

Name Wounds

PSALM 137:1–6; LAMENTATIONS 3:43–48

GOAL

Adults approach God with honesty about heartaches and wounds with hope that God hears and responds to their pain.

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



Visit our YouTube channel, bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR, for conversation starter videos.

PRAYER

God of all hopefulness, open me to receive the stories of your people and point them toward the hope you offer in their deepest lament. Amen.

THIS SESSION

In the ancient Jewish spiritual practice of lament, God’s people named both personal and communal wounds. Naming emotions and hardships remains a faithful practice. Turning to God to express anguish gives people a safe outlet to name their individual sorrows and discover that it is OK to acknowledge the feelings that lead to lament. Often, we move too quickly to resolution, counting blessings, or proposing solutions. While these are necessary, owning one’s feelings is an important step in the process of healing and growth. In developing a practice of naming our hurts, welcoming our hard feelings, and caring for them, we discover that we can lament, heal, and find hope. We join a long tradition of God’s people trusting God with our feelings and finding hope in our lament.

THE BIBLE STORY

The book of Lamentations is a series of five poems expressing the lament of the Jewish people following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. It gives words to the people’s pain in each verse and chapter. The third chapter is written as an individual lament outlining the terrible afflictions that have come upon the author. The author expresses anguish in three sets of verses, naming their feelings again and again and making clear that wounds, trauma, and despair have been caused by these afflictions.

Psalms 137 expresses the anguish of the Jewish community who had been taken captive and removed from their homeland. This trauma shattered their faith in God. They felt abandoned by the One who promised to be their God in Jerusalem. In this new land, Babylon, they had no one to turn to except God. They could do nothing but cry out and weep in this foreign land. In their lament, they promise to remember their God and their home.

SESSION PREPARATION

Depending on the options you choose:

- “Lament Infographic Poster” (p. 6): Obtain and display the *Lament* infographic poster (bit.ly/FMInfographicPosters, Year 3 Set).
- “Lament in Worship” (p. 7): Provide *Glory to God* or other hymnals. Preview and identify hymns of lament.
- “Naming Laments” (p. 7): Turn a newsprint sheet horizontally. Write headings to make three columns: What You Lament, Name Wounds, Feelings.

GETTING STARTED

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome participants and allow time for gathering activities particular to your group (*introductions, offering, prayer concerns, and announcements*). Review the Unit Overview on page 4 of the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain that a more detailed discussion of the practice can be found in the foundational essay that begins on page 47 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Encourage participants to read the essay during the course of the next four sessions.

OPENING LITANY

Refer participants to the opening litany on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Read aloud the explanation for the writing of the hymn text. Show the YouTube video “In Deepest Night, Glory to God Hymn #785, arr. Lee Hoffman” (bit.ly/FMDeepestNight, 2:22, first verse ends at 0:43).

For the opening litany, invite participants to repeat after you as you lead them in speaking the first verse of “In Deepest Night” (*Glory to God, #785*). The words are also printed on page 7 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*.

In deepest night, /
in darkest days /
when harps are hung, /
no songs we raise /
when silence must suffice as praise,
yet sounding in us quietly /
there is the song of God. /¹

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

CONVERSATION STARTER VIDEO

Show the “*Lament Overview*” video and the “*Lament, Session 1*” video from the Growing Faith YouTube channel (bit.ly/FMYouTubeGFR). Lead a brief conversation about participants’ thoughts and questions the videos prompt to introduce the session.

“PRAYING AND CUSSING”

Refer participants to the session introduction on page 6 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs in this section. Discuss when participants have felt free to express their true feelings to God. How has sharing honestly with God been helpful?

Read aloud the quotation and explanation from author and social work professor Brené Brown on page 7. Continue discussion with these questions:

- ➔ Have you ever wanted to curse at God? In what circumstances might this be appropriate?
- ➔ Why is it OK to bless God, yet people are reluctant to curse at God?
- ➔ What do you know about God that suggests that God can handle our range of feelings?

1. Susan Palo Cherwien, “In Deepest Night,” in *Glory to God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), #785. © 1995 Susan Palo Cherwien (admin. Augsburg Fortress). Used by permission.

This and all sessions require that the leader and participants have their copy of the *Adult Reflection Guide* with them.

Internet-connected device

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- ☐ Lament infographic poster (Year 3 Set)

LAMENT INFOGRAPHIC POSTER

Display the *Lament* infographic poster. Discuss the definition of *lament* on the poster. The steps offer a roadmap that helps us move from hard feelings to hope. Review each of the steps. Discuss ways these steps can be helpful in expressing lament.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

LAMENT OF EXILE

Refer participants to “Finding the Practice in the Bible” on page 8 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Have them read the first paragraph. Before reading the Scripture passage, invite participants to imagine that they had been exiled and forced to live in a land that is not their home, among unfamiliar people, enduring poverty and oppression.

Have a volunteer read aloud Psalm 137:1–9 on page 8. Notice the feelings of anguish, anger, and revenge. Discuss how these words reflect the situation in which the people found themselves.

