

1

Lament Out Loud

PSALM 137:1-6



GOAL

Children hear expressions of biblical writers and others sharing their reasons for lament and engage in practices of naming and sharing their personal and communal laments.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

O God, you are always ready to hear our cries and respond in love. Give me the same grace to be present with children learning to lament. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Lament is a crucial practice for people of faith. As we learn to speak aloud our sorrows, we entrust God with them in hope. We learn that, rather than avoiding talking about or exploring what makes us sad, sharing our lament with God is the first step toward healing.

THE BIBLE STORY

Psalm 137 recalls the time of exile, when God's people had been taken from their home into the foreign land of Babylon. It names their loss and gives voice to the feelings of pain. Along with other expressions of lament in the Bible, it demonstrates how God invites us to speak and share all our emotions. Our sad prayers are just as important to God as our prayers of joy.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Children in a multiage group will have different abilities to process grief or loss. All should be able to understand the feeling of personal sadness, with varying abilities to name or describe the emotions around it. Older children will be more able to identify and speak about sadness not just in themselves, but also in others. The idea that God welcomes our sad feelings as much as our happy ones may be a new idea for some. Learning that a family of faith, such as your group, is a safe place to name sadness is a valuable lesson about the people of God.

SESSION PREPARATION

- "Alphabet Cards or Roses and Thorns" (p. 8): Obtain twenty-six blank 3" x 5" index cards for this activity if you plan on doing "Lament from A to Z" (p. 10).



GETTING STARTED

- ☐ Twenty-six blank 3" x 5" index cards (optional)
- ☐ Markers, crayons, colored pencils

ALPHABET CARDS OR ROSES AND THORNS A C X

Greet the children as they arrive. If you plan on doing “Lament from A to Z” (p. 10), provide blank 3" x 5" index cards and coloring supplies. Assign one or more letters of the alphabet to each child so that the whole alphabet is covered. Invite them to draw their assigned letters large on the card, one letter on each card. Assist with drawing the letters as needed. Encourage the children to decorate their cards, adding words or pictures of items that begin with that letter. You may need to assign more letters to children after everyone has arrived if you don’t have a complete set of alphabet cards. Set aside cards for “Lament from A to Z” (p. 10).

If you do not plan on using the alphabet cards in “Lament from A to Z,” then engage the children in conversation, encouraging them to share their *roses*, or highs, and *thorns*, or lows, from the week. When a high or low is mentioned, wonder where it falls on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the prickliest of thorns and 10 being the sweetest of roses. Ask the children how it makes them feel when they experience thorns and what helps them when they feel these thorny times.

- ☐ Internet-connected device (optional)

GOD IS THERE M T

Gather the children together and invite them to repeat after you as you lead them in speaking the first verse of “In Deepest Night” below.¹ Then repeat the verse again, wondering about the meaning of each line.

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. /

Try singing the verse together, if you wish. Show the YouTube video “In Deepest Night, Glory to God Hymn #785, arr. Lee Hoffman” ([bit.ly /FMDeepestNight](https://bit.ly/FMDeepestNight), 2:22, first verse ends at 0:43) and invite children to sing along with the soloist.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- ☐ Cards cut apart from Resource Page 1 and placed in a container, such as a basket or bag
- ☐ Music player and lively music

NAME THAT EMOTION AM C D M

With the children sitting in a circle, play a game of Name That Emotion. Explain that this game is like charades but they will be acting out and guessing emotions. Play music and have the children pass the container


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.

of cards cut from Resource Page 1 around the circle. Stop the music and have the child holding the container draw a card from it. Invite the child to use only facial expressions and body movement, but no words, to convey the emotion to the rest of the group. When one or more children guess the emotion, have them finish the following prompt: “I feel (*emotion*) when . . .” Play in the same manner until all the cards are used. Try to stop the music when children who have not had a turn are holding the container.

Engage the children in conversation about the different emotions.

- Which of these emotions do you like to feel?
- Which emotions are the hardest for you to feel?
- Which of these emotions help you think about God?
- Which of these emotions do you think Jesus felt? (*all of them!*)

Tell the children that God knows and loves every bit of them, including all their feelings and emotions. Place the card that says “I am sad.” in front of you. Explain that this unit focuses on how God’s people and followers of Jesus have remembered, and continue to keep in mind, God’s love when they are sad. Share that one word used to describe feeling and sharing sad emotions in the Bible is *lament*. Invite the whole group to show their facial and body expressions for the feeling of lament.

