

***Into the Light: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament***  
**2020–2021 PW/Horizons Bible study**  
**Webinar Q & A**

The following questions were asked in the chat bar during Lynn Miller's *Into the Light* webinars on Zoom June 9<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

**ABOUT LAMENT AND LAMENTING**

**Do you see lament as part of our everyday lives?**

I think there are certainly things in our world that we can lament every day: situations, issues, and circumstances that we have no power to change. All of those things could lead to lament. Whether the practice of lament is part of our everyday lives is a different question. I hope that the study will help us make the practice of lament more a part of our lives. After all, lament is prayer and we should be talking to God every day about all kinds of things.

**What is the difference between lament and having a pity party?**

**Do laments sometimes lead to violence?**

**Does lament always end with hope or maybe depression?**

The two biggest differences between lament and a pity party center on the who and the why of each. A pity party centers on the one who is speaking and the speech is designed to cause other people to feel sorry for the speaker. A lament focuses on God and on calling on God to change a situation. The lamenter is involved but is not the focus of the lament. The lamenter doesn't call on God so that God will feel sorry for the lamenter but rather calls on God to "be God" and bring things in line with God's will and God's plan.

This is why I don't think lament can lead to violence. That's not to say that situations worthy of lament might not include violence—I suspect the violence might be one of the things to lament. Biblical lament intentionally calls on the one who can change things and bring the situation back into God's will and God's plan.

I believe lament does lead to hope because when we lament we call on God in whom we hope. Lament is addressed to the one who can change things. That doesn't mean that the lamentable situation will change immediately. Understandably, a lamentable situation that doesn't seem to change would be disheartening to the one lamenting. Remember, too, that the heart of lament is the perceived absence of God and feeling like God is absent could lead to the feelings associated with depression. The study's section on the "dark night of the soul" (page 48) might help you think about lament and depression.

**Someone laments to you but it sounds like to you they are complaining or whining or they seem to be chronic complainers—how do you sort through that to get to the “real” lament? Could this be an issue with this study?**

You are right that at the beginning of the study it is important to define what a lament is. “What Lament is Not” (page 5) is a place to start. Some groups may find it helpful to develop a covenant or checklist where participants pledge to examine issues they bring to the group in light of what lament is. Such a checklist might include questions like:

- What is the situation or injustice I want to bring to the group?
- Am I addressing my lament to God?
- Have I done everything humanly possible to address the situation?
- What am I asking God to do?

Other questions would be appropriate as well, so each group should develop their own questions. If everyone is asking and answering the same questions, there may be a more common foundation for studying and reflecting and lamenting together.

**What would be something your church could do to have more lamenting?**

**Can ideas for worship lamenting be listed in resource download?**

**Are there resources for a congregational service around lament?**

**Is there anything on lament to use in children's ministry?**

**Would you consider an All Saints Day evening service where every one names the loved one they have lost the previous year (or longer) a service of lament?**

**Have you heard of a Blue Christmas service remembering loved ones lost? Also, would the women's service in the spring be one of Lament?**

To learn more about how your congregation incorporates lament into its life you could do a review of your orders of service to see how often themes and the practice of lament are part of worship. I suspect it won't be often. In my experience, we use the themes and practice of penitence more than we use the themes and practice of lament.

We will be gathering resources as we find them—or as Presbyterian Women write them—during the course of this year and will post them on the PW website on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/>. I hope that by the end of the year we will have many, many new resources for incorporating lament into worship.

**Is it easier for women to lament than men?**

It may be easier for women to lament than it is for men because of societal reasons. In general, and I don't say this is a healthy thing, society has conditioned men to downplay, and even repress, their emotions and to believe that they can fix anything if they just work hard enough. Lament, of course, is what we do when we have done all we can. Women are

“allowed” by society to share their emotions, though ironically this is sometimes turned against women as proof that they are “too emotional.”

**When we see a sibling of faith suffering (for instance in the current protests for racial justice) how can we lament with them?**

The place to start walking alongside anyone who is lamenting is to make space for the lamenter to give voice to their lament. In Lesson Five, Lamenting Life, there are three different stories about people who accompany people who are lamenting. Based on those examples, which friend do we want to be? The best way to walk alongside someone lamenting is to ask how we can support them. Their lament may not be ours, so we listen and take our direction from the ones who are lamenting.

**I can see our current racial discussions as a cause for lament and repentance. Is this a valid assessment?**

I believe it is a very valid assessment. And I think the things to lament are many and varied and they differ among individuals and groups. It is important to remember that we lament the things we bring to God in prayer (spoken, sung, painted, danced) and we repent the things we can change about ourselves and about our situations but choose not to change.

**Can the lamenter also be the changer at the same time?**

**The lamenter would have to make that 180-degree change, wouldn't they?**

In the Biblical pattern of lament, the lamenter and the one called to act or make change are two different beings. If there is still something that an individual (or group) can do to change a situation of injustice or loss, then the proper response for them is to repent because they have not used their power to change a situation and then act. Repentance doesn't just mean saying you are sorry. To repent is to turn 180 degrees, doing the complete opposite of what you have been doing. In Biblical lament, you don't lament when you can still act.

**Is it that lament is God's way of giving us permission to scream or just let "it all hang out" or release feelings?"**

Lament is more than that. While there is good that comes from emotional release, the ability to take a situation to God and call on God to act moves us forward in ways that are more than helping us release emotion. Clearly the psalmists felt free to describe the source of their laments in very direct language, which had to be a release for them. Think about the tone of voice you would use to read Psalm 13:1–2a. “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart?” What sort of release does saying these words have for you?

**Isn't lament a help to deal with grief and other worries?**

Lament can help us deal with grief (usually about a situation that cannot be changed), but it is more than just missing someone or something that is gone. The point of lament is to ask for the situation to be changed. So, in lamenting a loss to God, what will you ask to be changed? The same is true for other situations. We ask ourselves if there is anything else we can do to address the worries. If there isn't, then we lament to God, asking God to come and act. We need to think about what we are asking God to do.

**How do you convince a nation that it needs God to end lament?**

I don't know that we can. In fact, our inability to convince the nation may be one of the things we lament. We've witnessed to who God is and what God has done for us, we have done all that we can to convince others, but when we can't do anything else, we lament to God.

**How does "I believe, help me in my unbelief" fit into lament/repent?**

It seems to me that the belief in question when we lament is the belief that God can and will act. If situations have gone on for so long that it seems they will never change it can be hard to hope. In Lesson Two (page 23), the study points out that communal laments are less likely to have the statement of assurance at the end of lament. As we create our own laments, there may be times when we just can't seem to speak that assurance. That would absolutely be a moment to include "Help my unbelief" as part of the lament.

**Please say a bit more about how we get beyond lamenting because it seems so depressing.****How do we add more hope, making the study joyful?**

Finding balance to lament depends on at least a couple of things. The first is determining what is the answer to lament. Is it hope? Is it joy? In the webinar (and in the study) I suggest that the, or an, opposite of lament is revelation (specifically the revelation of God's presence).

There is scripture that points to hope and (usually) some kind of action at the end of each lesson to remind us that lament does not have the last word.

**How similar was the theme of the General Assembly to this Bible study?**

The General Assembly 2020 theme (Lament Into Hope) was very similar. Since the study had been in process since March 2017, GA planners did know, of course, about the PW Bible study. It is a theme that speaks perfectly to the world in which we find ourselves.

**If the answer to lament is revelation, does that mean that revelation is the realization that God is there, and has always been there?**

Yes. The study begins by identifying lament as the perceived absence of God. I say “perceived” because we know that God is always with us. There are times when it doesn’t feel that way, as Jesus proved on the cross when he cried the words of Psalm 22, but God did not abandon Jesus, and God does not abandon us. That’s good news.

**If Biblical lament is protest, then can the opposite of lament be justice and equity, instead of revelation?**

How you define lament will influence how you define its opposite. In Lesson One, lament is connected to “the perceived absence of God.” The opposite of “the perceived absence of God” would be the perceived presence of God, which we know through God being revealed to us.

Personally, I think that lament is praise. When we lament we don’t deny the greatness and glory of God—just the opposite, I think. When we lament we acknowledge that only the greatness and goodness and glory of God can fix a situation. That, to me, is praise.

Certainly, the opposite of an injustice is justice and lament calls for the righting of injustice. It is splitting hairs (but important hairs) to remember that the lament isn’t the injustice. In the webinar, discussing Lesson Nine, I said that God doesn’t bring the end of lament, God is the end of lament. My preference—and it is my preference, not a proclamation—is to make God the focus.

There is no one correct answer that pinpoints the opposite of lament. Your answer will depend on how you define lament and praise.

## **ABOUT THE STUDY**

**How would you suggest we encourage participants to create their own laments in each lesson—that Practicing Lament open space at the end of the lessons will be intimidating to some!**

I can think of two ways to help folks become more comfortable with the process of creating verbal laments. The first way is to walk through the process of composing a lament using the **Psalm 42 handout** from the webinar, located at the end of this document. Gather together and walk through the form. Ask people to circle or underline the parts of lament they find in Psalm 42 and then use those parts as examples as they try to compose their own laments. You can decide if you want to invite people to share their laments or you could tell everyone at the beginning that this is a “no share zone.” A statement like this lifts the pressure off someone who might be intimidated by the process.

Another way to compose a lament is to brainstorm through the elements as a group. Start with: address God. Invite your group to share ways to address God. Have someone write down the group's answers as they are suggested. Then invite participants to describe situations that cause them to lament. Have someone write down those answers. Continue in this way through all of the parts of a prayer of lament. Assemble your group's lament by choosing a phrase from each part's list. A way to make this choose-your-own-adventure style of lament ongoing would be to write down the answers for each part of lament on individual pieces of paper or notecards, label each stack of cards for each part of lament, and make one set of cards for the group or even for each participant. Participants could pick a card from each stack of cards for each part of lament and pray their freshly assembled lament. Aside from preparing the cards, there's little pressure when laments (or any kind of prayer) are composed this way.

**Doing each lesson, what time frame would you suggest?**

I think that depends on the group and the lesson. There may be lessons where the scripture needs more time to unpack. In other lessons it may be the contemporary lament that takes more time or inspires more conversation. I would say to make sure there is time spent in every lesson on the study of the text and on practicing lament. The other parts of the lesson may ebb and flow, time-wise.

**Which lesson do you think would best address racial injustice?**

I think every single lesson is connected to racial injustice. As I was putting the study together I tried to find overarching ideas for each lesson rather than assigning a lesson a particular subject to lament. That is also one of the reasons it is important to practice lament in each lesson. Practicing lament will connect the particular issues and situations of lament particular to each person to the lesson. My hope is that the study will age well and remain relevant beyond our current times into a future when we may be lamenting different things than we are lamenting right now.

**Lynn, why are vessels used in all of your illustrations?**

**Why is there a different vessel pictured at the beginning of each lesson?**

**On the cover, is that a teapot with those containers?**

The vessels are a visual representation of the lament structure. The structure of Biblical lament gives a form to our laments in the same way that a vessel gives structure to the water, or other liquid, it carries. The vessel doesn't define the contents, but it does enable us to convey the contents. The vessel on the first page of each lesson is also the vessel in the illustration. There is one that looks like a teapot! It is actually an *askos*, a vessel used for refilling oil lamps. It helped me think about refilling that God-shaped space that feels empty

when it seems like God is absent. Pages eight and nine have information about all the illustrations. If you look at Lesson Two, you'll see that I (accidentally) flipped the vessel on the lesson illustration when I painted the cover. Oops! The drawing wasn't perfectly symmetrical, so you can see that it is flipped.

