

*Ritual of Reflection for the Anniversary of the Beginning of the  
Pandemic*

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(adapted with permission from the “Blessing for Times of Loss and/or Gratitude,” from the Nilsen Family’s [\*For Everything A Season: 75 Blessings for Life’s Milestones\*](#) [for Daily Life])

As we approach the year anniversary of the first shelter-in-place orders, and as we look back on a year that altered most of our lives in ways we could never have imagined, many of us are wondering how to mark this strange, unbidden anniversary. In this past year we have each experienced, witnessed, and accompanied others through profound grief. Often, loss upon loss upon loss. 2.5 million deaths the world over from Covid, a ½ million of those deaths here in the U.S. And that’s “just” the deaths from Covid. Then there’s the sickness, the endless special events cancelled, the stresses on mental and physical health and relationships, the injustices, the traumas, the tragedies, the list goes on and on and on.

How do we make space to honor not only our grief over the suffering and losses, big and small, but also the gifts, the learnings and the wisdom that have emerged from this painful year?

This is a simple ritual of reflection to honor both the grief and the gratitude that may arise as we look back on this year. It can be done alone or shared with others. You may find yourself wanting to do this on the anniversary of a “LAST” (the last day school met in person; the last day of in-person worship...) or on the anniversary of a “FIRST” (the first time you couldn’t hug a family member when you saw them; the first time you couldn’t be there to comfort a friend when they needed you).

In this ritual of reflection, you are invited to recognize joy and suffering, gratitude and grief, life and death by honoring without shame the losses of this past year big and small; by naming without shame any gifts that accompanied these unbidden losses for which you are truly grateful; and finally by giving language to what you have learned, what wisdom you have gained, and how you want to live differently having experienced what you have experienced.

As with any loss, the first anniversary can be both a tender, fragile time and a powerful opportunity to metabolize those losses — allowing our grief to deepen and mature us, to grow us up in some fundamental way, so that we can pass down whatever grief we have experienced to the next generation as wisdom and beauty rather than as burden.

## **Preparation**

To prepare, you will want to have something to write on and something to write with. In addition, if you'd like, you can light a candle, and also fill a cup with water for each person participating, for a small ritual action at the end. Feel free to pause the video now to gather what you need.

## **Welcome**

*For Everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. Welcome to this time for grieving and giving thanks.*

## **Prayer**

*Let us pray. God of faith, hope and love, after one year of living in a pandemic, this prayer rises before you from hearts filled with both loss and gratitude. Be present with us during this time, and give us all we need for the day and whatever is to come. Amen*

## **Scripture**

*Hear these words from the book of Lamentations, the 3rd chapter.  
The thought of my suffering and homelessness  
is bitter beyond words.  
I will never forget this awful time,  
as I grieve over my loss.  
Yet I still dare to hope  
when I remember this:*

*The faithful love of [God] never ends!*

*[God's] mercies never cease. (Lamentations 3:19-22, NLT)*

## **Reflection**

In the next few minutes I'll be offering four prompts for you to reflect on. If you are by yourself, give yourself as much time as you need to write on each of the questions. If you are with others, you might take time to write for a few minutes first, and then share aloud, or simply use the prompts as a way to start the sharing. After each prompt, pause the video, and then resume it when you are ready to move on to the next reflection question.

So we begin. As you look back on the past year, what have *your* losses been? For what do you grieve? (Covid-related or not; big or little; people or animals; personal or public; tangible or intangible; experiences or opportunities; beliefs or assumptions; what did happen and what didn't happen;...) Simply reflect on what has been lost, and notice the feelings that arise as you name these losses. You may want to start your reflection with the words,

***I have lost...***and then complete the sentence.

Now as you look back on the past year, what have the gifts been for which you are grateful? Even, and sometimes especially in

painful times, there are unexpected gifts. What are those gifts for you, and notice the feelings that arise as you name what you are grateful for.

You may want to start your reflection with the words, **I am grateful for...**and then complete the sentence.

Now as you look back on your experiences, the losses and gifts of the past year, what have you learned (about self, others, etc.) and what wisdom have you gained?

You may want to start your reflection with the words, **What I have learned, and the wisdom I have gained is...**and then complete the sentence.

Finally, as you reflect on what you have discovered so far, what thoughts arise about how you want to live differently now.

You may want to start your reflection with the words, **Given everything I have experienced, lost and gained from this year, how I want to live differently now, is...**and then complete the sentence.

### **Ritual Action**

If you have a cup with water, take four sips to honor the losses, the gifts, the learnings and the wisdom from this year. If you don't

have a cup, take your hands as if you are scooping up water, and bring your hands to your mouth four times drinking it all in — the losses, the gifts, the learnings, the wisdom.

## **Blessing**

And in closing, repeat these words of blessing from the book of Lamentations: *“The faithful love of God never ends! God’s mercies never cease.” Amen*