

The appointive cabinet has written a daily Lenten devotional for the Arkansas Conference called 40 Days of Lament for Lent. You may share in this journey toward Easter by reading the daily post via an email blast from the Center for Technology, checking the Network for Discipleship and Mission for daily posting, or downloading a weekly set of the 40 Days of Lament for Lent document to use or reproduce and distribute in your church. The daily postings will begin Wednesday, March 5, and the weekly downloadable document will be available that same day on arumc.org.



The graphic features a large maroon number '40' on the left. The zero is a circle containing a white wreath, a palm frond, a chalice, and a cross. To the right of the '40' is the text 'Days of Lament for Lent' in maroon, with 'Lament' in a larger font size.

40 Days of Lament for Lent

Welcome to the Season of Lent. For most of us this is an unsettling season of personal sacrifice and self-examination. Few of us approach Lent with joy; however, for many of us Lent offers precious days for honesty and truth telling within the Body of Christ. Walter Brueggeman writes that the life of faith is a life of orientation, disorientation, and reorientation. If this is true, then Lent is our season to admit our disorientation and claim a new reorientation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The process for this movement of the Spirit in our lives requires lament. Lament for our own sin. Lament for the suffering we endure. Lament for the world. Lament for all that is not right, oriented, and true, in spite of the grace of God. Without lament, our losses, shortcomings, and disappointments feel like punishment. However, through honest lament, we can discover a new way as we admit our disorientation and experience God's reorienting grace.

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Wednesday, March 5

A Lament Concerning Seeing Revival as a Moment Rather than a Movement

Read Acts 2

Reflection Questions:

- 1) You are a part of God's ongoing story. Recount from the moment of your baptism, from when you received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, some of the most critical moments of your ongoing spiritual journey.
- 2) What would have been lost if those who had received the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost had not devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and living as a community of faith?
- 3) How have our communities of faith fallen short—trading our revival moment for comfort and familiarity?
- 4) What can we do differently to be revived by the Spirit and live in ways closer to the Acts 2 church?

Prayer:

Lord, you remind us that we are always growing in your justifying and sanctifying grace. Remind us of our faithfulness and openness to the movement of the Holy Spirit, encouraging us to serve others in profound and transformative ways. May our search for the good community come after deep reflection and correction of our ways. May our lives reflect our belief that they are a living sacrifice for you. Remind us that you will always provide and care for our needs. Forgive us for falling short, but move us by your Spirit—revive us again, O Lord—to be your hands and feet, your servants of Christ in this world. Amen.

Thursday, March 6

A Global Lament Concerning Oppressive Regimes / Need for Military Defense / Lack of Peace

Read Isaiah 2:4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How does God intend for us to live together?
- 2) I am just one person; how can I bring change to the world?
- 3) Why do we humans find it necessary to treat one another with disrespect?
- 4) Where does "Peace" really begin?

Prayer:

Gracious God, You created the world and called it "good." We now live in a world torn apart by hatred, pain, and death. We each feel so helpless, for we are only one and the problem is global. What can we do? What do you wish us to do? Speak into our hearts and direct our steps so that we may be "peacemakers" and bring Hope to a divided and fragile world. Direct us today to fulfill your holy desire. Amen.

Friday, March 7

A Lament Concerning Idolatry in our Local Church

Read Psalm 119:25-48

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has idolatry left its effects upon the church today? What are the things that we are "holding onto" rather than following the Spirit? Do we see our churches as institutions or mission stations?
- 2) How do we deal with times when we sense the Living Spirit, but can hardly let it work its way before we try to capture and control it? How are we, the Church, any different from the culture?
- 3) What pain does this cause when we go after the comfortable, safe, and flashy world, rather than things of Spirit? What are the idols that you and I put before commitment to God? What are the things we want to happen before we follow Jesus?
- 4) How do we respond to this issue as a disciple of Christ and as the body of Christ, the Church?

Prayer:

All-loving God, in many ways, we are no different from our unbeliever brothers and sisters. We're fascinated with anything with an engine on it or the latest electronic wonder. Owning that kind of stuff gives us power. It makes us feel cool. We were raised to be competitive, so anything that gives us an edge over the other person seems irresistible. The bigger the item, the bigger we feel. You, O God, have to wonder where it's going to stop. We are the same way with our churches: the flashier the better, the bigger and more things we place inside it, even better. In our church, we confess that we have the tendency to gather with others who look just like us, rather than letting the church look like the diversity of the community around us. Teach us, O Lord, to be careful to keep "things" in perspective. They can steal too much of our time and attention. We move from one thing to the next, hoping "the next big thing" will do the trick. In all our activities we forget the first thing, "I am the Lord your God, you will have no other gods before me."