**Exactly where does the title come from?**

The title comes from the text of James Weldon Johnson's "Lift Every Voice and Sing" (page 89 in the study book). The text is:

God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,  
thou who hast brought us thus far on the way;  
thou who hast by thy might led us **into the light**  
keep us forever in the path, we pray.

**I am doing the study on my own. How can I incorporate all of this?**

You might find it helpful to get a notebook or journal or something else to use to collect your thoughts and work across the study—since there won't be a collective memory to help you remember "what we did last time." We are also working on ways to connect individuals in a virtual space so that you can be in a group of PW from across the church. That information, when available, will be on the PW website.

**Was this *Into the Light* Bible study introduced or was its theme introduced at General Assembly as a resource to whole congregations, not just women, during this difficult year of pandemic and social justice issues?**

Presbyterian Women were definitely being guided by the Holy Spirit in 2017 when this Bible study subject was selected and the process of writing, testing, and producing the study began. Now that we are here in 2020, the ideas of lament and hope are more relevant than ever, making them an appealing and appropriate theme for the 224<sup>th</sup> General Assembly. We hope that the study will be used widely throughout the denomination. While the Louisville PW office will continue to market and promote the study, the degree to which the study is used will probably depend on women suggesting (and leading!) the study in their own congregations and presbyteries.

## **ABOUT THE WEBINAR (following up on resources, PW laments, congregations, and so on)**

**I know there are more Zoom webinars scheduled, but will one of them be recorded so it can be available for members who could not attend?**

**Will the slides be available afterward?**

One of the webinars was recorded and is now available on the PW YouTube channel. The direct link is: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SqykJqtyEaY>.

Selected slides and handouts are located at the end of this document, for your convenience, and are also located on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/>.

**How can we submit suggestions for the playlist?**

**Where can you find Cheri Harper's sermon please?**

The playlist will be posted on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/> after the music webinar, Wednesday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, 7-8:30 p.m. eastern time.

Cheri's sermon can be found on the PW website: <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org>. The direct link is: <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/horizons-magazine/horizons-march-april-2020/women-of-vision-installation-service-for-pw-by-cheri-harper/>.

**Do you think these monthly lessons could be expanded so that a group could meet weekly and over a month of meetings cover one lesson?**

Absolutely! See the Resources listed on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/> for additional things to include. You could show the Companion DVD by sharing your screen over Zoom one week; the next week you could explore the focus scripture; week 3 could explore how the group experiences lament and the contemporary lament included in the lesson; and week 4 could be used to create written lament or art that reflects the lesson's theme. Or, you could spend one lesson on each of the headings in the Suggestions for Leaders: Lament in Image; Lament in Scripture; Lament in Life; Lamenting Together in Hope; and incorporate the Lament We Bring section into each meeting.

**Several years ago I wrote a poem about Old Cemeteries. Is there a way I can share it?**

Yes. Contributed laments that are created over the course of this study as well as other resources can be found on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/>. To have your lament included in the listing, please share them with [Stephanie.Patterson@pcusa.org](mailto:Stephanie.Patterson@pcusa.org).

### **Another webinar on food and lamentation?**

There are no plans for a webinar on this topic.

### **Can you explain the concept of “spiritual bypassing?” I’m not sure I understand it.**

In the webinar, I mentioned the concept of spiritual bypassing in conjunction with Lesson Two. As defined by John Welwood, spiritual bypassing is using “spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep personal, emotional ‘unfinished business,’ to shore up a shaky sense of self, or to belittle basic needs, feelings, and developmental tasks.” In other words, we bypass our own needs, believing it makes us more spiritual to do so. But part of the structure of Biblical lament is calling on God to act, and Biblical lamenters seem to feel free to ask God for what they want. This includes Jesus, who asked God to “let this cup pass from me” as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane. If Jesus were involved in spiritual bypassing, he would have skipped that part of the prayer—speaking aloud his wish—and jumped straight to the spiritual part of the prayer, “nevertheless not my will but yours be done.” Biblical lament makes space for us to ask God for what we want (though God is not required to act in the way we ask).

### **Who am I to tell God what God needs to do?**

Always remembering that God is not bound to do as we ask—in anything—I think the best answer comes from “Belonging to God: A First Catechism.” The first question is “Who are you?” And the answer is, “I am a child of God.” As a beloved child of God, you have been invited (by God) to make your requests known to God (Philippians 4:6). Our ancestors in faith leave examples for us throughout scripture. We will be studying some of them in these lessons, but there are others as well.

### **How would the parts of a lament be circled, boxed, and so on as a group? Or should this activity be an individual one?**

One of the handouts from the webinar offers the opportunity to practice identifying the parts of a lament in scripture (using Psalm 42) and then to write our own laments. You might use that handout before starting the study in order to help people become familiar with the structure of lament. I don’t think there is a wrong way to do it, so either as a group or as individual works. You might combine the two by asking individuals to look at the exercise before you gather together. You could split the difference by doing a pair-and-share, dividing your group into pairs and letting them work together and then come back to the whole group with insights.

### **Is there a way to access the Landay poems?**

The landai were mentioned in connection to Lesson Three. You can find some of the poems online. Search for “Eliza Griswold” and “landay.” The full collection was published in her book **I Am the Beggar of the World** which you can order or purchase.

**Could you please say more about the Jewish observances that you mention in Lament Over the City, Lesson Six?**

In the webinar I mentioned two Jewish observances that might speak to Lesson Six. One is Tisha B’Av; the other is Tikkun Chatzot. I would encourage you to reach out to a synagogue in your town or nearby to find out more about these observances from people of the Jewish faith community. Our study of lament may be an opportunity to show commonalities between our communities. But here is some basic information:

**Tisha B’Av** is a day of fasting and mourning on the ninth day of the month of Av. In 2020, it begins at sunset on Wednesday, July 29, and ends with sunset on Thursday, July 30. In 2021, Tisha B’Av begins at sunset on Saturday, July 17, and ends with sunset on Sunday, July 18. The day remembers, among other things, the destruction of the Temple(s) in Jerusalem, both Solomon’s Temple and the Second Temple. Remembering the siege of Jerusalem, there is a period of three weeks before Tisha B’Av that is characterized by practices of mourning and deprivations. Particular foods are eaten before the sun goes down and Tisha B’Av begins. Tisha B’Av evening services include prayers (dirges) and reading the book of Lamentations.

**Tikkun Chatzot** is a midnight service of prayer that focuses on the destruction of the Temple and the still-awaited redemption and restoration associated with the Temple. Tikkun Chatzot begins with confession and moves to readings of Psalm 137, Psalm 79, and Lamentations 5. The liturgy is divided into two main sections named for the matriarchs Rachel and Leah. The Tikkun Rachel focuses on mourning and exile; Tikkun Leah focuses on praise and longing for the presence of God.

You can find references and liturgies online. The full liturgy of Tikkun Chatzot is also found in a book called **The Sweetest Hour** by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, which can be ordered online.

**Please restate what Agatha said.**

**Can you please repeat what Agatha said that is right?**

My wise friend Agatha said that nothing human can fully fix things. Only when God is brought back into our individual lives, and our life as a society, will we see the end of situations that lead to lament. This is the point of Lesson Nine: God does not bring the end of lament God IS the end of lament.

## About Lynn and her process

### **What was your approach in making the DVD for this study?**

In the DVD I tried not to repeat what was in the study book but, instead, to open up some points in each lesson. Sometimes I introduced an additional avenue to creating laments or ways to share personal stories. For Lesson Three I talked about the quieting of women's voices in ancient history. For Lesson Seven I talked about the Edward Hicks painting *The Peaceable Kingdom* that illustrates the lesson. It is my hope that the DVD will add to the material in the book.

### **Do any of the lessons speak to you personally? Or maybe do you have a favorite lesson?**

All of the lessons wound up speaking to me in one way or another. When I began reading in preparation for writing, I thought I knew which lessons would be the most meaningful to me. I can tell you that I was surprised by my reaction to Lesson Eight. My original thesis for the lesson was that since God laments, we should be more comfortable with lamenting. I was well into reading and writing when I realized that, although I said the subject of the lesson was God's lament, I was viewing God's lament mostly in light of what it meant for our practice of lament. It was quite a conviction to realize fully that the heart of the lesson is that I/we am/are the cause of God's lament. That can only happen because God loves me/us.

### **I know you talked about the process of putting the study together but how long did you work on it before it was all "finished?"**

I started reading in 2017 and started "officially" writing in 2018. The draft went to field testing and was given re-writes in 2019 and then published in 2020. The study was like some of my paintings—I don't know that they are ever really "finished" but at some point I have to be done with them. I'd keep fiddling with things forever if I could.

### **Do you have the slides or info that you shared at churchwide about the different types of tears?**

Yes. Selected slides are available at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CWG-Tears-Presentation-by-Lynn-Miller.pdf>.

### **Lesson Three: is there a praying figure in the lower right?**

Hmmm . . . the figure of the woman is at the left of the illustration. It's the only figure I intended, but now I'm curious. Maybe a second figure found its way in.

### **Did your semi-circle practice lament more as a group or individually as after a lesson?**

The one test lesson they did, they practiced lament as a group during the lesson. I had a pastor colleague teach one lesson so she could give me some feedback on how it was. They

didn't get the whole study because then what would they/we do starting in August 2020? I do teach every lesson for the Semi-Circle (though I tell them I would be happy to share that responsibility), and I'll probably ask them to think about their laments before we meet. I'll probably vary how we do things in the lesson.

**Is there anything you would do differently if you were writing today in the face of the unrest in our country?**

As I was writing, I intentionally tried not to get too trendy or too directive. There are so many things that are lamentable in our world, and I know that my experience limits my ability to see some of them. I made a conscious decision to stay mostly with the Biblical text and invite (encourage!) participants to bring their specific laments to the process. I hope we'll have lots of laments contributed to the website so that we can try to understand how inclusive Presbyterian Women is. And I hope that Presbyterian women will have their eyes and hearts opened when they read what has come from the hearts of other Presbyterian women. Contributed laments can be found on the *Into the Light* web page at <https://www.presbyterianwomen.org/bible-study/into-the-light/>.

**Have you thought about laments in slavery-generated spirituals.? If yes, any examples?**

This idea really requires more unpacking than I can do in a Q & A. *Were You There: Lenten Reflections on the Spirituals* by Luke A. Powery, Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville, 2019, begins this way: There is no lack of pain and suffering in the world. . . . However, to sing can be a sting to the reality of suffering. It can be a sign of hope and the presence of God in the midst of agony. This is why [these sorrow songs] are called the "Spirituals" because they are the Spirit's song . . . (p. xi)" Perhaps *Were You There* would be a good way to explore Spirituals during our study and during Lent 2021.

