

The Language of Lament

A Silent Retreat Guide

Welcome to this space for retreat!

Noise is not new. No matter where and when, there has been noise in our world. Noise outside ourselves and within. In this noise are voices. Voices from our past and even our present. The voice of fear of the future. True voices and false ones. Repeated voices and wounding voices. How do we quiet all the noise and hear God's voice? One way is through the spiritual practices of solitude and silence. This practice gives us opportunities to make way for God's voice in the sea of voices. It gives us time to quiet, settle, and focus on hearing God's voice.

This guide is a way of giving you a framework for your time of solitude and silence. And let it be just that - a guide and framework. This means there is space to move within and outside the guide. If you get to wandering too far, use the guide to bring you back. My hope and prayer is that this time draws you nearer to our God and strengthens you in heart, mind, body, and soul.

Grace and peace,
Laura

General Guidelines:

Turn off digital notifications and music. Inform anyone who might need to know that you will be unavailable for the next hour and a half.

Get settled. You may need to go for a walk to move your body or clear your mind before you settle. This might take longer than you think. Let it come in its time and use the spiritual practices to help you. At some point in the hour choose to settle in solitude and quiet.

****Go at God's Pace.** The practices below are suggestions for making space for God to meet and speak to you. It is not required you do them all. When the Holy Spirit nudges you to pause, pause. If you feel the nudge to slow down, slow down. When it is time to keep going, keep going IN WHATEVER DIRECTION the Spirit has for you. The Holy Spirit is with you and directing you!

Spacious Places

The Practice of Lament

The Spiritual Practice of Lament is spacious. It holds our sorrows and disappointments, our thoughts and emotions, our questions, and our expectations. It also holds our desires and longings for wrongs to be righted and a world without brokenness. And in our Lament, we are held. We are held by a God who knows what it is to lament, one that even cried out a lament as he died (Psalm 22, Matthew 27:45-46).

One Psalmist says:

“When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place.” – Psalm 118

When hard-pressed, God invites us into spacious places. One of these places is the practice of Lament. In this practice, we are given space, voice, and a framework. Within this practice, we are given more freedom than we realize and a language to our lament.

In the Practice of Lament we are invited to:

- **Linger:** Stay long enough with the sorrow to see and feel it.
- **Let it Out:** Let out our thoughts and our emotions.
- **Let Ourselves Rest:** Find that God holds us and all that is within us.
- **Long for More:** Express our desires and our longings.
- **Live in Hope:** To keep moving and giving.

Even as we look for our language, we might find ourselves stuck, frustrated, or even speechless.

In these times, you are encouraged to:

- Name it.
- Continue to face God.
- Surrender the pace.
- Allow God to lead.
- Move on to a different aspect of lament or repeat one.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to pray for you, even without words (Romans 8:26-27).

Please hear this:

Lament does not trap, shame, or leave us on our own. Lament invites us to a spacious place, where God meets us.

And in this space God invites us to cry out to him, to ask questions, to receive rest, and to trust. We not only have the spacious practice of lament, but he shows us just how spacious his love, grace, and goodness are as he meets us. And as he meets us he shows us how to meet others in their cries and laments (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).

Let's practice this together.

A Psalm of Lament

The Practice of Listening to Scripture

- “1 I cried out to God for help;
I cried out to God to hear me.*
- 2 When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;
at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.*
- 3 I remembered you, God, and I groaned;
I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.*
- 4 You kept my eyes from closing;
I was too troubled to speak.*
- 5 I thought about the former days,
the years of long ago;*
- 6 I remembered my songs in the night.
My heart meditated and my spirit asked:*
- 7 “Will the Lord reject forever?
Will he never show his favor again?*
- 8 Has his unfailing love vanished forever?
Has his promise failed for all time?*
- 9 Has God forgotten to be merciful?
Has he in anger withheld his compassion?’*
- 10 Then I thought, “To this I will appeal:
the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand.*
- 11 I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.*
- 12 I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.”*
- 13 Your ways, God, are holy.
What god is as great as our God?*
- 14 You are the God who performs miracles;
you display your power among the peoples.*
- 15 With your mighty arm you redeemed your people,
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph.*
- 16 The waters saw you, God,
the waters saw you and writhed;
the very depths were convulsed.*
- 17 The clouds poured down water,
the heavens resounded with thunder;
your arrows flashed back and forth.*
- 18 Your thunder was heard in the whirlwind,
your lightning lit up the world;
the earth trembled and quaked.*
- 19 Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.*

²⁰You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” – Psalm 77 (NIV)

What did you hear repeated throughout this Lament Psalm?

Is there anything that surprised you?

Did you hear something you related to?

How do the words of the Psalmist invite you to use similar type words or words of similar strength as you continue on this retreat?