All-loving God, set us free this Lenten season. Enable your people, the Church, to set aside all the sins of the flesh and material world, and grant that we may be your agent to bring change to this world. May this day, we place all things in the proper place within our life. Amen.

Saturday, March 8

A Lament Concerning Cynicism and Hopelessness about the Future Blocking Revival

Read Psalm 90

Reflection Questions:

1. What has happened to discourage the Methodist revival in our time?
2. What most needs to be revived for us to be the people and the church God calls us to be?
3. What does God want for your life, for your church, for the United Methodist Church? What is your Godly vision for the future?
4. What can restore your hope? What are you willing to do to make that happen?

Prayer:

Eternal God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. But we're not sure we see another generation coming. Our church and society are falling apart. Corruption and immorality are rampant. Our government is in gridlock. Our church is in conflict. Expressions of hope seem like lip service to forsaken ideals. We don't see how we can get a revival going. But you can. You have created outbursts of the Spirit in the worst of circumstances. Do it again, Lord! Blow your Spirit into our gatherings! Give us the anointed tongues of witness! Prosper the work of our hands! Do it again, O God, for the sake of your Son. Amen.

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Monday, March 10
A Lament about Global Hunger and Poverty
Read Psalm 12

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What are the systems of injustice that perpetuate hunger and poverty?
- 2) What is it like for God to stand up for those who are oppressed, suffering, and groaning?
- 3) How is God faithful to those who are under-resourced?
- 4) How is the Church to be faithful to those who are under-resourced?
- 5) What is God calling you to do?

Prayer:

God who is Lord to all, whose pure promises contrast with the lies of those who oppress others, be merciful to us, and grant us a way to rise up and help others as you wish your faithful servants to do. Give us courage to move beyond acts of charity to transforming systems of injustice in order to permanently change lives, communities, and the world. May we hear, as we know you do, the groans and cries of those who hunger and thirst, and who eke out a daily living. Above all, Lord, continue to feed us all Living Bread and Living Water to quench our spiritual needs, that we may be sustained by your grace and fortified for the journey before us. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Tuesday, March 11
A Lament on Behalf of our Neighborhood and Mission Field First Responders
Read Psalm 91

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Can you name the persons who have dedicated their lives to protect your life?
- 2) Do you recognize the danger they live with to provide for your safety?
- 3) How would you say "thank you" to those who guard you?
- 4) Will you say "thank you" to a first responder today?

Prayer:

Lord, there are those around us who have chosen to place themselves in harm's way to protect and defend us. Help us to honor their service. Help us to provide and encourage them, as they stand ready to aid, assist, and sacrifice for our safety. We pray that you protect them in their service. Amen.

Wednesday, March 12
A Personal Lament Concerning Resistance to Change
Read Psalm 80

Reflection Questions:

1. The metaphor of a vine that God carefully plants and God's people is often used in scripture. How have you experienced God's careful guiding hand in your life?
2. The Psalm repeats the phrase, "**Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we might be saved.**" This indicates a corruption of what God intended. Where have you strayed from God's intended path for your life?
3. What changes are needed in your life or your congregation to be faithful to God's intention of a growing, fruitful disciple?
4. We all hate changes, yet all healthy living things do change. What are the things that have not changed in your life or in your congregation's life that are limiting God?

5. If our prayer is to *Restore us, O Lord*, then what needs to be restored?

Prayer:

Loving God, you gave me life through your **Prevenient Grace**. You saved my life through your **Justifying Grace**. Now you lead my life through your **Sanctifying Grace**.

Lord, forgive me when I cling to those things that are comfortable and reject those new things where you are leading. Forgive me when I cry out "enough" when you have so much more in store for me, and through me, so much more for others.

Lord, I release all that holds me back from becoming all that you have created me to be. I repent of insisting that the future must look as I think it should be. Give me eyes to see you at work doing a "new thing" within me and within your Church. Amen.

Thursday, March 13
A Relationship Lament Concerning our Self-indulgence
Read Psalm 14

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you have trouble practicing discipline in your life? What lies at the root of our lack of discipline?
2. What does God think it takes to make us happy?
3. How can the church help us renew our discipline together?
4. How can we make a witness to a culture of self-indulgence without being self-righteous?

Prayer:

Holy God, we have a strange idea of happiness. We think it's fun to do things that are ultimately self-destructive. We eat too much; we drink too much; we buy too much; we are unfaithful to our closest relationships. We have strayed from your goodness and righteousness, and we act like you don't exist. Turn my heart back to you. Fill me with your goodness and righteousness. Give me strength and courage to practice self-discipline, so I can truly be a disciple of my Lord Jesus. Restore all who come back to you, and we will rejoice. In the name of our Master, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Friday, March 14
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament Concerning Racism & Classism
Read Galatians 3:25-29, James 2

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How often do you speak about the reality of racism and classism (among other "isms") at home and at church?
- 2) What does it mean to be an heir to God's promises? Is anyone excluded from the promise?
- 3) Consider what James 2:1 means in relationship to racism.
- 4) What is the will of God, and what should be our obedient response?