# 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.

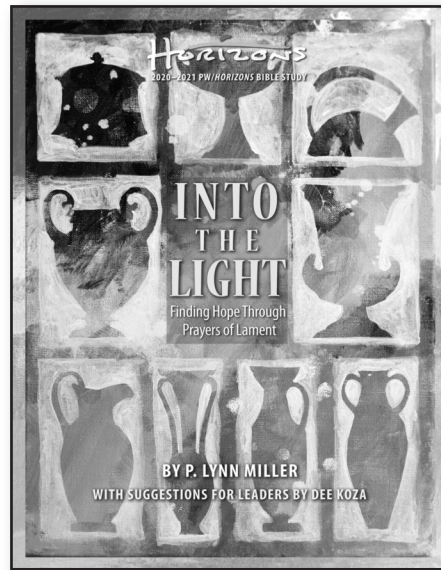
It provides

- 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

- are emotional statements of sorrow or grief;
- concern the past, present, or future;
- are directed toward the one who has the power to change the situation or right the injustice—God;
- 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:

- the main idea of the lesson
- the laments explored
- an important insight or highlight
- the contemporary example of a lament that illustrates the lesson
- the lament practice offered for use individually or in the group
- 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](http://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](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org).

Order the Bible study and supplemental materials online at [www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop](http://www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop) or call 800/533-4371, Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM EST. See [www.presbyterianwomen.org/shop](http://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	<b>Psalm 139:7–12</b> God accompanies and surrounds us.
Public marches as communal lament	Write a communal lament.	<b>Romans 12:4–5</b> Christian community needs all of us.
Situations and issues for women's engagement	Explore ways to teach and lead lament practices.	<b>Exodus 15:20</b> 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.	<b>1 Corinthians 15:54b–55</b> Death does not reign. Christ is risen!
Thomas Dorsey's hymn, "Precious Lord, Take My Hand"	Explore ways to accompany people lamenting life.	<b>John 10:10</b> I am a child of God.
Bruce Springsteen's song "My City of Ruins"	Lament over your community and ask God to act.	<b>Matthew 5:14</b> 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.	<b>Isaiah 11:6–9</b> 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.	<b>Romans 8:38–39</b> 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.

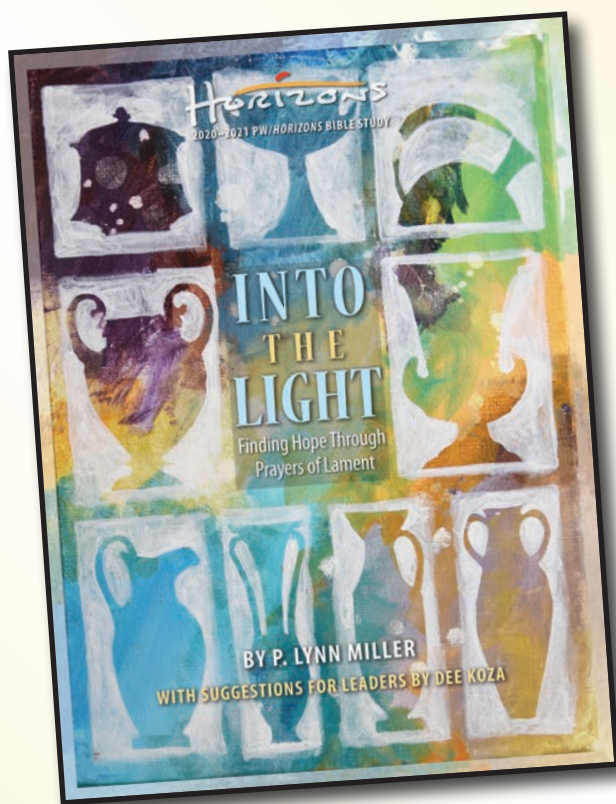
### Lesson Eight: God Laments

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!

## Introducing the 2020–2021 PW/*Horizons* Bible Study!



In this nine-lesson study, Lynn Miller revives lament as a proper theological response to the difficult situations of our world. One of the foundational points of the study is that, in scripture, lament usually leads to hope. After crying out to God, the one who laments remembers God. And while that doesn't fix things in the moment—the injustice, the loss, still exists—the lamenter is strengthened to face the world and to hope. And for us as Christians, hope is not just an emotional response or an attitude of pie in the sky. Hope implies movement: both God's inherent movement toward justice and our movement toward God. Recovering lament may be one of the church's most timely gifts to the world.

### About the authors



**Lynn Miller**, author and artist, is a minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She received her MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary (Richmond, Virginia) and the DMin from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, in conjunction with the University of Aberdeen

(Scotland). She has served as a workshop leader, graphic designer, and keynote speaker for conferences and gatherings on theology, worship, spirituality, education, and the arts. She provided the suggestions for leaders for the 2016–2017 PW/*Horizons* Bible study, *Who Is Jesus? What a Difference a Lens Makes* by Judy Yates Siker. Lynn has been a practicing artist for 25 years. She holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in fine arts and art history. Her work is in private and church collections throughout the U.S.



**Dee Koza** is a certified Christian educator, commissioned lay pastor, and a commissioned ruling elder in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). A graduate of the Presbyterian School of Christian Education (Union Theological Seminary), Dee has served in presbytery and

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LESSON ONE

### The Heart of Lament



LESSON TWO

### Lamenting Together



LESSON THREE

### Women's Lament



LESSON FOUR

### Lamenting Death



LESSON FIVE

### Lamenting Life



LESSON SIX

### Lament Over the City



LESSON SEVEN

### Creation Laments



LESSON EIGHT

### God Laments



LESSON NINE

### The End of Lament



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# Landay - Landai



Lesson 3

When sisters sit together, they always praise their brothers.  
When brothers sit together, they sell their sisters to others.

2 lines

22 syllables (9-13)

ends with -ma or -na

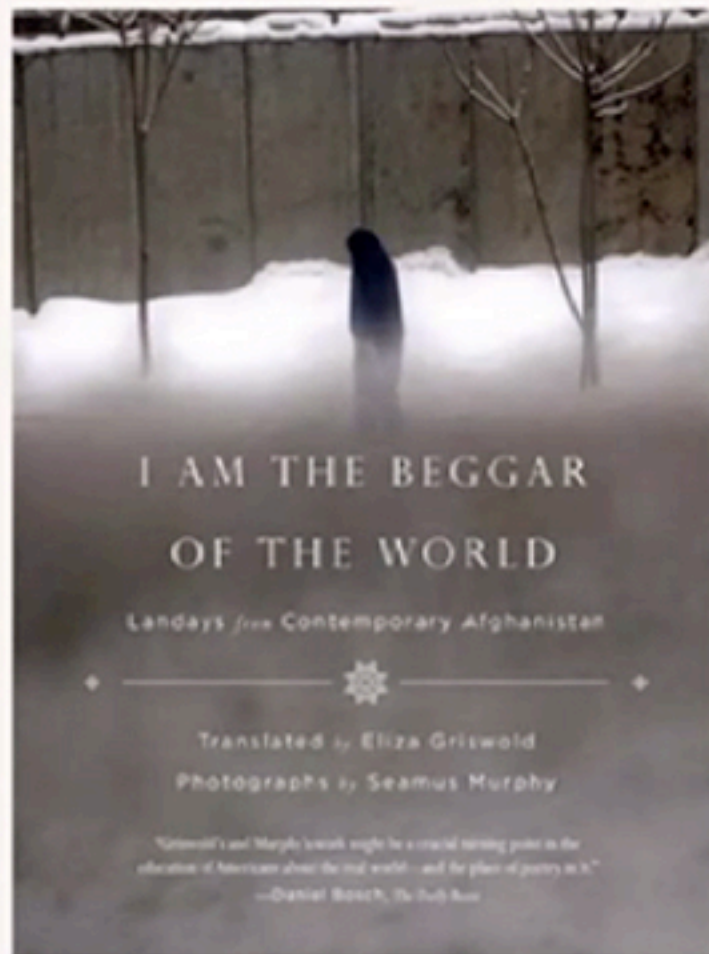
"snake"

# Landay - Landai

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Lesson 3

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<https://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/03/our-first-public-parks-the-forgotten-history-of-cemeteries/71818/>



## Lesson 4

PopularLatest

*The Atlantic*

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U.S.

# Our First Public Parks: The Forgotten History of Cemeteries

REBECCA GREENFIELD MARCH 16, 2011

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*From tiny plots to wide-open "rural cemeteries" and modern "memorial parks," the evolving design of cities of the dead*



Being a friend...



Lesson 5

The proper response  
to lament is...

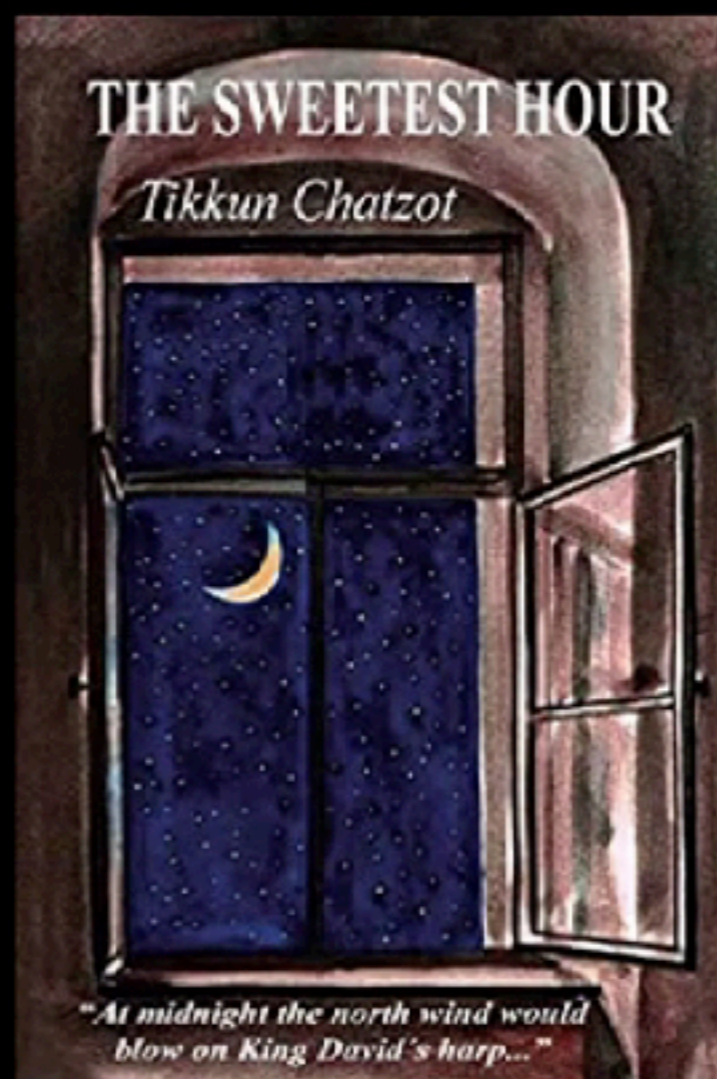
[silence]

[Lynn's opinion]

# Tikkun Chatzot



Lesson 6



Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

The opposite of  
lament isn't  
happiness (or  
even joy), it's...  
[revelation]  
[Lynn's opinion]



Lesson 9

Individual, communal,  
women...life, death...city,  
creation...God...end

9 first, then 1-8

ending with God's lamenting and us repenting

8,7,6,3,2,1,5,4,9

big to small lamenters, then life, death, end  
small to big lamenters (1,2,3,6,7,8) then 5,4,9

Liturgical year?

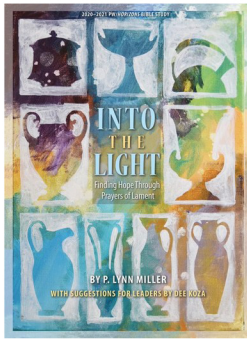
what to lament - not repent - in each season

Things to know about  
the Bible study:

It is a Bible study.