Use the question for reflection on page 8 for additional discussion:

- ➔ Increasing numbers of refugees in the US have been forced to leave situations of violence and poverty in their countries. How does the psalm express what they may be feeling?

HARSH AND HOPEFUL WORDS

Have participants read Lamentations 3:43–48 on page 9 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Invite them to share their thoughts after reading these words. Encourage them to identify specific complaints and accusations against God.

Have a volunteer read the paragraphs immediately before and after Lamentations 3:43–48 on page 9. Remind participants that the third chapter of Lamentations was likely written by one who witnessed destruction and remained in the place that was destroyed. Discuss how understanding the context in which these verses were written explains their tone and sentiment.

Select from these questions to continue discussion:

- ➔ What is the effect of voicing these specific laments?
- ➔ What groups of people today might resonate with Lamentations?
- ➔ What are some specific complaints you have raised to God? What difference did it make to voice these?

FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or more options.

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- ☐ Internet-connected device

JEWISH FESTIVAL OF TISHA B'AV

Explain that *Tisha B'Av* is the annual Jewish day of communal mourning, commemorating the destruction of the first and second temples in Jerusalem in 586 BCE and 70 CE. It is a day of intense sadness for people of the Jewish faith. As part of the mourning, sections of the book of Lamentations are read aloud. People may also refrain from eating, drinking, and bathing.

Show the YouTube video “What Is Tisha B'Av: The Jewish Day of Mourning” (bit.ly/FMTishaBav, 4:10). Invite participants to describe

their feelings after watching the video. Discuss ways the Jewish people acknowledge their feelings during this period of mourning. What might be the benefit of engaging in an annual ritual like this?

LAMENT IN POPULAR CULTURE

Read aloud the opening sentences in “Finding the Practice Then and Now” on page 10 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Refer participants to “Songs of Lament in Popular Culture” on page 11. Explain that you will view two videos that express lament and compare ways they express lament.

Show the YouTube video “Pete Seeger: Where Have All the Flowers Gone” (bit.ly/FMFlowersGone, 4:22) by American folk singer Pete Seeger. Then show the YouTube video “Dax—Dear God” (bit.ly/FMDearGod, 3:10) by Canadian rapper Dax. Warning: This YouTube version is edited to exclude language deemed offensive by some. If you search for the lyrics, however, those words may be present.

Invite participants to share their initial impressions of the two songs. Use the questions for reflection on page 11 to continue discussion.

LAMENT IN WORSHIP

Refer participants to the descriptions of worship activities that may include laments (pp. 10–11 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*). If your community’s worship includes any of these activities, invite participants to read the descriptions and discuss ways that laments can be incorporated into your worship services.

Distribute copies of *Glory to God* or other hymnals. Direct participants to hymns of lament. In *Glory to God*, these are found in “Lament and Longing for Healing” (#775–800). Have participants look through the hymns and select one that is familiar or speaks to them. Invite individuals to tell about the hymns they identified and the feelings expressed to God. Discuss how God receives our hymns and prayers of lament.

Internet-connected device

Glory to God or other hymnals



If your congregation uses a different hymnal, preview it and identify hymns of lament to reference in this activity.

PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or more options.

WRITING A LAMENT

Refer participants to “Write a Lament” on page 12 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Challenge them to use Lamentations 3:43–48 as a model or template for writing their own lament. Have them read the description on page 12 and try their hand at expressing personal or communal laments, naming hurts or wounds, for these times. They may write their lament in the blank space on the page.

Pens

NAMING LAMENTS

Direct participants to “Name Laments” on page 13 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Display the prepared newsprint and have the group spend time reflecting on personal or communal things that they lament. Invite participants to name these and record them on the prepared newsprint under the heading “What You Lament.” In the second column, list wounds; and in the third column, name feelings around the lament. To help participants begin, you can fill in the first lament around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the end of the activity, discuss how they can express these laments to God. How would they want God to respond?

Prepared newsprint and markers

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- Pens
 - Timer

JOURNALING LAMENT

Explain that, in naming our feelings, we acknowledge them and share them beyond ourselves, including with God. For some people, writing their feelings and laments in a journal helps them to take stock of where they are hurting and tap resilience within themselves.

Distribute pens and have participants locate blank space in their *Adult Reflection Guide* or in a journal for writing. Invite them to engage in “free writing” for five minutes; they should write non-stop for this timed period, naming their feelings and expressing them to God. Assure them that no one will read what they write. Use the timer to track the five minutes of writing.

FOLLOWING JESUS PETITIONING FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE

Refer participants to “Following Jesus” on page 14 in the *Adult Reflection Guide*. Explain the process for the prayer of lament to be completed by participants. As you read aloud each statement, invite participants to speak aloud or pray silently, completing each sentence. Begin with a moment of silence to enter into a time of prayer.

After all sentences are read and prayed, lead the group in the closing prayer printed on page 14.