

The Lily Pad

“I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.” Solomon 2:1



Mother's Day - Dare to Hope in God in A Season to Lament

A lament is a prayer searching for understanding and peace in the midst of suffering or disheartening circumstances. The Old Testament psalmists and prophets wove many such prayers of lament into their writings.

Civilization could not have envisioned a time such as this! A micron sized coronavirus entered into the life of humanity over three months ago, crashing unexpected limitations in our lives, just as we began Lent, the traditional season of doing without or adding to our uncertain existence.

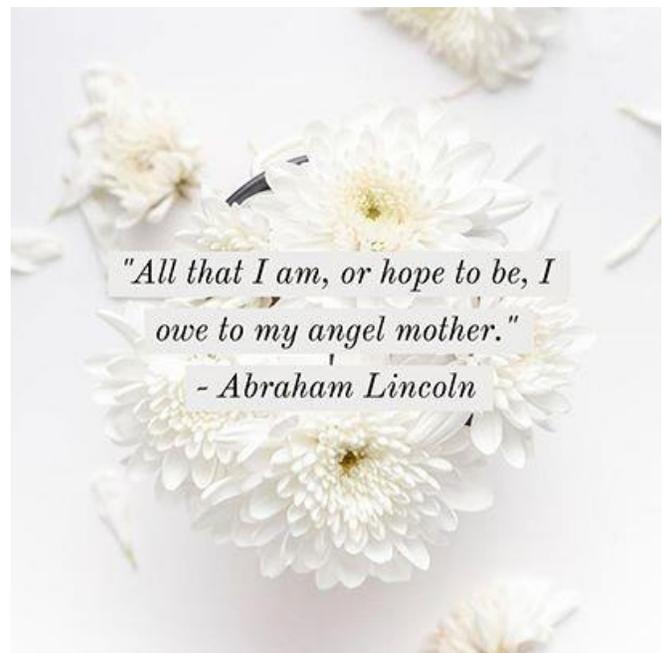
First-time restrictions and new regulations—no movie theaters, all forms of education closed, stay 6 feet apart, disinfect – everything, no reusable bag (forget the care of our environment), virtual house arrest for those over-70, black and brown people dying in unprecedented numbers, coronavirus and overcrowding of prisons with black and brown people—a deadly combination, each one of these concerns challenged our faith during these Lenten disciplines. Doing without television or sweets, is kid's play compared with the heartbreak of not seeing or touching family and friends or going to the library, church, or rest.

Rachel was the wife of Jacob (grandson of Abraham) and the mother of two sons—Joseph and Benjamin. Although Rachel the mother of only two of the twelve tribes of Israel—Joseph and Benjamin, is considered the mother of the entire Jewish people. Her name is found more than forty times in the Old Testament. In giving birth to Benjamin she died and was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19). A thousand or so years after her death, Rachel is symbolically portrayed by the prophet Jeremiah:

A voice rises from Ramah— mourning and bitter weeping are heard day and night. The voice is Rachel's; she's weeping for her children. She will not be comforted, for her children are no more. (Jeremiah 31:15) (Matthew 2:18)

But listen to what the Eternal says: Eternal One: Do not weep, Rachel—wipe the tears from your eyes—for I promise I will reward you for what you have done. Your children will return from this exile; they will come back home from this enemy land. There is hope for your future, I promise. Your children will come home to their own land. (Jeremiah 31:15-17)

Her sad death in childbirth, would personify Rachel's historical role as the ideal mother who would sacrifice herself for her children, throughout the ages, until the end of time. Rachel, the voice of a woman who is weeping bitterly, who died a millennium earlier, is lamenting her lost “children,” her distant offspring. Hence to weep for her children signified a bitter lamentation over the entire nation.



God hears Rachel's lamentation as she "suffers" with her exiled people, and promises that her people will return to their land (Jeremiah 31:16). So, Rachel, in Jewish tradition, is a most powerful intercessor, (go-between, negotiator) who intercedes with the power of her motherly sorrow. During this mind-boggling time in human history, perhaps what we need is to recover this biblical tradition of lament.

Lament is part of the human life and directly tied to the healing of our souls. Over a third of the Psalms are laments. The book of Lamentations weeps over the destruction of Jerusalem. Jesus lamented in the final hours of his life. Scriptures from the prophets, the book of Job, and over a third of the psalms are laments. We live in a fallen world where pain and injustice happen. Each of us are no more immune from tragedy than the women and men who share their stories with us throughout Scripture.

Lament is not the same as crying, however. It's different and uniquely Christian. Lament is different than crying because lament is a form of prayer. It is more than just the expression of sorrow or the venting of emotion. Lament talks to God about pain. And it has a unique purpose: **TRUST**. It is a divinely-given invitation to pour out our fears, frustrations, and sorrows for the purpose of helping us to renew our confidence in God.