It's really a study about  
God.

It can be rearranged.



# Scripture Cited

INTO THE LIGHT: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament

## Lesson 1

Psalm 22:1-19  
Matthew 27:45-56  
Mark 15:33-43  
Luke 23:46  
Psalm 51:11  
Psalm 10:1  
Psalm 13:1  
Psalm 88:14  
2 Thessalonians 1:9  
Psalm 139:7-12

## Lesson 2

Psalm 137  
Psalm 60:1  
Lamentations 3:46-47  
Psalm 44  
Psalm 74  
Psalm 79  
Psalm 80  
Psalm 83  
Psalm 3  
Psalm 13  
Psalm 31  
Romans 12:4-5

## Lesson 3

Jeremiah 9:17-21  
Matthew 2:16-18  
Jeremiah 31:15-17  
Mark 7:28  
Genesis 21:16  
Luke 7:15  
1 Kings 17:24  
2 Samuel 1:24  
Ezekiel 32:16  
Luke 8:52  
Luke 23:27-28

Jeremiah 19:20b

## Lesson 4

John 11:28-37  
Mark 5:38  
Matthew 5:4a  
Mark 5:39  
Luke 8:52  
John 20:11  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8  
Psalm 22:6-7, 17b-18  
Psalm 31:5  
1 Corinthians 15:54b-55

## Lesson 5

Job 1, selected  
Job 4  
Job 6:8-9a, 10  
John 20:1-18  
Job 19:25, 27  
Psalm 88:1-7  
Psalm 109:20-25  
John 10:10

## Lesson 6

Lamentations 5:1-22  
Luke 23:26-31  
2 Chronicles 35:25  
Jeremiah 9:17  
Psalm 84  
Psalm 46  
Psalm 48  
Psalm 122  
Psalm 102  
Psalm 137  
Matthew 5:14

## Lesson 7

Isaiah 24, selected  
Romans 8:19-23  
Genesis 4:10  
Genesis 3:17  
Genesis 6:11  
Genesis 7:11  
Genesis 3:16b  
Exodus 2:23  
Lamentations 1:8  
Judges 2:18  
Jeremiah 9:10-14  
Isaiah 11:6-9

## Lesson 8

Hosea 11:1-9  
Luke 19:41-44  
Matthew 23:37-39  
Luke 13:34-35  
Hebrews 5:7  
Luke 19:40  
Luke 21:6  
Jeremiah 12:7  
Jeremiah 31:15-17  
Matthew 2:16-18  
Deuteronomy 21:18-21  
Romans 8:38-39

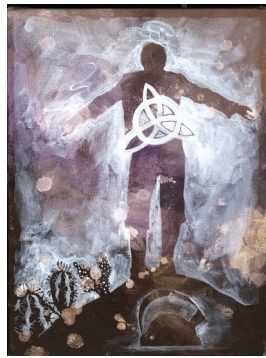
## Lesson 9

Isaiah 25:6-10  
Revelation 21:1-7  
Isaiah 2:2-3  
Psalm 77:1-2  
Romans 8:24-25



# Digging Deeper into the Texts INTO THE LIGHT: Finding Hope Through Prayers of Lament

by  
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## Lesson 1: Matthew 27:45-56

45 From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 46 And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' 47 When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, 'This man is calling for Elijah.' 48 At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. 49 But the others said, 'Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' 50 Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.

The earth shook, and the rocks were split. 52 The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. 53 After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. 54 Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, 'Truly this man was God's Son!'

55 Many women were also there, looking on from a distance; they had followed Jesus from Galilee and had provided for him. 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

Matthew 27:45-56 is paralleled in Mark's gospel (15:33-41). In Luke's telling of the crucifixion, Jesus quotes Psalm 31:5 "Into your hand I commit my spirit." (Luke 23:46)

Verse 46...Jesus quotes the first verse of Psalm 22, becoming one of the people of God who use Psalm 22 as their own prayer in their own circumstance.

Though Jesus speaks the psalm's first verse only, cultural practice indicated that quoting the first verse actually implied the entire writing. Because the psalm ends on a positive, faithful note, one school of thought is that Jesus' use of the psalm is actually a declaration of faith. A contradictory interpretation says that we should "hear" what people near the cross heard and that what they heard Jesus say was a cry of despair. **How do *you* hear Jesus' words from the cross?**

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Deuteronomy 31:17 says: *My anger will be kindled against them on that day. I will forsake them and hide my face from them; they will become easy prey, and many terrible troubles will come upon them. On that day they will say, "Have not these troubles come upon us because our God is not in our midst?"* **What parts of this scripture seem to be realized in Jesus' cry?**

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Early Christian martyrs often went to their deaths willingly, bravely, using the occasion to give impassioned speeches about their love for God and calling on others to be faithful as well. **How and why was Jesus' experience different from the martyrs who came after him?**

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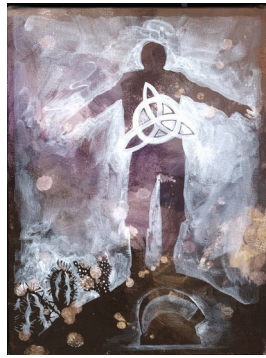
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Verse 50...Jesus has cried out, but he is not rescued. Remember that one of the psalmist's points is that the ancestors had cried out and been saved but now the psalmist is crying out and not being saved.

Verse 51...The tearing of the temple curtain may be seen as an answer to the psalmist's/Jesus' cry that God is not present. Symbolically, the tearing of the curtain is seen as opening up access to God. What had before been only the province of the High Priest is now open and available. Gentiles can now come into God's presence.

Verse 54...The Gentile soldiers present at the crucifixion acknowledged Jesus as God's son. **How do you think they heard his quotation of Psalm 22?**

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## Lesson 1: Psalm 22: 1-5, 9-15

A superscription attributes this psalm to David, but no specific event from David's life is mentioned in the text. Therefore the psalm can be considered a prayer not for one historical person, but as a liturgical piece available for anyone at any time.

Verse 1...The opening phrase “my God,” establishes that the psalmist is in relationship with God. The entire psalm should be read with that relationship in mind. The word “why” is often used in laments. It is also important to remember that though the psalmist believes God is absent, God can still be addressed.

Verses 4-5...The relationship with God enjoyed by the psalmist is of long standing. Here the ancestors are documented as having trusted in God and been saved. **How can you talk about the division of responsibility in the relationship between the ancestors and God? According to the psalm, who has acted more to preserve the relationship – God or humans?**

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Verse 5...The current situation, whatever it is, is especially hurtful for the psalmist because the ancestors cried to God and were heard, but now the psalmist has been crying to God (verse 2), and God does not answer. There is a disconnect between the psalmist's experience of faith and current situation. **Have you had that kind of disconnect between your own faith and experience?**

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Verses 9-10...The previous closeness of the relationship between the psalmist and God is paralleled here in the relationship between a newborn baby and the baby's mother. God appears to have played the role of midwife and then provided the feeling of safety and security that close human contact can provide after a traumatic experience like birth.

Verse 11...The request that God be “not...far from me” is repeated in verse 19.

Verse 12...The word “surround” contrasts with “far” in verse 1. Because God is far away, there is room for evildoers to get close to the psalmist, even to the point that the psalmist is surrounded.

Verse 15...The psalmist acknowledges that there is a sense of God's movement and action at this lowest point. Note that “*you* (God) lay me in the dust of death.”

Psalm 22 is structured in two parts. Verses 1-21 are a prayer for help. Verses 22-31 give praise to God for helping. Within each of those two sections are other smaller units. The prayer for help has two sections (verses 1-11 and 12-19), each of which concludes with “be not far.” Verses 1-11 are broken down further into two sections that lament the psalmist's trouble (1-2, 6-8) followed by two sections expressing confidence in God (verses 3-5 and 9-10). Further repetition follows in the prayer for help and in the praise for God sections.

- 1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.
- 3 Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.
- 4 In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.
- 5 To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.
- 9 Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast.
- 10 On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God.
- 11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
- 12 Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me;
- 13 they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.
- 14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;
- 15 my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.



## Lesson 2: Psalm 137

1By the rivers of Babylon— there we sat down  
 and there we wept when we remembered  
 Zion.  
 2On the willows there we  
 hung up our harps.  
 3For there our captors asked us for songs, and  
 our tormentors asked for mirth, saying, “Sing  
 us one of  
 the songs of Zion!”  
 4How could we sing the Lord's song in a  
 foreign land?  
 5If I forget you, O Jerusalem,  
 let my right hand wither!  
 6Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,  
 if I do not remember you, if I do not set  
 Jerusalem above my highest joy.  
 7Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites the  
 day of Jerusalem's fall, how they said, “Tear it  
 down! Tear it down! Down to its  
 foundations!”  
 8O daughter Babylon, you devastator! Happy  
 shall they be who pay you back what you  
 have done to us!  
 9Happy shall they be who take your little  
 ones and dash them  
 against the rock!

Verse 1...This psalm specifically mentions Babylon and is dated in relation to Israel's exile there. Scholars differ on whether the psalm was written in Babylon or by returned exiles. The word “there” says something different than saying “here” would have. Babylon sat on two famous rivers: the Tigris and the Euphrates. Between the two rivers were a series of canals. **John Ahn translates “rivers” as “irrigation canals” in v. 1. Which translation do you prefer? Why? Which do you think the captives might have preferred? Why?**

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This is the psalm's first call to “remembering” but not the last.

Verses 2 and 3...Harps were instruments for worship music and hanging them up (refusing to play) is considered by the psalmist and other musicians a sign of faithfulness. The people were no longer in God's house, so they would not play God's music.

Verse 4...With no instruments and no singing, the exiles were remembering in the middle of a silence broken only by weeping.

Verse 5...The psalm turns from memories of Babylon to memories of Jerusalem. Memory brings hope. The people promise again to be faithful —outlining various hardships that should come upon them if they are unfaithful. Interesting that if the psalm is spoken by musicians, the withering of their right hand would impede their ability to play their harps in the future. **The psalm moves from “we” to “I” in verse 5. How does that impact the lament?**

Verse 6...As with verse 5, the consequences of forgetting would prevent the singers from singing the songs of Zion.

Verse 7...Verses 6 and 7 pick up the idea of “remembering” from verse 1. Here, the meaning is not just “think back on a time before now.” Instead it seems to demand divine judgment (as if just thinking about the disrespect shown to the city and people of God must demand God's retribution). This verse is the first to address God directly. The psalmist seems to want vengeance on the Edomites more than the Babylonians as they are mentioned first. The Edomites descended from Esau, Jacob's twin brother.

Verse 8...The last two verses take the form of a beatitude (“Happy are those...”), even as they voice the desire for retribution. These verses are called *imprecatory* because they contain curses upon those who are perceived as the enemies of God and/or God's people. **What is your initial response to verses 8 and 9?**

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Verse 9...Though we might understand how the psalmist came to the point of uttering this sentence, it is still jarring. More so when considering Israel's understanding of “Rachel weeping for her children” (Lesson 3). The psalmist feels no remorse at wishing that grief on Babylon. Remember that this demand does not come from God's mouth. The human psalmist may perceive innocence-for-innocence as a just payback, but the psalmist is not God.



## Lesson 2: Luke 22:39-46

See parallel versions of the story at Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 14:32-42, Luke 22:39-46, John 18:1.