 Some children may have more difficulty talking about their emotions than others. This is a learned skill. Learning to name what we feel is the first step, not only in learning to lament, but also in developing our emotional intelligence. Expect a variety of ability and comfort in naming what makes your group members sad.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

BY THE RIVERS OF BABYLON



Distribute copies of Resource Page 2. Invite the children to look at the picture while you set the scene for today’s Bible story. Tell the children that long, long ago—after Moses had lived and died bringing God’s people to the promised land, but long before Jesus was born—the people of God were sad. Explain that everyone was sad, all at the same time, because they were far from their homes and land. They were in another place called Babylon. Their great city Jerusalem had been conquered. Their beautiful temple had been destroyed. Many had been taken away to be slaves in Babylon. They called it *exile*, being forced to live far from home. So much was lost: their homes, their place of worship, everything they knew and loved.

So the people of God were every kind of sad: the crying kind of sad, where the tears just wouldn’t stop; the quiet kind of sad, where they just wanted to be still; and the loud kind of sad, where they couldn’t hold all their feelings in. Sometimes while sad, someone would pray or sing, telling God how very sad they were because they knew God listened to them and heard their feelings. Tell the children that Psalm 137 is a prayer from God’s people in exile.

Invite the children to color while they listen to you read aloud the adapted Bible story from Psalm 137:1–6 on Resource Page 2.

Wonder together, using the following questions or some of your own:

- What would you miss from home if you were in exile?
- Do you know anyone who has experienced exile? (*refugees, prisoners*)
- The reading says the people of God felt “every kind of sad.” What kinds of sad do you know?
- What do you want to do when you are sad?
- How do you think God feels when people share their lament with God?

-
- Copies of Resource Page 2
 - Crayons, colored pencils



FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or both options.

WHAT MAKES US SAD

G

Have the children sit in a circle, and invite the children to play a game where they name something that makes them sad that begins with the first letter of their first name. Give the following examples, then begin. For example, “I’m Paul, and it makes me sad when people pollute the earth” or “I’m Hannah, and hunger makes me sad.”

Then play the game a second time and have the group respond, “God hears your lament, (*Name*),” after each child speaks.

As a challenge, play the game as a memory round. Each person will begin with the first person, naming them and their sadness (“It makes Paul sad when people pollute the earth.”) then add each subsequent person, and finally add their own. In a second round, the entire group can respond after each turn with “God hears your lament, (*Name, Name, Name . . .*)” naming each person in order.

- Internet-connected device
- Paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

LAMENT IN MUSIC

M A AM T

Tell the children that, just as lament can be expressed in prayers and in the poetry of the Bible, it can also be expressed in music and art. Invite the children to listen to some different classical music pieces, encouraging them to distinguish sadness and a variety of other emotions in music. Play about a minute from the YouTube videos listed below, pausing after each selection and asking the children to describe the emotions the music sounds like or makes them feel.

- “George Frideric Handel—The Arrival of the Queen of Sheba” (bit.ly/FMHandelSheba, 3:29)
- “Rossini: William Tell Overture: Final” (bit.ly/FMRossiniWilliamTell, 3:23)
- “Tritsch-Tratsch-Polka—Johann Strauss II” (bit.ly/FMStraussPolka, 2:38)
- “Samuel Barber—Agnus Dei [HD]” (bit.ly/FMBarberAgnusDei, 8:40)

Tell the children that you will continue to play more of the last selection, “Agnus Dei” by Barber. Invite them to draw or move, expressing feelings about what they are hearing in the music. Provide paper and coloring supplies for those expressing feelings in art.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

- Prepared set of alphabet cards from “Alphabet Cards or Roses and Thorns” (p. 8)
- Newsprint or mural paper, marker
- Tape

LAMENT FROM A TO Z

C

Tell the children that lament is found in a number of books in the Bible. Comment that one whole book, which was written about the exile in Babylon, is full of lament, and it is even called Lamentations. Explain that God’s people knew God wanted to hear their sorrows and trusted that God heard even their deepest feelings. Their laments were written using the form

of acrostic poetry. Point out that the book of Lamentations was originally written in Hebrew and the Hebrew alphabet was used in their poetry acrostic. Explain that it doesn't translate to English, so they won't see it if they look up verses in Lamentations, unless they can read Hebrew!