Lament gives our souls the ability to protest occurrences that go against the goodness of God's creation (COVID-19). It is only in the naming of what is wrong that we can begin healing. There is a season for everything. Lament acknowledges that today, right now as you are reading The Lily Pad, is a good day to grieve what is broken, shattered, or frightening. It allows us to begin the work toward restoration of God's good creation. Weeping (lamenting) for our sisters and brothers is a tangible way to love one another as Christ commanded.

Biblical lament comes in many forms. Some lament is directed toward the enemy; some toward God; some is individual and isolated; some is communal and all-inclusive. Lament is a response to the full range of problems in the human condition. The psalms specifically name isolation, shame, despair, danger, physical impairment, and death as cause for lament.

Lament is the language for living between the poles of a hard life and trusting in God's authority. It is a prayer form for people who are waiting for the day Jesus will return and make everything right. Christians don't just mourn; we long for God to end the pain. "The practice of lament is one of the most spiritually informed things a person can do."

Laments feature four essential elements:

- **Turn to God.** Often a lament begins by an address to God: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" (Psalm 13:1). The point is that the person in pain chooses to talk to God about what is happening.
- **Bring your complaint.** Every lament features some kind of complaint: "How long must I stay isolated and apart from family and friends? How long shall this virus be exalted over me?" (Psalm 13:2). Biblical lament humbly and honestly identifies the pain, questions, and frustrations raging in our souls.
- **Ask boldly for help.** Seeking God's help while in pain is an act of faith: "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, 'I have prevailed over him,' lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken" (Psalm 13:3–4). We do not give in to hopelessness, denial, or despair; lament invites us to dare to hope in God's promises as we ask for his help.
- **Choose to trust.** This is the purpose for our laments. All roads lead here: "But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me" (Psalm 13:5–6). More than the stages of grief, this prayer language moves us to renew our commitment to trust in God as we navigate the brokenness of life.

Lament prayers take faith. Talking to God instead of getting sinfully angry or bitter requires biblical confidence. Laying out the messy struggles of your soul and then asking — again and again — for God to help you requires a solid spiritual anchoring (my soul is anchored in the Lord). Laments turn toward God when sorrow tempts you to run from him.

Where to begin? Start by regularly reading lament Psalms 10, 13, 22, and 77. And then move to the other forty-plus laments in the book of Psalms. You'll probably be surprised how connected you are to the words you read. Laments tend to become personal quickly.

Or, study a lament psalm by looking for each of the four elements: **turning to God, bringing your complaint, asking boldly, and choosing to trust.** Once you find examples of each element, consider writing your own lament. Follow the flow of the scriptural text, tell God about your struggle. As each psalm was written by a real person with real problems, make yours authentic, combining rich spirituality with real emotions.

Christians lament because we know the long arc of God's plan: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. We know the cause of all lament: sin. And we read in Revelation about the ending of all laments: "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4) We wonder, "How long, O Lord?" (Psalm 13:1). Anyone can cry. But only Christians can faithfully lament.

Since life is full of sorrows, and since the Bible is clear about the plan of God, Christians should be competent lamenters. We should regularly talk to God about our sorrows and struggles. Christians should learn to lament.

Lament is the prayer language for God's people as they live in a world marred by sin, wickedness, or evil. It is how we talk to God about our sorrows as we renew our hope in his sovereign care. To cry is human, but to lament is Christian. We believe in God's power to deliver. We know the tomb is empty, and Jesus is alive.

Although we should always be grateful for how much the maternal figure in our lives does for us, Mother's Day is the day to really show your appreciation. Whether it's your mom, your grandma, an aunt or someone that filled that role, honoring that person will definitely look very different in 2020 in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Yes, Mother's Day will be like no other on Sunday, as scores of people self-isolate and are forced to rethink plans with loved ones, as the usual lunches, brunches, and afternoon family gatherings are cancelled.

Luckily, there are ways to be creative and have a good Mother's Day regardless. You can do simple acts of kindness from your home or partake in a socially distanced festivity. A little celebration or gesture can go a long way.

"Mothers are like glue. Even when you can't see them, they're still holding the family together." —Susan Gale

A Happy & Blessed Mother's Day

PASTOR CLARISSA & Brother MARTIN

**Biancha & Robert would like to share the amazing, joyful, blessed news
with their 5th Avenue Family & Friends,
& Her great-aunts Zealine and Brenda and special cousin-aunt Luree –**

the Best Parents are becoming the Best Grandparents!!!

Congratulations, Biancha and Robert!

We Love you!