Verse 39...The Mount of Olives is east of Jerusalem and is separated from Mount Zion by the Kidron Valley. John's gospel refers to Kidron, the creek that gave its name to a nearby valley, but does not mention either the Mount of Olives or the name Gethsemane. Matthew and Mark mention the name of "a place called Gethsemane." *Gethsemane* means *olive press*, but Luke's is the only gospel that mentions the Mount of Olives.

Verse 42...The reference to a cup is one that is found throughout scripture. It generally refers to the future, but often that future indicates an impending punishment. Themes similar to those in this passage in Luke appear in Isaiah 51:17: "Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger."

This is an honest cry to God in a moment of crisis. Jesus isn't thinking about theological consistency or academic arguments or the person of God. He is a human being crying out for help. Because this is a cry made in the moment, it may seem that Jesus is asking for something impossible. Even Jesus seems to realize what he has said when the next phrase is a corrective, "Nevertheless, your will be done." Still, it is important to note that Jesus, in this human moment, is speaking to God what is in his heart.

Verses 43 and 44...These verses are not found in every manuscript of Luke's gospels. **What does their presence add to our understanding of Jesus' state and of God's care?**

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**39** He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. **40**When he reached the place, he said to them, 'Pray that you may not come into the time of trial.' **41**Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, **42**'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.' **43**Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. **44**In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] **45**When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, **46**and he said to them, 'Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial.'

Verse 45...Jesus has been pouring out his heart in prayer during this episode. The disciples have fallen asleep – apparently because of grief. **Do you find that reasoning convincing? Why or why not?**

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Jesus had asked only one thing from his disciples: that they be awake and aware as he began his suffering. **What are other moments and occasions in scripture where Christ's followers are instructed to stay awake and be aware? Are they also instances of grief and/or suffering?**

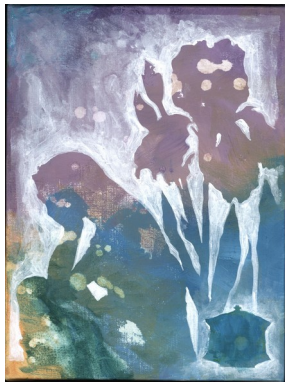
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Verse 46...Even if the disciples had stayed awake, they would have been unable to do anything to relieve Christ's suffering. **What can that tell us about the process of lament?**

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## Lesson 3: Jeremiah 31:15-17

Jeremiah 30-33 is generally characterized as a Book of Comfort or Consolation, both welcome words to one who is lamenting. This book, however, reminds the hearers that any consolation or comfort comes not from human effort or ingenuity but rather from the words and actions of God.

Verse 15...The text begins with an unknown voice. **What does an unknown voice crying out bring to this text? What is the difference between a known voice and an unknown voice? What other voices in scripture are characterized as “crying out”?**

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The voice is crying out from Ramah. Ramah here has been interpreted several different ways. It may refer to the home and burial place of Samuel (1 Samuel 7:17), as a location on the route of exile (Jeremiah 40:1), or in association with the traditional burial site of the matriarch Rachel, who is ultimately identified as the one whose voice is heard. Of course, Rachel died in childbirth, so she never lamented the loss of biological children. Which reason do you think is the primary reasons for the beginning of this text? Why do you think that is the primary reason?

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The phrase **nehî bechî tamrûrîm** (*lamentation and bitter weeping*) is almost pronounced like the sound of crying and lamenting. The first two words are more like gasping sobs while the *u* and *i* of *tamurim* mimic the ooo and eee sound that might be heard in a long keening cry. You might practice saying that phrase out loud: nə·hee bə·kee tam·rū·reem.

Hebrew poetry often uses parallelism. One line will be followed by a line of identical – or almost identical – meaning. The prophet says that Rachel is weeping for her children and then that she refuses to be comforted for the loss of her children. Are those the same thing? What is the difference in the two descriptions of Rachel's state of being?

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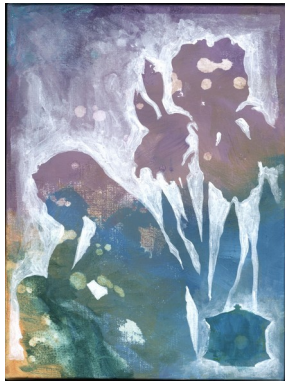
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The concluding phrase of verse 15 is only two words in Hebrew. The first is *because*. The second is *they are not*. Imagine the pain of this description. Children who, simply, *are not*. How do you interpret this absence of being? \_\_\_\_\_

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Verse 17...There is hope for the future. Rachel's children would come back to their own country. The pattern in this text echoes Rachel's life: both her sorrow and hope were related to her children. There was initially sorrow because she had no children, though she clung to the hope that she would. She even named her second son Ben-oni (“The son of my sorrow,” Genesis 35:18). His father called him Benjamin.

15 Thus says the LORD:  
A voice is heard in Ramah,  
lamentation and bitter weeping.  
Rachel is weeping for her children;  
she refuses to be comforted for her children,  
because they are no more.  
16 Thus says the LORD:  
Keep your voice from weeping,  
and your eyes from tears;  
for there is a reward for your work,  
says the LORD:  
they shall come back  
from the land of the enemy;  
17 there is hope for your future,  
says the LORD:  
your children shall come back  
to their own country.



## Lesson 3: Matthew 2:16-18

Verse 16...The Herod of this passage is Herod the Great, also called Herod I. Among his architectural achievements was building the fortress at Masada and expanding the Temple in Jerusalem (sometimes known as Herod's Temple). As a puppet king of Rome, he pandered to the interests of Rome more often than he saw to the needs of his people. He placed a statue of an eagle at the entrance of the Temple. He continually taxed the people to pay for his building programs and the gifts he sent to Roman officials. He made his teen-aged brother-in-law High Priest and then ordered him drowned at a party. Herod had fourteen children by seven of his nine wives. He was responsible for the execution of three of his sons. If he was unconcerned with killing his own children, it is probably no surprise that he was willing to kill other people's children.

Verse 17...The gospel writer says that Herod's actions fulfilled the Jeremiah passage. Here *fulfill* doesn't necessarily mean that the prophet had predicted a specific event that came to pass. *Fulfillment* can also mean completion.

Verse 18...What learnings do you bring forward from your consideration of the Jeremiah passage that is quoted here in Matthew's gospel? Do you hear the Jeremiah passage differently in the gospel? \_\_\_\_\_

Rachel was not willing to be consoled. Should the mothers of the Bethlehem babies allow themselves to be consoled? Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the one mother in this story who is not weeping over her child? \_\_\_\_\_ When will she weep over her child? \_\_\_\_\_

This story is read during Christmas. What makes this a perfect story to read during Christmas? \_\_\_\_\_

**16** When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men. **17** Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet

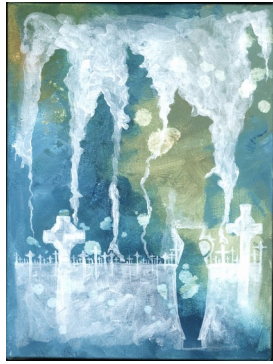
Jeremiah:

**18** 'A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.'

In what other seasons of the year would it be appropriate to read this text? What about those seasons makes them right for this story? \_\_\_\_\_

Check *Glory to God* or the song collection used by your congregation and see how many of the Epiphany carols mention the massacre of the innocents or Rachel weeping. Though not in *Glory to God*, the Coventry carol, written in 1534, includes reference to Herod in the second verse:

*Herod the King, in his raging, Charged he hath this day;  
His men of might, in his own sight, All children young, to slay.*



## Lesson 4: John 11:28-37

28 When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' 29 And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. 30 Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. 31 The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. 32 When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' 33 When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' 35 Jesus began to weep. 36 So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' 37 But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Verse 31...The gathering of friends and family following a death had no doubt been a process covering all the days since Lazarus' death. By the time Jesus responds to Jairus' request for healing for his daughter, the child is reported as dead. When Jesus and Jairus get to the synagogue leader's house, there are already people gathered who are mourning (Mark 5:38).

The friends who are consoling Martha assume that she is going to the tomb to weep. Remember that Mary Magdalene is found weeping outside Jesus' tomb on Easter morning (John 20:11).

Verse 32...This is the same comment made by Martha when she went out to meet Jesus (John 11:21). The sisters and all those who loved Lazarus and followed Jesus had probably said this before Jesus arrived. *If Jesus had been here, Lazarus wouldn't have died. Is there a connection between mourning/lament and Jesus feeling far away?*

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Verse 33...This translation says that Jesus is greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. The Greek work is *enebrimesato* (ἐνεβριμήσατο), which can also be translated *groaning*. Jesus groaned in spirit and was deeply moved.

Verse 34...Jesus asks where Lazarus has been laid. One practice was to have a first burial of the deceased. The body was wrapped and placed in a tomb—often a cave or chamber carved into a hill. After a year or so the bones were collected and placed in an ossuary—a box specifically for bones—or in a niche in the tomb. Tombs were usually resting places for entire families. When Jacob is about to die, he instructs his sons: *Bury me with my ancestors—in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave in the field at Machpelah, near Mamre, in the land of Canaan, in the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites.* (Genesis 49:29-32)

Verse 35...**Why do you think Jesus wept, knowing that in a few minutes Lazarus would be raised from death?**

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In this text, Jesus shows one effect of very human emotions: he weeps. **Do you imagine Jesus having a full range of human emotions? With what stories do you associate those emotions?**

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## Lesson 4: Judges 11:30-32, 34-40

**30**And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, **31**then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, to be offered up by me as a burnt-offering.' **32**...and the LORD gave them into his hand.

**34** Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah; and there was his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dancing. She was his only child; he had no son or daughter except her. **35**When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow.' **36**She said to him, 'My father, if you have opened your mouth to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites.' **37**And she said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me: Grant me two months, so that I may go and wander on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, my companions and I.' **38**'Go,' he said and sent her away for two months. So she departed, she and her companions, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. **39**At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the vow he had made. She had never slept with a man. So there arose an Israelite custom that **40**for four days every year the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Did Jephthah really sacrifice his daughter? There are several interpretations of the story. One is that, yes, Jephthah's daughter was sacrificed to Yahweh. Jephthah could find no way out of his vow so, with her "concurrence," the sacrifice was offered. A second way to read the text (see below the notes on verse 31) says that she was not killed but had a different fate.

Verse 30...It would seem that Jephthah told no one about his vow. Surely if he had, someone would have made sure that his daughter was not the first person out the door of his house.

Verse 31...There is some ambiguity in the translation of this portion of the text. Traditionally Jephthah's vow is translated, *whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me on my safe return from the Ammonites shall be Yhwh's and shall be offered by me as a burnt offering*. The *and* can also be translated *or*, implying that what was first out the door would be dedicated to God and, if fitting, would be offered as a burnt offering. This may sound like mental gymnastics to give Jephthah an out, but the possibility is in the text.

Verses 35 and 36...Rabbinic texts credit Jephthah's daughter with a greater understanding of Torah than her father. In the text here, he says that he must complete the vow. In those rabbinic texts, she argues against human sacrifice using Leviticus 1:2 – where the Torah specifies cattle offerings rather than human sacrifice – and Genesis 28:22 – where Jacob makes a vow to set aside a portion of all that God gives him. She argues that God gave Jacob twelve sons and Jacob did not sacrifice any of them. There is indeed no scriptural precedent for human sacrifice. God specifically stops Abraham from sacrificing Isaac (Genesis 22:1).