Prayer:

Forgive us, O Lord, for the ongoing, obvious and subversive, divisive sin we have in our prejudices and preferences, in our racism and classism. May we repent! Receive our contrite hearts and grant that we will change our ways. Enable us to see our individual expressions of our sinfulness, as well as our corporate failings. We know that if we put our faith and trust in you, and if we watch the way Jesus

Christ led by example, exalting the lowly and lifting up the oppressed, then we shall be able to change our ways forever. All this to the end that the Kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.

Saturday, March 15
A Personal Lament about Apathy and Cynicism
Read Psalm 74

Reflection Questions:

1. **"O God, why do you cast us off forever?"** (verse 1) When did you believe that God had cast you off? What changed to reverse that belief?
2. **"How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?"** (verse 10) As our world becomes increasingly secular, God's name is increasingly reviled. Look inward and remember when, by your words, you brought dishonor to God. Consider how God's name has been attached to curses and abused. Pray for repentance and forgiveness.
3. **"Why do you (God) hold back your hand?"** (verse 11) When God seems distant to us, we often turn to apathy and hopelessness, a condition that is shared by many around the world. Reflect on how your growth as a disciple is weakened by cynicism and the expectation that nothing will change.
4. **"Yet God my King is from of old, working salvation in the earth."** (verse 12) The Psalmist claims God's working presence in our world, and in your life. When was this realization of God's active presence in your life most strongly felt?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, forgive me when I look at the world and see little or no hope. It seems that when problems arise, it is easier to just give up or criticize, instead of giving these problems to you. Lord, it is a false sense that the best times for our Christian faith are in the past and not in the future. When those thoughts arise, let me remember your faithfulness. Let me remember that you are victorious in all things, even to the end of the age. Amen.

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Monday, March 17
A Global Lament for Civil Unrest and Violence
Read Psalm 57

Reflection Questions:

1. Where are the places in the world where people "lie down with lions" because they cannot trust their neighbors?
2. What has caused the unrest in places like the Ukraine, the Central African Republic, and Egypt, where neighbors turn against their neighbors and families are divided by doctrine and dogma?
3. Imagine yourself in that place of fear and danger. What would you say to God?
4. What are the signs you see of God's presence in these places? Is there some way you can participate in bringing peace?

Prayer:

Dear God, send forth your love and faithfulness, for you alone are our peace. You are the source of justice we seek. You are the fountain of mercy we have forgotten. You are the wisdom we need when all our plans and systems crumble. As nations fall and your people suffer, we cry out for you to protect the innocent, comfort all who mourn, shelter any who are displaced, and reform this chaos for your Kingdom's sake. Amen.

Tuesday, March 18
A Personal Lament for Stunted Spiritual Growth
Read Psalm 25:10-14

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What new spiritual practices have you added to your walk with Christ?
- 2) How do you keep the spiritual disciplines alive and vital in your life?
- 3) How do you keep ministry fresh and vital in a constantly changing world?
- 4) Are you open to new ways to feed your soul? What are they?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, remind us each day how important it is to grow in your love and grace. Help us to constantly use the tools that you have given us to stay connected with you. Allow us to constantly discover the new riches of your Word. Guide us toward a life filled with prayer. May we always make time for daily prayer. Allow us to always worship you. When we come to your glorious table of grace, remind us and empower us to be your Church. Guide us to constant transformation in our walk with you. Amen.

Wednesday, March 19
A Personal Lament Concerning Spiritual Satisfaction and Comfort
Read John 14

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Would you describe your life as one of "quiet desperation"?
- 2) What is the foundation of your beliefs and values?
- 3) Who and what is most important to you?
- 4) Is Jesus Messiah, Savior, friend, confidant, and advisor to you?

Prayer:

We call you Lord, but what place do you really hold in our lives? Are you first when it is convenient? Do we call out when we are panicked? Do we invite you to join in our lives to live and breathe with us? Lord, search us and change us so that instead of a casual knowledge of you, we know you as the constant and faithful Savior who died and rose again. Amen.

Thursday, March 20
A Mission Field Lament for Corruption in Government
Read Psalm 43

Reflection Questions:

1. How does corruption in government impact your life?
2. Imagine your church's neighborhood; do you see effects of corruption in your mission field?
3. How can your church be a source of light and truth to those who have been victims of corruption?

