

Lament: A Way of Life

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For use with Lesson One of the 2020–2021 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament* by P. Lynn Miller



Scripture: Psalm 22

As I sit at my computer to ponder Lesson One of this year’s PW/*Horizons* Bible study, my husband Michael, our dog Libby, and I are beginning our fourth week as a “quaran-team” navigating COVID-19. Our adult children are safely keeping social-distance in New Orleans and Minnesota—Andrew because he and his partner make their home in New Orleans, and Rebekah in Minnesota because her job requires her to fly an average of once to twice a week. Retreating to work-at-home with parents in the at-risk category of the chronologically gifted didn’t seem wise, nor especially conducive to what she needed to manage. So, she is in Minnesota joining the quaran-team of three dear friends—working parents and a five-year-old, from a now fully-equipped office and bedroom basement suite. They all share the working, parenting, cooking, homeschooling, creative play, outdoor exercise, expanded-but-still-monitored screentime life that will forever define March, April, May, and who knows how much longer in the year of our Lord 2020.

The socially distant life was, and still is, a reality for many of us. And I’m curious:
Who was on your “quaran-team”?

How would you describe your daily routine?

What were you most worried about?

What were you most afraid of?

What was the biggest challenge?

What was the greatest loss?

Write it down. Because it is stark evidence of the fact that every single one of us has direct, too recent, too present, too painful experience of devastating and powerful reasons to lament.

Lament is “an emotional statement of sorrow or grief” (4). “Laments bridge the space between our faith in God and the reality of living in our not-yet-redeemed world” (5). It wasn’t hard to speak and hear emotional statements of sorrow and grief during Pandemic 2020. It wasn’t hard to recognize and acknowledge we live in a “not-yet-redeemed” world.

Even so, Presbyterian women ground their lives in worshiping congregations. Presbyterian women have circles of friends and phone buddies and “dear ones” they keep in touch with weekly. I suspect the vast majority of us worshiped virtually with our churches most Sundays; joined an occasional Zoom meeting to reconnect, carry on with our book groups, commiserate with long-distance family members; even read a story or two to grandchildren or nieces and nephews. Yes, we had lots of lamenting to do, but we also slowed down our lives, talked more, walked more, spent less on frivolous things, exercised generosity, and gratefully

received from others when we had needs. Pandemic 2020 took us deep into lament. Pandemic 2020 surely caused most of us at some time or other to feel God was no longer present with us. Surely Psalm 22 was written—no, prayed—for us, for this time.

Psalm 22 (Common English Bible)

Grab a pencil, or a couple of highlighters. Take them to Psalm 22:1–19 with Pandemic 2020 in mind. As you read:

Underline phrases and sentences that speak for the distance you felt from God at certain times. When were those for you?

Put parentheses around words and phrases that identify feelings you experienced. When did they arise in you?

Circle lines that proclaim God's presence. When was God present to you?

Double underline ways to help you know God is present. How will you remember them when you need them?

Who "showed up" for you during Pandemic 2020 and how did that affect you?

For whom did you "show up" and how might God have used that to help them know God was indeed present to them?

My God! My God,
 why have you left me all alone?
 Why are you so far from saving me—
 so far from my anguished groans?
 My God, I cry out during the day,
 but you don't answer;
 even at nighttime I don't stop.
 You are the holy one, enthroned.
 You are Israel's praise.
 Our ancestors trusted you—
 they trusted you and you rescued them;
 they cried out to you and they were saved;
 they trusted you and they weren't ashamed.
 But I'm just a worm, less than human,
 insulted by one person, despised by another.
 All who see me make fun of me—
 they gape, shaking their heads:
 "He committed himself to the Lord,
 so let God rescue him;
 let God deliver him
 because God likes him so much."
 But you are the one who pulled me from the womb,
 placing me safely at my mother's breasts.
 I was thrown on you from birth;
 you've been my God
 since I was in my mother's womb.

Please don't be far from me,
 because trouble is near
 and there's no one to help.
 Many bulls surround me;
 mighty bulls from Bashan encircle me.
 They open their mouths at me
 like a lion ripping and roaring!
 I'm poured out like water.
 All my bones have fallen apart.
 My heart is like wax;
 it melts inside me.
 My strength is dried up
 like a piece of broken pottery.
 My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
 you've set me down in the dirt of death.
 Dogs surround me;
 a pack of evil people circle me like a lion—
 oh, my poor hands and feet!
 I can count all my bones!
 Meanwhile, they just stare at me, watching me.
 They divvy up my garments among themselves;
 they cast lots for my clothes.
 But you, LORD! Don't be far away!
 You are my strength!
 Come quick and help me!

Let's follow Jesus' lead. Both lamenting our sense of abandonment (Matt. 27:46) and proclaiming God's deliverance (Ps. 22:31) are faithful.

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