Verse 36...How do you hear Jephthah's accusation that his daughter "has become the cause of great trouble?" Is this her fault?

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Verse 37...The group of women mourned her virginity rather than her death. The ongoing emphasis on her virginity (mentioned even after Jephthah's vow is "completed" in verse 39) and childlessness means that Jephthah's line will not be continued. Jephthah's rise to a position of power was hard-won, given his origins (Judges 11:1). Because of his vow, there would be no grandchildren who could inherit his redeemed standing in society. Remember the importance of having descendants in this culture.

Verse 40...The text says that the lament for Jephthah's daughter happened for four days "every year" [*miyyamim yamimahl* (11:40)]. This phrase can indicate something that happened in perpetuity, but it is also used referring to Hannah's yearly visit to Shiloh (ironically, originally to lament her childlessness). In that case the phrase would not refer to something ongoing but rather something that occurred only during the person's lifetime. If Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed but instead lived in seclusion for the remainder of her life, perhaps this custom only lasted as long as her life. There is no report of this custom's observance in scripture.



## Lesson 5: Job 3:1-4, 9-19, 24-26

<sup>1</sup>After this Job opened his mouth and cursed  
the day of his birth. <sup>2</sup>Job said:  
<sup>3</sup>'Let the day perish on which I was born, and  
the night that said,  
"A man-child is conceived." <sup>4</sup> Let that day be  
darkness! May God above not seek it, or light  
shine on it.

<sup>9</sup> Let the stars of its dawn be dark;  
let it hope for light, but have none;  
may it not see the eyelids of the morning  
—<sup>10</sup> because it did not shut the doors of my  
mother's womb,  
and hide trouble from my eyes.

<sup>11</sup> 'Why did I not die at birth,  
come forth from the womb and  
expire? <sup>12</sup> Why were there knees to receive  
me, or breasts for me to suck?

<sup>13</sup> Now I would be lying down and quiet; I  
would be asleep; then I would be at  
rest <sup>14</sup> with kings and counsellors of the earth  
who rebuild ruins for themselves, <sup>15</sup> or with  
princes who have gold,  
who fill their houses with silver.

<sup>16</sup> Or why was I not buried like a stillborn  
child, like an infant that never sees the  
light? <sup>17</sup> There the wicked cease from  
troubling, and there the weary are at rest.

<sup>18</sup> There the prisoners are at ease together;  
they do not hear the voice of the  
taskmaster. <sup>19</sup> The small and the great are  
there, and the slaves are free from their  
masters.

<sup>24</sup> For my sighing comes like my bread, and  
my groanings are poured out like water.

<sup>25</sup> Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me,  
and what I dread befalls me. <sup>26</sup> I am not at  
ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest;  
but trouble comes.'

In the first chapter of Job, all is lost. Children, animals, property. But Job himself is not harmed, and Job does not curse God. In the second chapter of Job, Job's physical body is afflicted. He is covered with loathsome sores head to toe. Job's response is to sit in ashes. For seven days he sits, saying nothing. His friends gather to console with him. They tear their clothes, join him in the ashes, and say nothing. In chapter 3, Job speaks.

Job curses the day he was born in a speech structured almost as an undoing of Genesis 1.

Verse 3...Job curses the day on which he first saw light. He asks that light not shine on that day, an opposite to the first day of creation where God created light. **What other references to the activities of creation do you see negated in Job's speech?**

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Verses 11 and 12...This section of Job's lament includes a series of questions, each beginning with the word "why." These questions focus on activities surrounding birth and early childhood. He wonders why he was ever born.

Verse 13...Job proclaims that had he never been born, he would now be at rest. Rest was God's activity on the seventh day of creation. Here he claims that he would be resting with royals: kings, counsellors, and princes.

Verse 17...Here Job contrasts the inhabitants of the place where he would be at rest had he not been born. No kings are here, only the wicked. No counsellors or princes, just the weary.

Verse 18...Because life has turned out so badly for Job, he begins to see it more as prison and slavery than the royal life he once had. If he is a prisoner and a slave, then that means God would be the taskmaster. Only death could free Job from this life.

Verse 19...The Hebrew word for master is *adonai*, the word used when God is identified as Master.

Verses 24 – 26...While the first parts of Job's speech are things Job wishes would (have) happened, these last verses describe Job's actual condition. He sighs and groans. He has no ease, no quiet, no rest. Where the section begins with the first day of creation, it ends with the activity of the seventh day.

Laments are often structured to give an opportunity for description of the current condition of chaos or injustice. Following that description, though, is an affirmation of hope in God, hope that God will see the situation and act in appropriate ways. Job has no such affirmation at the end of this speech. **Based on what you know of Job's story, do you think there will come an affirmation of hope in God? Why or why not?**

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## Lesson 5: John 20:11-18

11 But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb.  
As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;  
12 and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet.  
13 They said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him.'  
14 When she had said this, she turned round and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.  
15 Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? For whom are you looking?' Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, 'Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.'  
16 Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to him in Hebrew, 'Rabbouni!' (which means Teacher).  
17 Jesus said to her, 'Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."''  
18 Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord'; and she told them that he had said these things to her.

Verse 11...This post-resurrection story is found only in John's gospel. This section follows Mary's initial discovery of the empty tomb. Notice that she did not immediately assume Jesus had been resurrected. Here, the disciples have already disappeared from the scene. Only Mary remains at the tomb.

Verse 12...The two angels are wearing white. Remember there had been other white clothing in the tomb: Jesus' graveclothes.

Verse 13...The angels ask why she is weeping. Jesus will ask the same question in verse 15. Mary's answer in this verse is very similar to the announcement she makes to the disciples in verse 2. In verse 2, however, she says "we do not know where they have laid him." Reporting to the disciples, she speaks for all the women. Here, she speaks for herself.

Verse 14...Why did Mary not recognize Jesus? She could not see through her tears...Jesus did not look as he had before...it was still too dark to see facial features clearly...Mary wasn't expecting to see a risen Jesus so she just couldn't see him...she had her back to him (the verse says she turned around to reply).

Verse 15...Jesus' question "For whom are you looking?" repeats his question to Andrew at the beginning of the gospel (John 1:38). At this point, the readers know that Jesus has been raised, but Mary seems not to consider resurrection as a possibility. She is concerned only with Jesus' earthly remains and promises that she will take Jesus' body away if "the gardener" knows and will tell her where the body is. **How do you think she would have moved the body? What do you think she thought to do with it?**

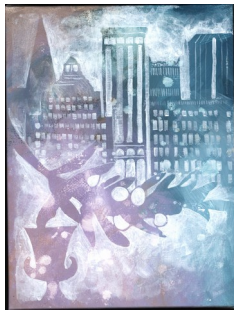
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Verse 16...This verse is a realization of two of Jesus' earlier statements. Jesus speaks Mary's name and she recognizes him, because sheep know their shepherd's voice (John 10:38). It also shows the truth of Jesus' prophecy in John 16:20: *Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.*

Verse 17...Jesus' command "Do not hold on to me" seems to indicate that Mary has touched Jesus and is still holding on to him as if she will not let him go (it is a present imperative verb). Mary will have to physically let go of Jesus, and she will also have to let go of her former relationship with Jesus as he is now the Risen One, though not yet ascended. **Do you think it was harder for Mary to let Jesus go this second time? Why or why not?**

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Verse 18...Though Mary cannot hold on to the Jesus she has known, she becomes the first apostle, taking to the disciples the message, "I have seen the Lord!" After her conversation with the "gardener", Mary was surely rejoicing as she left the garden. This is quite a change from the state in which Adam and Eve left their garden.



## Lesson 6: Lamentations

5:1-22

1 Remember, O LORD, what has befallen us;  
look, and see our disgrace!  
2 Our inheritance has been turned over to  
strangers, our homes to aliens.  
3 We have become orphans, fatherless;  
our mothers are like widows.  
4 We must pay for the water we drink;  
the wood we get must be bought.  
5 With a yoke on our necks we are hard driven;  
we are weary, we are given no rest. 6 We have  
made a pact with Egypt and Assyria, to get  
enough bread. 7 Our ancestors sinned; they are  
no more, and we bear their iniquities.  
8 Slaves rule over us; there is no one to deliver  
us from their hand. 9 We get our bread at the  
peril of our lives, because of the sword in the  
wilderness. 10 Our skin is black as an oven from  
the scorching heat of famine. 11 Women are  
raped in Zion, virgins in the towns of Judah.  
12 Princes are hung up by their hands; no  
respect is shown to the elders. 13 Young men  
are compelled to grind, and boys stagger under  
loads of wood. 14 The old men have left the city  
gate, the young men their music.  
15 The joy of our hearts has ceased; our dancing  
has been turned to mourning.  
16 The crown has fallen from our head; woe to  
us, for we have sinned!  
17 Because of this our hearts are sick,  
because of these things our eyes have grown  
dim: 18 because of Mount Zion, which  
lies desolate; jackals prowl over it. 19 But you,  
O LORD, reign for ever; your throne endures to  
all generations. 20 Why have you forgotten us  
completely? Why have you forsaken us these  
many days? 21 Restore us to yourself, O LORD,  
that we may be restored; renew our days as of  
old 22 unless you have utterly rejected us,  
and are angry with us  
beyond measure.

*The book we call Lamentations is a collection of five poems. In the first poem (chapter), two voices speak of destruction and desolation. One voice is a narrator—distanced from the trauma of the destruction. The other voice is Daughter Zion who has endured the destruction. The second poem (chapter) focuses on God as the source of the destruction. The third poem (chapter), the center of the poem cycle, contains the only explicit hope in the poems. The speaker in the poem is neither the narrator nor Daughter Zion. The fourth poem (chapter) is spoken by a narrator and by the people. The fourth poem is shorter than the preceding three and less intense in tone. The fifth and final poem (chapter) mostly follows the traditional format for communal lament: address to God, complaint, trust in God, deliverance.*

Verse 1...This poem, the shortest of the five, is spoken by the people. Notice the use of *us* and *our* in the plea that God will remember and see. The first eighteen verses outline everything the people want God to see.

Verse 2...The inheritance is the land itself, now controlled by strangers. Those strangers also control all resources and services.

Verse 5...A yoke traditionally symbolizes slavery. Given the hardships in succeeding verses, characterizing the situation as slavery seems accurate.

Verse 6...Egypt and Assyria are both former enemies of Israel. That the people have agreed to join forces with them means that they will also swear allegiance to Egyptian and Assyrian gods.

Verse 19...In these last few verses the people acknowledge that God still sits on the divine throne and will continue to do so into the future. God is still the one worthy of worship. **Or do you think this verse is simply trying to flatter God into acting on behalf of the people? What led you to your conclusion?**

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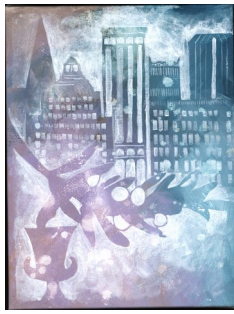
Verse 20...In verse 16 the people acknowledge their sin as the source of the situation. Here, they challenge God, demanding to know why God seems absent.

Verse 21...The word *restore* can also be translated as *return*. **How is this verse changed by choosing one word or the other?**

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Verse 22...Verse 21 would be a great ending to these poems. God's renewal in the midst of chaos and suffering is the point of lament. As it happens, though, verse 21 is not the last word. The final word is despairing—that God will have rejected the people once and for all with no opportunity for redemption or renewal. **How would you characterize this ending?**

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## Lesson 6: Luke 23:26-31

This passage is part of Luke's account of Christ's passion.

