

LAMENT

Spiritual Disciplines: Personal

Introduction:

Learning what to do with our pain and grief is a large part of the Christian journey. Culture says, "Buck up. Get a grip. Control your emotions. Don't feel. Don't talk. Stuff the pain. Pretend or medicate if you have to – but get over it and move on." Christian culture can say, "If you are full of faith, you won't get hurt, confused and discouraged. You won't feel hopeless or have a life filled with pain and loss." This myth doesn't do justice to our lives, to Scripture or to the life of Jesus.

The liquid entreaty of tears is a huge part of the biblical text. Orphans, slaves, widows, sinners, cities, prophets, priests, kings, the oppressed, sick, exiled, defeated and bereaved – all weep. Jesus weeps (John 11:35). And he's in good company because God started grieving over the mess his own creation had made just six chapters into Genesis (Gen 6:6). The promise of Jesus is that those who weep and mourn are "blessed" (Matt 5:4). The Holy Spirit prays for us with wordless groans (Romans 8:26).

Sometimes, the best response to the brokenness of this world and of my own life is a mixture of tears and prayers. This puts us in the company of human suffering and misery and in the company of God, Himself. There are even health benefits to crying tears that help release toxins and restore psychological balance. Prayers and tears will not and cannot solve the problem of suffering, but they can help soothe the pain by casting our burdens into the arms of God.

In placing our tears in God's hands, we are reminded and comforted by remembering that one day, every tear will be wiped away by God himself. The hope of lament is to trust God with our tears and our pain, the One well acquainted with grief, and allow Him to comfort us.

Reflection Questions:

1. What is your natural response to things that make you sad or mad?
2. What do you tend to do with your pain? How do you act it out? Rationalize it? Blame it on others? Deny it?
3. What messages, good and bad, have you learned in life about crying?
4. What does it mean to you that the Trinity is in solidarity with the pain and suffering of humanity?
5. According to Psalm 56:8, God collects your tears and puts them in a bottle. How does it feel to reflect on that?

Spiritual Exercises:

1. Choose a Psalm of lament and let the words of the Psalmist become your words and prayers as you pour out your heart to God.
2. Read Lamentations 3. How does this help you clarify your own experience and turn you toward God?
3. Feel your sadness. Don't self-medicate or numb it, but try to feel it. Write it out. End with a prayer bringing this sadness to Jesus and asking him to help you with this load.
4. Read John 11 and imagine you were present when Jesus began to weep (v 35). Listen to him and pay attention to him. What do Jesus' tears mean to you?

Psalms of Lament:

Community Lament: 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126, 129

Individual Lament: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9-10, 13, 14, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27

Taken from Spiritual Disciplines Handbook *Calhoun*