Using the newsprint or mural paper and a marker, demonstrate how an acrostic poem works by taping the letters A, B, and C from the prepared set of alphabet cards from "Alphabet Cards or Roses and Thorns" (p. 8) vertically down the left side of newsprint or mural paper. Explain that each line begins with the alphabet letters in order. Fill in some example lines, such as:

- A—All my feelings are sad today,
- B—Because of war, sickness, and more.
- C—Crying is all I feel like doing.

Add the card with the letter D and invite the group to help you write the next example line as a group. Tell the children that each line does not necessarily have to follow the line before it, but it may, or it may stand on its own. Have the children continue writing your group lament. Depending on your group, you can do this in several ways.

- Compose one group acrostic by adding the alphabet cards in order. Invite children to add their ideas for lines one by one, or popcorn-style as they are inspired.
- Form small groups and give each group a few alphabet cards to compose corresponding lines of the lament.
- Deal out multiple cards to each child and have them compose their own lines to add to the lament.

Suggest that, if composing whole lines is difficult, they can use the alphabet card letters as prompts for single words or short phrases describing what makes them sad. Allow that they may be creative with letters like X and suggest ideas such as "Exile" or "Exiting my favorite place."

As you continue to add letter cards, make columns on several sheets of newsprint or a piece of mural paper. Tape each alphabet card in order as the group, small group, or individual children add their laments. Read or invite volunteers to read your group lament out loud when it is finished.

LAMENTING IN COLOR



Tell the children that God wants to hear about all our feelings: when we are happy, when we are sad, what makes us laugh, and what makes us lament. We may have experience giving God thanks for what makes us happy. We may need more practice sharing our lament in prayer.

Explain that, just as lament can be expressed in poetry and music, it can also be shared in art. Demonstrate how to draw a prayer of lament using a copy of Resource Page 3. Write in one of the teardrops something that makes you sad. Then add some color or designs to your teardrop and between or around the teardrops. Provide copies of Resource Page 3 and coloring supplies. Invite the children to use words, pictures, and color to create their own lament to God.

-
- Copies of Resource Page 3
 - Markers, crayons, colored pencils



You may find that some in your group want to share their art with one another. Make this voluntary, being sensitive to those who may not want to share.



FOLLOWING JESUS

LAMENT AND LAUGH

C

Children may be familiar with the practice of sharing “highs and lows” or “roses and thorns” as you may have done together in “Alphabet Cards or Roses and Thorns” (p. 8) at the opening of the session. This is a similar practice using the language of lament. Tell the children that God wants to hear our laments just as much as God wants to hear our laughter and praises. Laments can be part of our regular prayers.

Gather the group in a circle. Invite them to share, when you pause the first time in your prayer, one lament they named during the session and to share one thing that makes them laugh when you pause the second time. Close with the following prayer or one of your own choosing:

Loving God, we know you hear all our prayers. You hear us when we lament over things like: *(pause for sharing words of lament)*.

You also hear us when we laugh over things like: *(pause for sharing words about laughter)*.

Help us share with you our joys and our sorrows, and trust that you are always with us. Amen.

I am happy.

I am sad.

I am angry.

I am worried.

I am excited.

I am proud.

I am surprised.

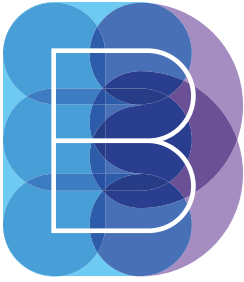
I am frustrated.

I am lonely.

I am scared.

I am hopeful.

I am grieving.



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON PSALM 137:1-6

By the rivers of Babylon,
we sat down and cried
when we remembered Jerusalem, our home.
On the willow trees there
we hung up our harps.
Our captors made fun of us, saying,
“Sing us one of your songs from Jerusalem!”
But how can we sing now?
How can we sing a song for our God
when we are so far from home?
And so very sad?
If I forget my home,
may my hands never play the harp again.
May my tongue never be able to sing again,
if I forget that Jerusalem, my home,
is my greatest joy.



