

A Practice: Lamenting with Movement

The authenticity necessary to thrive through the ups and downs of life requires that we remain open and alive to loss and pain in our lives. When we feel profound emotional pain, sadness and anger grip us tightly—the experience is gut wrenching and jaw clenching. Pain that evokes such a physical response is worthy of our attention and energy.

Although reeling in pain is part of a process of healing and change, lament is not an endpoint. While lament is a response to our most profound sorrow, it allows us to consciously engage our loss and sorrow in a proactive way, directing us toward those things that matter most. Lament calls us to awaken to the meaning of our losses, align our hearts with others sharing those losses, and it points us towards our purpose. In the Christian worldview, we are not left alone with our pain and suffering, but lament invites us to share our sorrows and find meaning with God. Lament does not leave us alone in our reeling, but invites us to engage our pain in the context of redeeming love.

When I feel heavy hearted and find myself wondering if I'll break down, praying with some form of movement is cathartic and helpful for me. Sometimes, praying with movement enables me to break open to what is being asked of me at that moment, rather than just breaking down in overwhelming grief and sorrow.

I have found this exercise effective in helping me hold the complexity of life in mind and heart during times of despair. When we find ourselves in despair, we are confronted by the loss or violation of those things that matter most.

An Active Prayer of Lament

1. Take a moment to extend your arms in front of you and open your hands in a meditative or prayerful way. Imagine one hand holding those things that bring you profound sadness, anger, and grief. Feel the weight of what that hand holds. If you can, picture all that hand holds. What are the beliefs that undergird those feelings? How heavy or light is that hand? What shape do you want to make with that hand? Maybe shaking your fist? Maybe dropping it in despair? Let your hand and arm move in that way.
2. In your other hand, imagine holding all that you're grateful for and those things that bring joy and delight. Contemplate your best strengths and abilities in that hand and envision those closest to you whom you trust. Think about who and what gives you hope, even if it's just a shard of hope today. What shape do you want to make with that hand? Do you want to raise it in praise? Shake it with joy? Let your hand and arm move in that way?
3. Now look at your two hands. Allow yourself to feel the full weight of what they bear. Which is heavier? Why? Consider raising your hands—as you do, offer these joys and sorrows to God, or to whom you seek consolation, and be mindful of those things which matter most to you. To complete the exercise, draw your hands together towards your heart—symbolizing the fullness and complexity of life—and acknowledge all that it takes to bear these joys and sorrows. Take a moment to ask what these complexities invite you to.

Lament involves a response

Lament allows us to recognize how deep and overwhelming our feelings are, and to intentionally contemplate what these feelings are asking us to do in response. They allow us to act in order to address the grief, right wrongs, and console sadness. In other words, carefully and consciously, we need to allow the pain, anger, sadness, and grief to ripple through us and draw us to our foundational beliefs and values about justice and human life. We need to allow those feelings to shake us into action and to take steps that align our beliefs with our actions.

Lament is a passionate expression of grief, and we see this as people lift their voices and act for change. When we are aware that our lament is woven into a much bigger story than our own, it does not minimize our grief or suffering, but gives our suffering greater meaning. In this way, we are called to lift up both hands—one with gratitude for goodness, and the other lamenting for loss and what we long for. We are not called to do this alone. As a community, we must lift our hands together—both in lament and gratitude.

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<https://thethrivecenter.org/a-practice-lamenting-with-movement/>