Prayer:

Deliver us, O God, from leaders who are self-serving and corrupt. Protect us from cynicism and hopelessness, which numb our disappointment and tempt us to accept that things can never change. Open our eyes to see how corruption causes hardship for our neighbors, and give us the compassion to reach out and the courage to work for change, so that the mission fields where we worship and serve may reflect your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Friday, March 21
A Lament Concerning Resistance to Change in the Local Church
Read Acts 7:51

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Why are you surprised when the Holy Spirit gives a different direction to your life?
- 2) How far are you willing to go to resist that which God has instructed?
- 3) What are you willing to risk to become what God desires you to be tomorrow?
- 4) How will you communicate to others the change that God is bringing into your life?

Prayer:

We acknowledge that we are not the persons that you hoped we would be. The Holy Spirit moves within us, bringing us closer to you and your desire, but we resist and disagree. Our desire is inward and pleasing self instead of loving God and neighbor first. Work within us the miracle of living a life for Jesus, and in Jesus. Amen.

Saturday, March 22
A Relationship Lament Concerning Conflict
Read Psalm 41

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has conflict made an impact upon our relationships? What are the repercussions of the misuse of words and actions we have made in the midst of conflict with others?
- 2) How do you know God is present in relationships when so many are suffering?
- 3) What kind of personal pain does it create?
- 4) How do you respond to conflict as a follower of Christ?

Prayer:

O God of Love and Justice, forgive the conflict and suffering we have caused others: the malicious comment or hasty word that, once spoken, cannot be recalled; the self-indulgence that ignores real need; and the violence we wish upon our enemies. We admit our part in all the conflict, and pray for all the relationships of our lives, and for those interconnected in the world. Forgive us, too, for blaming you for the evil we could have avoided or prevented. Hear our words as we cry out that we, too, have been in conflict with our own selves and with others. Almighty God, set us free that we may reconcile our relationships with others. Guide us to an understanding of love and reconciliation with all our relationships, that we may experience unity and harmony with others and ourselves. Amen.

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Monday, March 24

A Relationship Lament about Divorce and Broken Relationships

Read the hymn "When Love is Found," No. 643 in the *United Methodist Hymnal*

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Why do we keep score of who is right or wrong in our most intimate relationships?
- 2) Why can't we work through the pain of betrayal or change to once again find love?
- 3) Why can't we see our partner through God's eyes?
- 4) What can I do today to resolve the emptiness and pain in my life?

Prayer:

Lord, you bless us with love to share. Along the way we have lost sight of the joy and fullness of our relationships, and they have become broken just as we are broken. Heal the brokenness of our lives and those connected to us so that when you have healed us, we may never break again. Amen.

Tuesday, March 25

A Lament about Burdensome Church Structure as a Barrier to Revival

Read Psalm 22

Reflection Questions:

- 1) We understand that we are part of the catholic (or universal) church, which unites Christians from all denominations. At the same time, we find ourselves frustrated at the larger church. What would you say is the most frequent frustration with the church universal?
- 2) What is the most frequent frustration with the United Methodist Church nationally?
- 3) What is the most frequent frustration with the Arkansas UMC?
- 4) With the new work in the Arkansas Annual Conference, where do you think we are missing the mark?

Prayer:

Loving God, the church is the incarnate body of Jesus in the world today. You have lifted up the people called Methodist to advance your Kingdom on earth as part of the larger Church. Forgive me when I attribute all that is wrong with my local congregation to the hierarchy. And forgive us when we care more about rules and order than people.

Lord, I ask for you to come in the power of your Holy Spirit to bring real revival to all our people, starting with me; and with all congregations, starting with my congregation. May we be a vital congregation that is focused on making disciples who make disciples, to the glory of God and in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Wednesday, March 26

A Personal Lament Concerning Spiritual Stagnation

Read Psalms 42-43

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What ignites your passion in your walk with God? When do you feel God nearest to your heart?
- 2) What happens that causes you to drift in your relationship with God? Why is it so hard to get back on track?
- 3) What are some practices that might help you renew your passion for the things of God?
- 4) When God restores your soul, what can you do to show your gratitude?

Prayer:

O God of living water, I thirst for your presence. I remember times when you seemed so close. But instead of drinking the living water, I feel drowned by the floods of despair. Sometimes I don't even know why I am so cast down, but sometimes I know exactly what has led me away from you. Save me again, God! Restore the joy of my heart, the passion of my spirit. Let me drink again from your fountain, and I will be made new. I will put my hope in you, and I will praise you, for you are my help and my God. Through Jesus Christ, Amen.

Thursday, March 27

A Lament for Pride

Read Psalm 36

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Read verses 1-4 again, replacing "them" and "their" with "me" and "my." Does the Psalmist speak for the condition of your soul?
- 2) How do you define pride? What is the opposite of pride?
- 3) Imagine yourself safe in the arms of God, where you do not have to do anything or know the answers. Instead, just rest there as a child of God.