Verse 26...Simon of Cyrene is mentioned in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Cyrene is located in what is now Libya. In Mark (15:21) Simon is identified as the father of Alexander and Rufus. One could infer that Alexander and Rufus were known to the community of Christ-followers, so we might assume that Simon was already a follower of Jesus as well. In Luke's gospel Simon becomes a literal follower of Jesus by walking behind Jesus as he carries the cross.

Verse 27...Luke's gospel is the only one that includes this interaction between Jesus and the women. Women, both named and unnamed, are featured prominently in this gospel. The stories of Elizabeth and Mary open the gospel with Anna playing a part after Jesus' birth. Jesus heals women and uses women as good examples in parables. Women stay with Jesus through the crucifixion and go to the tomb to anoint Jesus. Women are the first to tell of the resurrection.

We don't know who these women are specifically. They might have been friends and followers of Jesus. They might have been professional mourners like those mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:25: *Jeremiah also uttered a lament for Josiah, and all the singing-men and singing-women have spoken of Josiah in their laments to this day. They made these a custom in Israel; they are recorded in the Laments.* Jeremiah 9:17 also refers to "mourning-women."

Verse 28...How do you imagine Jesus' tone of voice as he makes this comment to the women? \_\_\_\_\_

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Why do you think Jesus didn't want the women's tears? \_\_\_\_\_

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26 As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. 27 A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. 28 But Jesus turned to them and said, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the days are surely coming when they will say, "Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed." 30 Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us"; and to the hills, "Cover us." 31 For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?'

Remember the other times in scripture where women have been weeping for their children.

All too soon, the people of Jerusalem will find themselves in such circumstances that they might well be grateful not to have had children. Rome's army will lay siege to the city. This is not the first time Jesus has made a reference to these times. Luke 19:41-44 (Lesson 8) recounts Jesus' comments as he looks over the city of Jerusalem.

Verse 31...Another translation of this verse says: *If people do these things to a live, green tree, can you imagine what they'll do with deadwood?* What do you think this means in the context of these verses? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Lesson 7: Isaiah 24:4-6, 8, 19

Verse 4...The earth is in a state that is less than its pre-creation form. Before creation there was nothing; now what had been verdant and growing is dying and bare.

In verse 4, the Hebrew word *abelah* (אֵבֵלָה) is translated in other places in scripture as *mourns* (Jeremiah 12:11, 14:2, 23:10; Joel 1:10).

**How is the text set up differently if the earth *mourns and withers* rather than *dries up and withers*?**

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The word translated here as *earth* is *eretz* (אֶרֶץ), which is sometimes translated *land*. It is used again in verse 5. **Do you hear a difference between *earth* and *land* when you read these verses? If so, how would you characterize the difference?**

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**How would you describe what is happening when the earth and heaven *languish*?**

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Verse 5...**What is the source of the earth's problems?**

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**What are the laws, statutes and covenant that the inhabitants have violated?**

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4 The earth dries up and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish  
together with the earth.  
5 The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
6 Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants  
of the earth dwindled,  
and few people are left.  
8 The mirth of the timbrels is stilled,  
the noise of the jubilant has ceased,  
the mirth of the lyre is stilled.  
19 The earth is utterly broken,  
the earth is torn asunder,  
the earth is violently shaken.

This is not the only place where the prophet connects the earth's suffering to human action. In Isaiah 33:7-9, the land mourns the coming of war when Assyria invades Israel. *Listen! the valiant cry in the streets; the envoys of peace weep bitterly. The highways are deserted, travellers have left the road. The treaty is broken, its oaths are despised, its obligation is disregarded. The land mourns and languishes; Lebanon is confounded and withers away; Sharon is like a desert; and Bashan and Carmel shake off their leaves.*

Verse 6...**What scriptural curse can you identify that has to do with creation and disobedience?**

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Verse 8...Think back to Psalm 137. As there, the music is stilled. Perhaps there is a connection between lament and the lack of music.



## Lesson 7: Romans 8:19-23

*Paul writes to the Romans about the culmination of God's plan for salvation, and it includes the whole of creation. The fact that God plans to redeem creation reminds us that at the very beginning God called the creation "Good."*

Verse 19...The verse begins with "the creation" as the subject of the sentence. Because the passage continues to talk about creation in need of redemption, we can assume that Paul is referring specifically to the material creation of the earth. After all, angels – which are part of creation – are not subject to futility and decay. Those opposed to God do not wait eagerly for the revealing of the children of God. When these kinds of categories of created beings are removed from the creation as a whole, what is left is nature.

Verse 20...Creation found itself subjected to futility not because of anything creation did but rather because it was the will of God. Creation itself is not evil. And futility is not the last word.

Verse 21...**How will creation be freed when the children of God are freed?** \_\_\_\_\_

In the Beatitudes, Jesus says that the meek are greatly honored, for they will inherit the earth. How do you hear that in relation to this passage that also ties humans and creation together?

Verse 22...Paul compares the groanings of the waiting created order to the groanings of labor pains. It seems a strange comparison as Paul himself would know nothing about labor pains from first-hand experience, and we have no record of Paul being married. It isn't a bad comparison, just surprising from Paul.

Verses 22 and 23...**What things are done by both humanity and creation?** \_\_\_\_\_

Verse 23...In Romans Paul has already connected human beings with creation and redemption. Remembering Adam as the one who was charged with caring for the garden, Paul connects Adam with Jesus Christ, who will redeem the world. Romans 5:18-19 says: *Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.*

Verse 23 is also a reminder that the groaning will continue until the adoption and redemption happens. It has not happened yet though we have the first fruits of the Spirit. Until it happens, though, groaning is the norm.

19For the creation waits with eager longing  
for the revealing of  
the children of God;  
20for the creation was subjected to futility,  
not of its own will  
but by the will of the one  
who subjected it, in hope  
21that the creation itself will be set free from  
its bondage to decay and will obtain the  
freedom of the glory of the children of God.  
22We know that the whole creation has been  
groaning  
in labor pains until now;  
23and not only the creation, but we ourselves,  
who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan  
inwardly while we wait for adoption,  
the redemption of our bodies.



## Lesson 8: Hosea 11:1-9

- 1** When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out  
of Egypt I called my son.  
**2** The more I called them, the more they went  
from me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.  
**3** Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I  
took them up in my arms; but they did not  
know that I healed them.  
**4** I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with bands of love.  
I was to them like those who lift infants to  
their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.  
**5** They shall return to the land of Egypt, and  
Assyria shall be their king,  
because they have refused  
to return to me.  
**6** The sword rages in their cities,  
it consumes their oracle-priests, and  
devours because of their schemes.  
**7** My people are bent on  
turning away from me.  
To the Most High they call,  
but he does not raise them up at all.  
**8** How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I  
hand you over, O Israel?  
How can I make you like Admah? How can I  
treat you like Zeboiim?  
My heart recoils within me; my compassion  
grows warm and tender.  
**9** 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.

Verse 1...This passage begins with recollection the way a parent remembers when children were young. God remembers all the good times with Israel - the days when a young Israel needed God. But quickly the remembrance moves to heartbreak as God remembers when Israel was unfaithful. The text alternates between expressions of God's sorrow over the situation and God's love for the nation Israel.

Egypt is a symbol for slavery and bondage, but God's son will also be called out of Egypt in Matthew 2:19.

Verses 2 and 3...In these verses we understand that God's voice has called the people but they either don't hear or don't recognize God's voice. They keep honoring the Baals and idols as their god, as the one who is worthy of their worship.

Verse 3...Ephraim is one of the sons of Joseph. Along with his brother Manasseh, they comprise the tribe of Joseph. Here Ephraim stands in for all Israel.

Verses 3 and 4...Understanding the comment above, read the verses out loud, emphasizing all the times that God says "I" in verses 3 and 4.

Verse 5...This is the verse where God makes a decision. The nation will be conquered by other nations. No longer will they be free as God intended. No, because they refuse to obey God they will find themselves dominated by other governments.

Verse 8...With this verse the poem changes from God talking about the relationship with Israel to God's self-reflection. Practice reading these questions aloud. How do you hear the voice of God asking these questions? Admah and Zeboiim were two cities destroyed along with Sodom and Gomorrah (Deuteronomy 29:23).

Verse 9...God pledges to never again destroy Israel. Not because Israel will perfectly keep the covenant but because of who God is. God is both *other* (God and no mortal, Holy One) but also one who chooses to be in relationship with the people (in your midst, reference to bending down and lifting babies).

What does this text tell you about the stereotypes of "the God of the Old Testament?" \_\_\_\_\_

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What does this text say to us who are made in the image of this God?

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



## Lesson 8: Luke 19:41-44

**41** As he came near and saw the city, he wept over it, **42**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. **43**Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. **44**They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God.'

### Matthew 23:37-39 (Luke 13:34-35)

**37** 'Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! **38**See, your house is left to you, desolate. **39**For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, "Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord."'

In Luke's gospel, this passage immediately follows Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. The disciples have shouted joyfully, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" The Pharisees have asked Jesus to quiet the crowd. He answers that if the people were silent the stones would shout. In the next verse Jesus laments over the city.

Verse 41...This is one of three occasions in scripture where Jesus is described as weeping in scripture. Here he weeps over the city of Jerusalem. He weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11). The third time is in Hebrews 5:7.

Verse 42...The disciples have shouted about peace, but Jesus' lament begins "If...only...you had recognized...the things that make for peace!" If only. But now that opportunity is lost. There will be no immediate peace in the city. So Jesus weeps. **What are the things that would have made for peace?** \_\_\_\_\_

Verses 43 and 44...Luke describes what happened when the Roman army under the command of Titus laid siege to the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD. Luke was writing after that siege.

### Matthew/Luke

This text is almost exactly the same in the two gospels.

Verse 37...Isaiah is the only major prophet who died in Jerusalem. Zechariah 12:10 says: *And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.*

Another place in scripture where a bird image describes God's relationship with Israel is Deuteronomy 32:11: *God's wings are spread like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young.*

Verse 38..."Your house" may mean the temple, the city of Jerusalem or even the nation as a whole. Presumably the house is made desolate because the people of Jerusalem have rejected Jesus. This is not the first desolation. Jeremiah 12:7 says: *I have forsaken my house, I have abandoned my heritage; I have given the beloved of my heart into the hands of her enemies.*

Verse 39...The line that is put in the mouths of the people is the sentence said by the disciples as Jesus enters Jerusalem.

One of the differences between Matthew's and Luke's versions of this speech is the word *again*. In Matthew's gospel Jesus says that people will not see him *again*; Luke's gospel says that will not see him *until* the time comes. Remember that in Matthew's gospel Jesus has already entered Jerusalem (Matthew 21). Luke's timeline has Jesus entering the city in chapter 19.



## Lesson 9: Isaiah 25:6-10

Verse 6...Understanding the reference to “this mountain” requires returning to the first verses of Isaiah 2:

*In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.'*

These verses pick up the description and fulfillment of these early prophecies. Here, people come not just out of duty but for the wonderful feast that the Lord has prepared. Feasting implies special occasions in the life of a family or community: wedding feasts, funeral meals, celebratory dinners. In Psalm 23 there is even a table spread in the presence of enemies! There are no enemies present at this banquet.

