall for us the literal destruction to cities and communities when floods overwhelm them.

Lesson Seven: Creation Laments

1. “For the Troubles and the Sufferings (Pelas dores deste mundo)” (GtG 764), verse one, declares “the whole creation’s laboring in pain.”
2. “Touch the Earth Lightly” (GtG 713) laments, through positive encouragement, abuses that have endangered the earth. It calls us to care for all creation—water, land, creatures, and air.

Lesson Eight: God Laments

1. “Shall Tribulation or Distress” (GtG 823) captures Romans 8:38–39, the scripture this lesson uses to claim the hope we receive from knowing that nothing “in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.” Sing it out!

Lesson Nine: The End of Lament

1. “Live into Hope” (GtG 772) expresses all the joy of this lesson as it proclaims the justice and liberty for all in God’s kingdom to come. Notice that it was written for the United Presbyterian Women’s National Meeting in July 1976.
2. A multitude of hymns celebrate the vision of Revelation 21:1–8, God’s new heaven and new earth, where God dwells with God’s people and all things are made new. You might try “Light Dawns on a Weary World” (GtG 79); “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken” (GtG 81); “Day of Delight and Beauty Unbounded” (GtG 242), perfect for after Easter; “For the Healing of the Nations” (GtG 346); “Rejoice! Rejoice, Believers” (GtG 362); and “Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation” (GtG 394). Maybe it’s a day for a hymn sing!