Prayer:

Sheltering God, so much of my life is spent trying to prove to myself and others that I am worthy of your love. I do not trust you to be who you say you are, because I do not trust myself. I am puffed up and full of myself instead of seeking to be filled by you, and so often, I feel empty. Forgive me, so I can live as your child again, amazed by your faithful presence and content to be overshadowed by your grace and glory. Amen.

Friday, March 28

A Lament about Decline in our Local Churches

Read 2 Corinthians 4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How have you found yourself thinking about the decline of the Church?
- 2) What would you say to God about it?
- 3) How have you used your faith to be a channel of God's light to share the gospel with others?
- 4) What could be different for the Church after this Easter?

Prayer:

Almighty God, ruler of our hearts, it is by your mercy that we are able to engage in ministry in the world and in our churches. You make it possible and you inspire us to serve. Yet we watch as the world pulls others, and sometimes ourselves, away. We hold our breath, believing that what we experience as obvious—your love, mercy, and grace—will override the temptations and alternatives that keep people away from the church and from obedience to you. Our fears compel us to take risks, and sometimes to make compromises. Encourage us to speak as Paul and reveal the gospel, and commit to proclaiming the name of Jesus Christ to the world. May we stop seeing scarcity, decline, and darkness, and embrace a desire for the abundance of revival and renewal in an outpouring of your Spirit. Send us your light and cast out the darkness. Amen.

Saturday, March 29

A Global Lament for Poverty and Economic Disparity

Read Psalm 140

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How do you understand "I know that the Lord maintains the cause of the needy"? (verse 12)
- 2) How have you seen that "(the Lord) executes justice for the poor"? (verse 12)
- 3) As a disciple, in what ways has God called you to ministry FOR and WITH the poor?
- 4) As a disciple, how can we live faithfully in a world with a growing gap between the haves and the have-nots?

Prayer:

Holy God, today we pray for the needy and the very poor. We pray for the homeless and hurting. We pray for the confused and the lost. Lord, we pray for the millions who live on the edge of hunger, even in a land of plenty.

Give to us open hearts, minds, and doors, especially to those in great need, and regardless of whom they are. Move our world into a place where the gap between those with plenty and those with great needs is reduced. Finally, bless us so that we might be a blessing to you and to others. Amen.

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The process for this movement of the Spirit in our lives requires lament. Lament for our own sin. Lament for the suffering we endure. Lament for the world. Lament for all that is not right, oriented, and true, in spite of the grace of God. Without lament, our losses, shortcomings, and disappointments feel like punishment. However, through honest lament, we can discover a new way as we admit our disorientation and experience God's reorienting grace.

Such honesty is not for the faint of heart. It takes courage to admit when we are lost, afraid, ashamed, angry, and vengeful. Yet the scriptures, especially the Psalms, attest to the power of such honesty before God. When the faithful lament, we are always led to affirmation that God is with us and God alone can lead us to new life. Ultimately it is this new life, this reorientation that we seek when we enter Lent, knowing that it is through the cross that resurrection is possible.

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Monday, March 31
A Lament that Living in the Past Blocks Revival
Read 2 Corinthians 5:17

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has your faith matured since you first became a disciple?
- 2) When have you led another person to Jesus?
- 3) What sermon would your life preach?
- 4) Describe the ways you exhibit being a "new creature in Christ."

Prayer:

You have made us new creatures, following Jesus and led by the Holy Spirit. Our identity is found in your Spirit, and our purpose is to proclaim your Grace and Truth to broken lives and a broken world. We live in hope of your ultimate rule, when every knee shall bow and every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. Make it so, in us and through us. Amen.

Tuesday, April 1
A Relationship Lament for Grudges and Lack of Forgiveness
Read Psalm 32:1-2

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What are some of your grudges?
- 2) How old are some of your grudges?
- 3) Who have you forgiven and have you discovered a stronger relationship?
- 4) What is the greatest barrier you face in forgiving someone who hurt you?

Prayer:

Lord, you teach us to forgive, but it so hard. We are hurt and broken, and you are the only one who can make us whole. Help us from the brokenness of our lives, communities, church, and world. We are your disciples, but we live in broken relationships. Help us to know that forgiveness brings wholeness. Above all else, you are the God of forgiveness. Amen.

Wednesday, April 2
A Global Lament Concerning the Environment
Read Psalm 19:1-4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How do you understand creation as "God's handiwork?"
- 2) What does it mean to be a "steward" of God's creation?
- 3) Why do we ignore the many small ways to do long term damage to creation?
- 4) What simple steps to you or your congregation can do to care for the environment?

