



7-DAY LAMENT PRAYER EXERCISE

To say that this pandemic has been disorienting and difficult is an understatement. But God invites us to bring our pain, losses, and weariness to him honestly, in prayer. In the Bible, such prayers are called laments.

For ages, God's people have found healing and strength in praying their laments. Indeed, the Bible is filled with prayers of lament, especially the psalms. On the next page, you'll find an exercise designed to help you express your COVID laments to God in prayer.

But first, let's acquaint ourselves with the six elements found in Psalms of Lament.¹ While not every such psalm contains all six elements, some do. Most have three to five.

- 1. Intimate Address to God.** However hard or severe the lament to come, it is held in the context of a close relationship between the psalmist and God.
- 2. Complaint.** The heart of the life situation from which the lament arises is expressed, often forcefully, with no holds barred.
- 3. Petition.** Out of the complaint comes a request to God for help. This may spelled out in detail, with the expectation that God should respond.
- 4. Argument in favor of the petition.** The psalmist gathers and lists reasons why God, being God, should respond as desired.
- 5. Vengeance.** Sometimes the psalmist calls on God to bring vengeance on his enemies. Prayer is the safest place to express such feelings when we have them.
- 6. Rejoicing and Praise.** Even if there is no resolution to the problem, there is a sense of confidence in being heard by God that moves the psalmist into gratitude, hope, joy and praise.

¹<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/553ea282e4b0e1b549d403d5/t/59821ac403596ef7a1666763/1501698756906/An+Exercise+with+Psalms+of+Lament.pdf>

A 7-Day Exercise with Psalms of Lament

*The following exercise will take 15-20 minutes per day over 7 days. You may want to use this exercise for your daily devotional and prayer time during that period. There are **optional small group discussion questions** below if your group wishes to process this exercise together.*

Days 1-6

Pray the Psalm of Lament for each day as listed below. You may find it helpful to record your impressions and reflections in a journal each day.

As you pray each Psalm, use these steps:

1. Briefly scan the Psalm and notice which word or phrase, more than any of the others, connects with you. Some aspects of the Psalm may not resonate with your personal experience, yet may still evoke a response in you that is significant. If so, take note of this.
2. Read the Psalm 2-3 times slowly and prayerfully. Do not try to analyze or study the structure of the psalm. Just notice how and where it addresses you as you pray it.
3. Notice your response to the day's psalm. Does it generate a physical sensation, an emotion, an inner sense, an image or symbol? At this point, if you're able, pray the psalm out loud with feeling, perhaps adding gestures to your speaking.
4. Reflect on how the psalm is now speaking to you and how you are speaking to God through it. What is it that you are hearing from God, and what is it that you are saying to God in and through this psalm? It can be helpful to record your reflections in a journal.
5. Recognize that not all Psalms of Lament result in a resolution (such as Psalm 88). Anything that feels unresolved in you as you pray is also an aspect of lament that can be expressed to God.

Day 1: Psalm 6

Day 2: Psalm 13

Day 3: Psalm 55

Day 4: Psalm 56

Day 5: Psalm 88

Day 6: Psalm 142

Day 7

Choose any one of the following options to give expression to your COVID laments:

- **OPTION A:** Write a “lament psalm” of your own. Try to include 3 (or more) of the 6 elements found in Psalms of Lament as listed above.
- **OPTION B:** Journal a personal prayer of lament in your own words.
- **OPTION C:** If you are musically inclined, you may wish to create a simple song of lament. Try to incorporate at least 3 of the elements of lament in your song.
- **OPTION D:** Create a visual artistic expression of your lament.

Small Group Discussion Questions

1. If you could choose one word or phrase to sum up 2020 so far, what would it be? Why?
2. What are you personally lamenting during this pandemic?
3. What signs of hope have you seen or experienced that you want to thank God for in spite of the pandemic?
4. If you are willing, share your COVID lament from Day 7 of this exercise with your group.