Verse 7...What do you imagine the shroud and the sheet to be?

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Notice that the sheet and shroud are over all peoples and all nations. Presumably these are the same “all peoples” who are invited to the feast in verse 6.

Verse 8...Death is swallowed up forever, presumably for all people, not just for Israel.

Verse 9...The emphasis on all peoples and all nations earlier in the text leads to the understanding that it is the voices of all nations and people who say “...this is our God.” The instruction was given in Isaiah 12:4 to “make known his deeds among the nations.” Because the nations are now streaming in to Zion, the message seems to have been effective.

This is the Lord for whom we have waited. The text is specific in terms of detail (rich food, mature wines, wiping away tears), but general in terms of context. “This mountain” and “that day” are not specific dates and times. Rather they are the times deemed right by God. We wait for God's time.

It is also in Isaiah that we see the vision of the Peaceable Kingdom, which also happen on the mountain:

*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. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.*

(Isaiah 11:6-9)

**6** On this mountain the Lord of hosts will  
make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured  
wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-  
matured  
wines strained clear.  
**7** And he will destroy on this mountain the  
shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet  
that is  
spread over all nations;  
**8** he will swallow up death for ever.  
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears  
from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take  
away from all the earth,  
for the Lord has spoken.  
**9** It will be said on that day,  
Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him,  
so that he might save us.  
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and  
rejoice in his salvation.  
**10** For the hand of the Lord will rest on this  
mountain.



## Lesson 9: Revelation 21:1-8

**1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. **2** And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; **4** he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.' **5** And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' **6** Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. **7** Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children. **8** But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.'

Verse 1...The book of Revelation might be titled "What John Saw." the entire book is John's attempt to describe the indescribable things he has seen as the veil is drawn back. This is the final part of John's vision, and is filled with detail.

Notice that the old heaven and earth have not been wiped out; instead they have been transformed.

While heaven and earth exist in a new form, there is no sea in this new place. The sea may represent chaos, as in the waters before God spoke order into creation. There is no chaos in this new heaven and new earth.

Revelation is not the first scripture to speak of new heaven and earth. Isaiah 65:17 says: *For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.* The things of which God spoke have come to pass. See, everything has become new! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Verse 2...Imagine the sight of an entire city descending from the sky! And this, we will learn later, is a city in the shape of a perfect cube, echoing the shape of the Holy of Holies in the temple. The Holy of Holies was identified as the place where God's glory lived. Only the High Priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies and have direct access to God. In the new Jerusalem everyone would live in the "Holy of Holies" and have direct access to God.

In Paul's letters, the church is described as a "bride," but here the whole city of Jerusalem is the bride, or at least dressed like one.

Verse 3...Ezekiel 48 also describes a city. 48:15 identifies the name of that city as "The Lord is There." This is the same message in John's vision: the home of God is with mortals.

Verse 4...Tears, death, mourning, crying and pain are classified as "first" or "former" things which have now passed away. We usually think about "passing away" as a way to say that someone has died. But here what is passing away is passing away. What other things would you put in the category of things that no longer exist in the new heaven and new earth?

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Verse 6...This is one of the occasions when God directly addresses the readers/hearers of the text. In this statement we learn not that God brings the end, but that God IS the end.

The water in the new Jerusalem will be given as a gift – without price. Remember the prophet's call in Isaiah 55 to everyone who is thirsty, that they should come to the water, even those without money can buy milk and wine without money and without cost.

The Revised Common Lectionary assigns this text to All Saints Day, New Years Day and one of the Sundays of Easter. What themes in the text make it appropriate for those days? \_\_\_\_\_

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# A Psalm of Lament: Reading and Writing

Read through Psalm 42 (at left), marking the parts of the Biblical lament structure that you see in the psalm. The structure and the marks to make are in the box on the right. Then, using the headings and space at the right

## Psalm 42

1 As a deer longs for flowing streams,  
so my soul longs for you, O God.  
2 My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.  
When shall I come and behold the face of God?  
3 My tears have been my food day and night,  
while people say to me continually,  
'Where is your God?'

4 These things I remember, as I pour out my soul:  
how I went with the throng,  
and led them in procession to the house of God,  
with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving,  
a multitude keeping festival.

5 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;  
therefore I remember you  
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,  
from Mount Mizar.

7 Deep calls to deep at the thunder of your cataracts;  
all your waves and your billows have gone over me.  
8 By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,  
and at night his song is with me,  
a prayer to the God of my life.

9 I say to God, my rock,  
'Why have you forgotten me?  
Why must I walk about mournfully  
because the enemy oppresses me?'

10 As with a deadly wound in my body,  
my adversaries taunt me,  
while they say to me continually,  
'Where is your God?'

11 Why are you cast down, O my soul,  
and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

Address God

(underline the address in Psalm 42)

Describe situation or injustice

(circle this description in Psalm 42)

Statement of trust in God:

-Remember past relationship

(draw an arrow to the text in the psalm)

-Affirm trust in the time of the psalmist

(draw a cloud around this in the psalm)

Call on God to act

(draw a box around this in the psalm)

Statement of assurance that God will hear

(put a star by this part of Psalm 42)

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"Where is your God?"

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and why are you disquieted within me?  
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,  
my help and my God.

Address God

(underline the address in Psalm 42)

*Holy God you are slow to anger  
and abounding in steadfast love.*

Describe situation or injustice

(circle this description in Psalm 42)

*Life means nothing in our world O God  
People are murdered every day by other human  
beings perpetrators and victims both made in  
your image.*

Statement of trust in God:

-Remember past relationship

(draw an arrow to the text in the psalm)

*We know your plan is life. Cain killed his  
brother but you did not kill him. And yet hu-  
manity killed your son who had done no wrong*

-Affirm trust in the time of the psalmist

(draw a cloud around this in the psalm)

*We see you changing lives every day. Enemies  
work together to dispel violence. Life is support-  
ed in decisions made every day.*

Call on God to act

(draw a box around this in the psalm)

*Change hearts today O God. Remove from all of  
us the desire to kill another human being*

Statement of assurance that God will hear

(put a star by this part of Psalm 42)

*We know you hear us O God because your plan  
always leans toward life.*



## Lesson 8: Repent Rather Than Lament

Compare the structures of prayers of lament and prayers of confession (where we acknowledge ourselves as the source of God's laments). How might the structure of Biblical prayers of lament be seen/heard in other prayers (Prayers of the People, for example).

	Individual Lament	Communal Lament	Prayer of Confession	Questions, comments, observations
Address to God	Yes	Yes	Yes	Is God addressed the same way? Is the tone of the pray-er the same? Are the adjectives used to describe God the same (Eternal God, Merciful God, etc.)?
Truthful description of the situation				
Statement of trust in God (based on historical acts and the present time of the one praying)				
Call on God to act				
Assurance that God hears				

## What Is Spiritual Bypassing? By Diana Raab, PhD

*John Welwood, who coined the term, died this week.*

Posted Jan 23, 2019 (Psychology Today)

[https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-empowerment-diary/201901/what-is-spiritual-bypassing?fbclid=IwAR1Ehiu\\_l9oC2wBNYPsgksavlyT51MAnQYzh5p9aj5Ao4U62B4HKme\\_4bNY](https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-empowerment-diary/201901/what-is-spiritual-bypassing?fbclid=IwAR1Ehiu_l9oC2wBNYPsgksavlyT51MAnQYzh5p9aj5Ao4U62B4HKme_4bNY)

Last week, John Welwood, the prominent psychotherapist and author in the [transpersonal](#)-psychology field, passed away. Among other things, Welwood coined the term “spiritual bypassing,” and this might be a good time to honor him and his offerings.

In his classic book, *Toward a Psychology of Awakening*, which was one of my textbooks during my doctoral program, he defined spiritual bypassing as using “spiritual ideas and practices to sidestep personal, emotional ‘unfinished business,’ to shore up a shaky sense of self, or to belittle basic needs, feelings, and developmental tasks.” The goal of such practices, he claimed, was enlightenment.

This practice might feel as if it’s more and more prominent these days—at a time when there seems to be a great deal of unrest and uncertainty in our internal and external worlds. The foundation of spiritual bypassing is basically avoidance and repression; and for some individuals, [spirituality](#) serves as a way to rise above or handle the shaky ground beneath.

When spiritual practice is used to compensate for challenging traits such as low [self-esteem](#), [social isolation](#), or other [emotional issues](#), Welwood said, they corrupt the actual use of spiritual practice. In other words, using these practices to cover up problems seems like an easy way out, as opposed to working on the actual issues and etiology of the challenges.

Many of us know individuals who run away from problems by going on spiritual retreats. However, when these people return home, although they may feel enlightened for a short time, they are eventually triggered by the issues that sent them on their spiritual journeys in the first place. All the [fear](#), confusion, and drama are still where they left them, and nothing has really been accomplished.

One woman who was raised by a [narcissistic](#) mother claimed that for most of her life she’d swallowed her [anger](#) and just tried to be the “good girl.” She rarely lashed out and kept it all in. At an early age, she started practicing Transcendental [Meditation](#) and read spiritual books as a way to calm her during difficult times.

When she approached middle age, a friend suggested that she seek the assistance of a therapist so she could work on her underlying issues, which were not only causing problems in her relationships, but led her to engage in spiritual bypassing. During [therapy](#), she learned that it was much healthier to voice her opinions and not keep them bottled up inside.

Telling others how she felt wasn't something that she'd learned as a child, and habits that are ingrained early on are often difficult to change. But when she started voicing her thoughts, this woman not only felt better but realized that it benefited all her relationships. After addressing these issues, she continued her spiritual practices of meditation, prayer, yoga, healthy [diet](#), exercise, and grounding—all modalities that supported her transformation rather than replacing it.

Welwood also stated that anger is an empty emotion or wave that arises in the ocean of consciousness, often without meaning. This feeling can also lead to spiritual bypassing. Anger often stems from suppressed emotions that are not addressed, and it can become overwhelming. When taking the time to acknowledge the types of challenging emotions that are being bypassed, we learn how to handle them. The most effective thing to do is acknowledge the emotion, sit with it, and honor it without repressing it, as the Buddhists do. Basically, don't give it any power. Others like Ingrid Clayton, in her article, "[Beware of Spiritual Bypass](#)," (2011), claim that spiritual bypassing is a defense mechanism and although it looks different than other [defense mechanisms](#), it serves the same purpose.

Welwood said that many clients came to him with some impasse in their lives that their spiritual practice was unable to penetrate or help, whether a [personality](#) issue or a relationship problem. He was always amazed by the fact that although these individuals may have practiced sophisticated spiritual practices, they often did not practice self-love.

After attending numerous spiritual retreats myself and meeting many leaders in the field, I've learned the importance of compassion for myself as well as for those who present themselves as challenges. My father used to say, "You never know how people feel until you walk in their shoes," and his old-fashioned [wisdom](#) continues to ring true three decades after his passing.

Some signs of emotional bypassing:

- Not focusing on the here and now; living in a spiritual realm much of the time.
- Overemphasizing the positive and avoiding the negative.
- Being self-righteous about the concept of enlightenment.
- Being overly detached.

- Being overly idealistic.
- Having feelings of entitlement.
- Exhibiting frequent anger.
- Engaging in [cognitive dissonance](#).
- Being overly compassionate.
- Pretending that everything is okay when it's not.

## References

Clayton, I. (2011). "Beware of Spiritual Bypass." *Psychology Today*. October 2.

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