Prayer:

Almighty God, creator of this earth. Bless all who live on it and may it be filled with your glory and praise. Lord, help us to care for this precious gift that You have given to us. Help us to find new ways to be good stewards of this creation which you have blessed us with. Forgive us for the many ways that we neglect the most precious gift of all, the gift of one another and the gift of this earth. Amen.

Thursday, April 3
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament for Drugs and Addiction
Read Psalm 88

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How have drugs and addiction within individuals left an impact on families and communities? What are the effects not only to physical health, but also to family systems?
- 2) How is God present in places where individuals, families, and communities suffer?
- 3) How does all of this resonate within you?
- 4) How do you respond to this issue as a Christ follower?

Prayer:

Almighty God, we come to you and we pray for all those who struggle in the community and sit alone in the silence of their homes, struggling with addictions and abuse in all their forms.

We see the changes that addiction can make in a person, and the isolation that it brings in so many who try to cover up the effects, spinning into deeper layers of silence and being overwhelmed by life. It is truly the dark night of the soul and a heart cry of distress. In your mercy, Lord, be present with all of those who are caught up in its web and unable to see any way to be set free.

In your love, O God, set them free. Entrust to your church the avenues and ways to engage our communities, maybe even the home next door, to open doors of acceptance and support; to be your agent to stand alongside another. In love, may they know of your love that is always present. Amen.

Friday, April 4
A Global Lament for Natural Disasters
Read Psalm 29

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What has been your experience with natural disasters? Recall the times natural disasters have impacted your life.
- 2) How do natural disasters fit into your theology of the character of God?
- 3) How do you know God to be in the midst of natural disasters?
- 4) What can you do as a disciple of Jesus when natural disasters strike?

Prayer:

God of all creation, we feel anxious, frightened, and helpless in the face of the awesome destructive forces of nature. We know you created the world and called it good, and we wonder why your creation sometimes wreaks such havoc and pain on your children. But we trust in you. And we know that whenever we suffer, you are there with us. Be a Presence of strength and healing for those whose lives are devastated by floods, fires, drought, tornadoes, hurricanes, and the like. Empower us to be agents of compassion, through gifts and service, when we know of needs. Thus we seek to honor you. In the name of Christ, Amen.

Saturday, April 5
A Local Church Lament about Apathy
Read Psalm 51:6-12

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What are some examples of apathy within a worshipping community?
- 2) Why does a decrease in membership and worship attendance create an apathetic response?
- 3) As we look outward to our mission fields, how may we move beyond apathy to more effective ways to address communal issues?
- 4) Instead of apathy, what are some healthier emotional actions that can drive our mission and purpose?

Prayer:

Almighty God, we know that you are able to do all things. You are able to take our inward struggles and make them intentional actions. Take our attitudes about others and turn them into heart-felt movements. Guide us from life as a building and into being the living body of Christ. Lead us beyond apathy into making disciples, who then make disciples who transform lives, communities, and the entire world. Amen.

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Monday, April 7

A Lament that Self-Centeredness and Blindness to Needs of Others Blocks Revival

Read Psalm 10:1-4a

Reflection Questions:

- 1) We are often self-centered because of past pain. What are some past pains that have made you more focused on your needs than the needs of others?
- 2) Name a time that you have thought or said something hurtful about a person or a group of people.
- 3) When has your personal pride gotten in the way of a valued relationship?
- 4) How has humility been a blessing to your life and ministry?

Prayer:

Almighty God, your holy Word clearly states, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." Help us to be less prideful in all of our relationships. Allow us by your grace to see how to value others more than ourselves. We need your Spirit so that we can be a church that is driven by unity, not by pride. Help us to know that your love is stronger than pride. Amen.

Tuesday, April 8

A Lament for Bureaucratic Church Structures

Read Psalm 42

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What is the longing of your heart? Where do you experience dryness in your soul?
- 2) In what ways is the church vital to your spiritual growth?
- 3) Has there been a time when the church has made your journey more complicated than it needed to be? Can you name someone who has been disillusioned by the church?
- 4) What structures or practices make those outside the church ask, "Where is your God?"

Prayer:

God of the deep, from whom all healing waters flow, forgive us for the structures and practices that have dammed up your grace and changed the course of your love at work in the world. We admit that we love our organization—the committees, boards, and agencies which we have designed to help us fulfill our mission of making disciples. And we confess that sometimes this very organization can become an idol which demands more time and energy than we have for you or our mission. Help us to love you more than the institution, and lead us from mere maintenance to mission and ministry in your name. Amen.

