

# COVID as a Spur to Prayer and Lament

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This follows the 'Faith-Based Facilitation' model. You may wish to consider the 'Four Theological Voices' when reading Scripture (NB all references are from the NIV, 2011). Please see OurHub for details.

## Introduction - The issue

### Lament

- A crying out in grief (Merriam-Webster, Inc, 2021).
- A formal expression of sorrow or mourning, especially in verse or song (Dictionary.com, LLC, 2021).
- To feel deep sorrow or express it ... by weeping or wailing (Collins, 2021).

### Prayer and lament in the COVID-19 research

In 2020 the Research and Development Unit conducted a territorial-wide piece of research to explore how COVID-19 has affected missional thinking and practice during the pandemic and going forward. As part of this research a literature review identified key missional trends that emerged during the pandemic, of which prayer and lament featured as a significant priority in allowing churches to reflect on their role in the pandemic, rather than rushing to solutions (Quinn-Graham, 2020).

23% of Corps Officers surveyed during the pandemic claimed they felt God was telling them to slow down, reflect and spend time in prayer to discern how to move forward missionally in the future (Knuckey, 2020).



### Questions for reflection

- Where do you see prayer and lament fitting into the Five Marks of Mission?
- How might lament help in mission where you are?

## The First Steps - Why lament?

You may be questioning the value of lament as the church seeks to move out of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly as it may seem counter-intuitive to dwell on the past as we seek to move forward. However, after a traumatic experience, communities may need to corporately debrief to process their anger, frustration and sadness, and to move forward. Within Christian communities lament can provide an opportunity for this, allowing people to gather, reflect

and move on following events that have caused pain and suffering. According to Dr Hugh Osgood (Osgood et al, 2020), President of Churches Together in England:

“ If we don’t weep over situations, we’re not going to see situations change. ”

Lament can be an individual or a group process. In the context of COVID-19 church communities may wish to lament over various issues including:

Our own sins and complicity in the context of COVID-19

What has happened in our society and context, including an expression of sorrow and grief

The lost opportunities due to COVID-19

### Questions for reflection

- What has been lost during COVID-19 that might need to be lamented by you and your corps or spiritual community? Have there been new births missed? Healthy habits lost? What about long-awaited treatment for physical or mental health conditions?



## Going Deeper - Where is lament in Scripture?

**Psalms** More than a third of the Psalms are psalms of lament. Some psalms that remind us to direct our pain and suffering at God include Psalm 6: 6-9; Psalm 22:1-2; Psalm 22:1-2.

**Job** Job demonstrates a model of individual lament that Stillman (2020) describes as ‘turn to God, voice your complaint, ask boldly, trust in God’.

**The life of Jesus** There are various points throughout Jesus’ life where we get glimpses of lament, where Jesus weeps and expresses regret and sadness. In John 11:32-35, before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus wept and mourned the loss of his friend. In Matthew 27:45-46 we see Jesus cry out, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (*‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’*).

### Questions for reflection

- Does anything in these verses stand out to you as significant in your own journey through the pandemic? How about others’ journeys?
- Are there themes linked to lament that you feel God has been speaking to you or your corps or spiritual community about?
- Can you think of any other Scripture that your corps or spiritual community might find useful in prompting a time of lament?



## Reflection - What could lament look like for me and my corps or spiritual community?

### Start the conversation

Gather some people from your corps or spiritual community and start a conversation about lament. You could begin by asking them what they already know about lament and then build on this by sharing relevant parts of Scripture.

### Questions for discussion

- How do you feel about the idea of lament?
- What would you find useful in processing loss from the pandemic either individually or with this community?
- How could we create spaces to lament as we move out of the pandemic?
- Following the Four Theological Voices, how do you think your espoused voice (what you say you believe) and your operant voice (what you live out) align in the case of lament?

## Create spaces to lament

You and your corps or spiritual community know what will work best for you. However, here are some ideas to prompt you. Thank you to Lieut-Colonel Jayne Roberts, Secretary for Spiritual Life Development, for these suggestions:

### Storytelling

Two or three people from your corps or community could record their stories from the pandemic to build solidarity and help people to feel more able to acknowledge or share their own stories and experiences.

### Dedicating a space

With an event as devastating as this pandemic, people may need more than a one-off moment to lament. Why not dedicate a noticeboard or the corner of a room or hall to lament, where people can write, draw, or engage in other creative ways to process their experiences?

### Think about lament as mission

Just as you and your corps or spiritual community need space to lament and process your experiences of the pandemic, so does your wider community. Part of loving our local communities right now may be providing them with space to lament and to see the church wailing and weeping but still choosing, ultimately, to trust in God.

### Sharing

Ask people what they can offer each other. Is there a particular Scripture someone has found helpful during this time that they could share with someone else? If you have a WhatsApp or Facebook group, you can use this to share these resources with each other.

### Utilise small groups

If you have regular small groups, why not dedicate some of the prayer time during those meetings to prayers of lament? In fact, lament can also include a time of silence or space for people to respond in unstructured prayer as they feel prompted to do so.



## Moving Forward - Prayer and lament resources

### Resources

- [World Council of Churches - Voices of Lament, Hope and Courage](#)
- [Paul S Williams - Chapter 5: Learning to Lament, from Exiles on Mission](#)
- [Tearfund - COVID-19: Lament](#)

### Contacts

- Major Christine Kingscott, Prayer Network at THQ  
(Christine.kingscott@salvationarmy.org.uk)
- Your divisional prayer coordinator

We hope you have found this helpful. A bibliography for this chapter and the full COVID-19 booklet that addresses key themes in greater detail is available on OurHub. If you have feedback or any ideas you'd like to share, email [rdu@salvationarmy.org.uk](mailto:rdu@salvationarmy.org.uk).