



FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Mourning Our Losses Together During COVID-19: The Good News of Biblical Lament by Bob Yoder, DMin

This Facilitator's Guide is intended to prompt your imagination as to how you might engage biblical lament with the groups of people you serve and lead — whether it be for Sunday school classes, youth groups, smaller care groups, Stephen Ministers, church leadership teams, etc. Feel free to use or adapt any of these ideas. Finally, I welcome your feedback as to how any of these ideas or new ones you have developed have worked with your group(s); contact me at reyoder@ambs.edu!

VIEW THE WEBINAR AS A GROUP

The webinar can be found at www.ambs.edu/mourningourlosses. Have your group watch the webinar before your meeting, either together or on their own. After viewing it ...

- *Engage in open-ended discussion:* What new thoughts rose up for you? What resonates with you? What do you disagree with or have questions about?
- *Probe your group's losses during COVID-19:* What losses can you identify, both personal and corporate? Which are simply delayed vs. those that can never be recaptured?
- *Explore your God images/metaphors:* What images/metaphors do you have of God? Any new ones following this presentation? What might be helpful for those experiencing loss?
- *Consider specific ideas for your group:* Which examples might you be able to do in your setting? What adaptations would you make? What new ideas might you consider?

HAVE YOUR GROUP WRITE THEIR OWN PRAYER OF LAMENT (six-minute timed writing exercise)

- Review "Prayers of Lament" on the back — note Psalm 13:1-4 (Act 1), 5 (Act 2), 6 (Act 3).
- Decide ahead of time if you will invite people to read their prayers; let them know.
- Begin with an opening prayer, light a candle, etc.
- For each act, write for two minutes; serve as "timekeeper."
- Some options before ending: (allow them to "pass" with any of these options)
 - › Each person reads their prayer aloud to the rest of the group, or
 - › Each person reads their prayer with 1-2 partners, or
 - › The group anonymously turns in their prayers to you, and you read them aloud.
- End with a concluding prayer, extinguish the candle, etc.
- Other variations of this exercise:
 - › Vary the times of the steps: i.e., five minutes/act; one day/act ("live with" before meeting).
 - › Draw prayers, work with clay, etc.
 - › Have two people write a prayer together (encourages discussion).
 - › Compose a group prayer.
 - › Use as an intercessory prayer on behalf of someone/situation in the world.
- Other ways to engage biblical lament:
 - › Create songs, poems, short stories or videos.
 - › Conduct worship services with the lament format; make time in rituals/rites.
 - › Tell about songs that describe your lament; study biblical characters of lament.
 - › Tell stories of times of personal or corporate lament ("normalize").



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Bob has served for nearly 25 years in congregational, conference, camp and college ministry settings. He also has been Assistant Professor of Youth Ministry at Goshen (Indiana) College and an adjunct professor at AMBS. In 2007 he completed his doctoral project, which was later published as *Helping Youth Grieve: The Good News of Biblical Lament* (Resource Publications, 2015).

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE (continued)

PRAYERS OF LAMENT

"The practice of lament gives you time and permission to vent your pent-up anger, your deep sadness, and your self-blame. You allow yourself to grieve in a way that leads to healing and renewal. As you pour out your grief, loss, pain and anger in the presence of God, you discover that God hears your cries of anguish and comforts you. While you can't remove the storms, quiet the thunder or stop the lightning from striking, you can trust your tears to be the raindrops that release the clouds, allowing rays of sunlight to shine through. Before catching a glimpse of the rainbow, though, you have to brace yourself for the raging storm within."¹

Prayer exercise: Write your own "three-act" psalm. It does not need to be long.

- Act I: Argue with God
 - ▶ ☹ People get mad at God or about an injustice and pour out their raw emotions.
- Act II: Remember God's goodness
 - ▶ ☺ Gradually those who complained to God remember God's help in the past and know that God has heard them.
- Act III: Praise God
 - ▶ 😊 Those who lament realize they can trust God with their lives, and they tell God, "Thanks!"

Psalm 13

¹ How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? ² How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? ³ Consider and answer me, O Lord my God! Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death, ⁴ and my enemy will say, "I have prevailed"; my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. ⁵ But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

"Perhaps you are grieving a personal loss. Perhaps you are standing with others who are mourning the death of a loved one. The grief and other emotions you are experiencing are natural and inevitable. But when you glimpse the rainbow amid the storm, know that you are not alone. God is with you, and God can handle all the anger and cursing and complaints that your grief process provokes. You are surrounded by fellow sufferers who are also grieving loss; they will open their hearts to you and hold you up as you try to get your bearings again. Give yourself — and others — time and space to grieve in a way that leads to healing and renewal. That's what the practice of lament is all about."²

¹ Bass, Dorothy & Don Richter, eds. *Way to Live: Christian Practices for Teens*. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002), p. 251.

² *Way to Live*, p. 260.



ABOUT AMBS

Located in Elkhart, Indiana, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary is a learning community with an Anabaptist vision, offering theological education for learners both on campus and at a distance, including a wide array of lifelong learning programs — all with the goal of educating followers of Jesus Christ to be leaders for God's reconciling mission in the world.

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