Wednesday, April 9
A Personal Lament Concerning Hoarding
Read Psalm 13

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Hoarders: Have you watched them on TV or in your own neighborhood? What first comes to mind when you see all that junk? How is that a metaphor for your own spiritual life?
- 2) How does hoarding reflect a lack of trust in God to provide for us?
- 3) Could it be said that your congregation is hoarding the Good News? Keeping it to yourselves? Not sharing?

Prayer:

Lord God, I confess before you that my desires morph into needs that must be collected against a time of need. I confess that I prefer my silos full. I recognize that this is a spiritual condition, it is a lack of trust that you are faithful and that you will provide.

Like the Hebrews in the wilderness, I have tried to store up my manna only to find it ruined. Forgive my greed. The answer seems so simple: just throw out my extra stuff or give it to the thrift shop for others. But Lord, it is not so simple when it is so much a part of who I am.

So, Lord, remake me so that my trust is in you and you alone. And I will give you praise. Amen.

Thursday, April 10
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament about Crime and Violence
Read Psalm 54

Reflection Questions:

- 1) When have you experienced crime or violence toward yourself or someone you know? How did you feel or respond?
- 2) What do you think are the root causes of crime and violence?
- 3) Where does our faith say God is when a crime or violent act is committed?
- 4) As a disciple of Jesus, how can you respond if you become a victim? How can you respond toward other victims? How can you respond toward perpetrators of crime and violence?

Prayer:

God of all people, nothing makes us feel as vulnerable as the desecration of our bodies or property by violence or crime. It saddens our hearts when we hear of anyone killed or hurt by senseless acts. Help us seek justice and protection for those who are vulnerable. Help us find a way to forgive and love those who have hurt us or others. We know you are a God of both justice and mercy. Help us to follow you as we live in a dangerous world. In the name of Christ, who bore the wounds of violent men, Amen.

Friday, April 11
A Lament for Those Who Are Abused
Read Psalm 22

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What forms of abuse have you encountered? How has abuse damaged your life or the lives of others you have known?
- 2) How do you know God is present in such places of suffering?
- 3) Jesus quoted this psalm on the cross. Can you pray this psalm with hope?
- 4) What can you and your church do to heal the wounds inflicted by abuse in any form?

Prayer:

Self-giving God, you refused to play it safe and remain above the suffering of this world. You came to live among us and to suffer the wounds that we inflict upon each other in our sinfulness and pain. So we cry out to you, naming those who suffer and daring to pray also for their abusers. Redeem them all. Provide healing and hope. Pour out grace that allows forgiveness. Allow the church to be the voice for those who have been silenced. Give us courage to get involved, so we might be instruments of your saving power to free all who are oppressed by the misuse of power. Amen.

Saturday, April 12
A Personal Lament Concerning Speaking Ill of Others
Read Psalm 109

Reflection Questions:

- 1) **"In return for my love they accuse me, even while I make prayer for them"** (verse 4). Shades of Joseph, **"you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good..."** (Genesis 50:20). When did it happen in your life? In spite of others and all odds, God graced your life with good.
- 2) **"So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love"** (verse 5). Surely, you have had this happen to you. Think of the time you meant nothing but good and your words or actions were perceived as spiteful.
- 3) In a world of 24-hour news commentary, it is hard to believe anything anyone says. That attitude has bled over into the church. It is so easy to believe the worst about one another. When was the last time you discovered that your preconceived notions about another follower were wrong?
- 4) Reflect on why we as a society are so quick to believe the worst about others. Does this honor and please God, or is God's way one of forgiveness, repentance, and understanding?

Prayer:

Blessed Savior, you know above all the pain that comes when lies and half-truths are spread. You experienced it even on the cross. Forgive me, O Lord, when I speak before I know. Forgive me when my words are intended to tear down and not to lift up. Change my heart so that I look for the best in others. May I extend to them what I expect from them: the benefit of the doubt and the assumption that together we are sisters and brothers in Christ. Amen.

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Monday, April 14

A Relationship Lament for Isolation, Marginalization, and the Exclusion of Others

Read Psalm 142

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Who would find it difficult to be welcomed and accepted in your church?
- 2) What do you see as Jesus Christ's expectation when it comes to addressing the ways we perpetuate the exclusion of others?
- 3) Can you think of someone on "the outside"? Consider their position and what kind of relationship could be developed.

Prayer:

Precious Lord, Christ our Savior, and Holy Spirit our Comforter, remind us that not all your children are feeling the love and strength of your grace. May we open our ears, hearts, minds, and doors to listen to and receive those who find themselves shut out. Allow them to speak their truth, and enable us to hear. We place in your care these relationships, and trust that you shall enable us to build bridges in your name. Guide us into this work of restoration and transformation. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Tuesday, April 15

A Local Church Lament for Blindness to the Neighborhood

Read Psalm 137

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Does your local church look like its neighborhood?
- 2) Who are the people in the neighborhood of your church who would not feel comfortable coming to your church?
- 3) How would the people in your church react if neighbors who are not like you—racially, economically, educationally—began to show up?
- 4) Does God care who comes to your church?
- 5) As a disciple of Jesus, what can you do to make your church more open to the people who live near you?