Write down anything else from this listening practice that God has prompted you to pay attention to.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Space to Linger

“When hard pressed, I cried to the Lord; he brought me into a spacious place.” – Psalm 118:5 (NIV)

Where are you hard-pressed? Where do you see others hard-pressed? Linger in the injustice, the pain, the anger, the sadness.

Take your time here. It might get uncomfortable. You might be tempted to quicken the pace of your lingering. Linger in it a bit longer and let yourself feel the discomfort. Allow any additional thoughts about the circumstances, about God, or about yourself to come forth. Write those down.

Move forward to the next aspect of Lament as you are ready.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Let it Out

This space is for letting it out. Let anything out. Talk out your thoughts, emotions, confusion, fears, wrestling. Let them out. Walk them out, run them out, cry them out, hello them out, draw them out. As you let it out, your questions and accusations might be towards any number of persons and even against God. However you need to, let it all out. (Again, refrain from rushing the pace.)

These might come in the form of the question “Why?”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Why would you allow _____?”

“Why didn’t anyone show up for _____?”

These can also come in the question of “Where?”

“Where are you?”

“Where were the people I needed?”

What questions or words do you have? Write them down if you’d like or let them out another way.

When you have let what you can out, move to the next aspect of Lament.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Let Yourself Rest

Often, after letting out, comes a deep breath and rest. Allow swirling in your mind and the energy in your body come to a place of rest.

This can be hard. You may be tempted to rush this as well. If needed, practice this breath prayer a few times, allowing yourself to come to a place of rest.

Inhale In: Let me rest.

Exhale Out: God, you hold humanity.

After you settle and let yourself rest, resist picking up the pace again. You might be tempted to search for an answer, a lesson, or an outcome from the practice so far.

Try not to produce something from it. It might make us feel better for a moment, but it can cut off other aspects of the Lament practice.

Note: Sometimes this trust and rest come through the practice of confession within Lament. This is not a required step, but you might need it. If so, please practice confession on page 9. If not, move onto page 10. In confession you are not confessing the things you have done so far in Lament, you are practicing confession of your sin that God wants you to receive freedom and rest from.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Confession

Confession

The Psalmist says it is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in humans or princes (Psalm 118:9). At times we find ourselves taking refuge in ourselves, in what we can see, or figure out. Or we take refuge in the powers and promises of others.

1. As you let yourself rest, what are you tempted to trust in other than God?

2. How is God inviting you to surrender these places of refuge, protection, and care?

3. Confess what you can honestly confess. Ask God for the grace to confess anything else. Trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in you. The assurance we have is that the forgiving work of Jesus is complete. Trust and live in light of the confidence that in Christ you are forgiven.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Long for More

Lament includes the space to express our longings for more. We long for justice, peace, righteousness, forgiveness, healing, salvation, rescue, and so much more. Our cries expand as we long for heaven to come down to earth, a longing for all things to be made new.

Express your longing for more through the following questions:

What do you long for?

- For yourself:

- For others:

- Even for your enemies:

Write out your longing in prayer below.

The Language of Lament

The Practice of Lament: Live in Hope

Lament includes living in hope. It is living in confidence that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. It may not be in our time or our ways, but he promises he will make all things right.

And as we lament, our hope is strengthened. This means it deepens, expands, and it gives us the capacity to hope for and with others. It doesn't matter how big or small this hope might seem, it can be strengthened and expanded. Hope is miraculously exponential.

Through this process of lament, where and how is God inviting you to hope?

And we do not lament alone. We are not meant to. As you live in hope, will you consider inviting others into your lament practice? Telling them how God met you, and how you can live in hope? How can you do so?

When We Don't Have Words

The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Sometimes we simply don't have words. The lament too deep, the longing too hidden, and the hope too distant. Words fall short. In these times God reminds us of the gift of the Holy Spirit. This gift of the Holy Spirit is prayer on our behalf. When we have no words, the Holy Spirit communicates for us.

If you find yourself in a space where you don't have the words, take the time to meditate on this Scripture. As you do, slow down your racing mind, receive the gift of the Spirit's prayer on your behalf, and rest.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God." Romans 8:26-27

The Good of Others

Closing Blessing

“I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yes, wait for the Lord.” – Psalm 27:13-14 (NASB)

There are spacious places God invites us to trust. Part of this trust includes waiting. As we wait, we grow in trust, and we are strengthened. **Waiting for his goodness does not mean we stop displaying and living out God’s goodness. We can do that every day in our various contexts.** For we are sent as Jesus was sent, into the world, to love the world, and to invite the world to know, see, feel, and experience the love of God.

As you see and are strengthened by God and his goodness, may you continue to live out God’s goodness through the care for others.

How is God calling you to live out hope and goodness in this world?