Prayer:

God of red, yellow, black, white, and brown, of rich and poor, of every language, sometimes we feel like we're in a foreign land. We don't know our neighbors; we don't trust them; they make us nervous. How can we sing your song when the neighborhood has changed? How can we witness to people who aren't like us? Remove the blindness from our eyes and hearts, so we can really see those around us. Give us strength and courage to reach out, beyond the safe walls of our church buildings, to be in relationships with the folks around us. For we acknowledge they are your children, just as we are. Forgive us when we have been cliquish or condescending. In the name of Jesus, who even loved the Samaritans, Amen.

Wednesday, April 16
A Neighborhood and Mission Field Lament for Public Education
Read Psalm 119:71-73

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Take a moment to reflect on the public schools that are in your town or area. What are some deficiencies?
- 2) Is the environment of many of our public schools conducive for effective learning?
- 3) What role does privilege play in the decline of many public schools?
- 4) Think about a town that has recently lost its school. Lift them up by name, because to lose a school is, for some places, the beginning of the loss of community.

Prayer:

There are many schools all over this nation, Almighty God, that need your special touch. There are many schools that are in an area where crime, poverty, and neglect run rampant. Help us, O Lord, to see that every child's education is important. Grant us your grace to bridge the education gap. Use us as instruments of your peace. Show us ways to support, engage, and enlighten the young people of our world. Amen.

Thursday, April 17
A Lament for Consumerism and Our Lack of Personal Discipline
Read Psalm 10

Reflection Questions:

- 1) Did you give something up for Lent? What impact is that having on your life?
- 2) What do you want? What do you need? Do you believe this is God's desire for you?
- 3) How does it make you feel to imagine giving up your most prized possession?
- 4) Do you own your things, or do they own you?
- 5) How does getting what we want affect others?

Prayer:

Lord of all creation, we know that all things belong to you. Yet we live as if we are the masters of the universe. We are infatuated with what we can get. We are never satisfied by what we have. Our lives are ruined by our greed; we oppress our brothers and sisters to get more things, and we are destroying the planet so we can get more faster. What are we doing? Free us from our addiction to "more." Help us to recognize that we have enough, and to provide for others with the same energy and resources we spent getting things for ourselves. Open our hearts that we might know the joy of giving and the comfort of discipline. Lead us to lives of true freedom and justice for all. Amen.

Friday, April 18
A Personal Lament about Anger
Read Jonah 3-4

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has anger inserted a barrier between you and God? Between you and others?
- 2) Do you blame God, or harbor anger toward God, for something that has happened? How has that influenced your walk as a disciple of Christ?
- 3) How can anger be productive in the life of a Christ follower? In the church?
- 4) How do you see God at work, redirecting your concerns back to Christ and the movement of the Holy Spirit?

Prayer:

God of amazing grace, thank you for your unending, unyielding promise to love us, even when we set our hearts on anger and bitterness, thinking the world is unfair. You are merciful and wonderful. In our relationship with you and in our relationships with others, we ask that you relieve us of anger, that we may serve you with our whole hearts and hold nothing back. Forgive us, Lord. Rid us of the shame and guilt of our anger that we may be set free. Move us to be productive, helpful citizens of the Kingdom. Grant that we shall be restored in your mercy and grace. Thank you for hearing our prayer. What a relief it is. In your Son's name we pray, Amen.

Saturday, April 20
A Lament Confessing our Need for Revival
Read Psalm 80

Reflection Questions:

- 1) How has the need for revival become most apparent within our lives, our churches, and our Annual Conference? How is this revival the foundation for everything we do?
- 2) How do you know Jesus' unconditional love that it is so transforming that we are reconciled with God, and given a new way of living that is eternal?
- 3) What kind of pain do we experience when we turn away from spiritual revival?
- 4) How will we respond in bringing healing, hope, justice, and transformation in lives, communities, and the world?

Prayer:

We pray to you, Almighty God, to show us the way to a spiritual awakening and revival, in such a way that we may become anew in your Spirit. We pray for renewal and enthusiasm that leads us away from our disorientation of self that has so long impacted our lives. Our prayer for revival is to help us see what you are calling us to do and to be, right here and right now. We as your servants and your Church await your coming. Come Holy Spirit, and lighten our ways. We pray as the Psalmist prayed, "O God, restore us and cause Your face to shine upon us, and we will be saved." Amen.