

Hello, dear family of God. This is pastor Renée Antrosio, welcoming you to the 4th teaching in our series on Lament. I appreciate Sharon Chubbuck starting by outlining the steps of lament- speaking **Face-to-Face with God, honestly pouring out our complaining, pain, regrets. Asking God to Act-** which is not the same as jumping into action ourselves. Looking for God's response of **Comfort, Presence, Forgiveness, and Transformation. And then Trust, a renewed faith and hope,** in the midst of our lives, which are a mystery of suffering and joy. Pastor Emeritus Ron Simkins articulated those steps as Truth, Tears, Turning, and Trust. Today we will look at the example of Daniel and how his prayer models what we can put into practice.

As we face the Truths of our broken world, we are easily overwhelmed. In a culture that so often forces us into false binary choices, we hear concern for one group as lack of care for another. How do we resist that false narrative, as Jesus modeled in his time, refusing to be pigeon-holed into one group or another? Jesus loved both the wealthy young ruler and the widow mired in poverty. Jesus healed households of a Roman centurion, a Syrophoenician woman, and a synagogue official. Jesus was faithfully Jewish, sought out Samaritans, and anointed Paul to preach to the Gentiles. Jesus appointed 12 Jewish men as disciples and consistently chose women as companions, messengers, and witnesses. Jesus dined with Pharisees and with tax collectors. Jesus resisted the false binaries of his day- that identity in or care for one group meant a rejection of another.

Our focus on Reparations for Black Americans does not mean that we don't care about Native Americans, or Asian Americans, or Muslim Americans, or LGBTQ+ Americans, or Jewish Americans, or rural white Americans, or all the other overlapping categories of identity of people in our country who are struggling. When we acknowledge the brokenness of our systems- our schools, our healthcare, our politics, our law enforcement, our banking- we also need to acknowledge that there are people doing their best to faithfully serve God and serve people within those systems, to bring light and love in places of darkness and suffering. When we look closer at Daniel today, we see someone who has risen to a place of authority in the empire that took him away in exile; he serves within an ungodly system while being faithful to Yahweh and longing for his homeland. We, too, want to serve God faithfully in this broken world while we keep our heart set on our true homeland, our citizenship in God' kingdom.

As we grieve wars around the world- for the people of Ukraine and the people of Russia, the people of Gaza and Lebanon and all residents of Israel; the people of Myanmar; the people of Maghreb and Sudan; the people of Mexico; - regions of ongoing violence and terrible death tolls- suffering in which our own country is often complicit. We acknowledge our international policies have often supported corrupt

regimes and waged unholy war- the list of damage done in countries around the world by our empire is long. We pray for wars to cease, for mercy and justice and healing.

And so today, I want to turn to one of the great prayers of the Hebrew Bible where Daniel beseeches Yahweh on behalf of his people, owning the sins of the leaders and the generations before him as his own sins, taking collective responsibility with truth, tears, turning, and trust.

Daniel is a Hebrew in exile, taken captive as a youth when the Babylonians conquered Judah. When Judah's kings rebelled, the Babylonians besieged and then destroyed Jerusalem, looting the temple and plundering the city. The context begins with the book of Jeremiah, as Daniel referenced in the reading by Melissa and Steve/Paige and Jubal.

These are the words of Jeremiah, Hilkiyah's son, who was one of the priests from Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. The Lord's word came to Jeremiah in the thirteenth year of Judah's King Josiah, Amon's son, and throughout the rule of Judah's King Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, until the fifth month of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah, Josiah's son, when the people of Jerusalem were taken into exile. Jeremiah 1:1-3

This is quite a stretch of time of various kings and prophets, revolts and exiles. Like Daniel, I tried to put together a timeline to understand how the political events and the Hebrew prophets correspond. I consulted with Ron, looked up dates online and in Study Bibles, and went down the rabbit hole of research. What is important for us to know in order to contextualize Daniel's prayer?

Daniel is one of Jerusalem's elite, chosen and trained for leadership in the Babylonian empire. He participates in the ruling system and gains rank and notoriety in his service to multiple kings. He is thriving in exile; though there were points of danger for him and his friends where they almost got themselves killed, God delivered them. The book of Daniel is about being faithful in difficult places and God being present with God's people in whatever circumstance they find themselves. In the beginning of this passage in chapter 9, Daniel is trying to do the math to figure out how long the exile will last.

In the first year of Darius' rule—Darius, who was Ahasuerus' son, a Median by birth and who ruled the Chaldean kingdom— I, Daniel, pondered the scrolls, specifically the number of years that it would take to complete Jerusalem's desolation according to the Lord's word to the prophet Jeremiah. It was seventy years. I then turned my face to my Lord God, asking for an answer with prayer and pleading, and with fasting, mourning clothes, and ashes. Daniel 9:1-3

By Daniel's calculation, the time of desolation should be coming to an end. Or maybe it is overdue. Or maybe he is trying to hasten or shorten it. Consulting the scriptures causes him to take the issue to God. This is not a casual, everyday kind of prayer. Daniel devotes himself to this prayer completely with words and actions. This is an intense time focused on one issue- his people in exile.

As I prayed to the Lord my God, I made this confession:

Please, my Lord—you are the great and awesome God, the one who keeps the covenant, and truly faithful to all who love him and keep his commands: We have sinned and done wrong. We have brought guilt on ourselves and rebelled, ignoring your commands and your laws. We haven't listened to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our leaders, our parents, and to all the land's people. Daniel 9:4-6 (CEB)

It's important to note that Daniel personally has not done any of these things. The first half of the book of Daniel speaks of the faithfulness of Daniel- how he talked the guards into allowing him and his friends to keep kosher in the palace while they were being trained as leaders, how he asked God to show him King Nebuchadnezzar's dreams and interpretation in order to save all the sages including himself and his friends from being killed, how he prayed to God three times a day facing Jerusalem even when King Darius made a law that for thirty days anyone who prayed to anyone except him would be thrown into a lion's den, and God sent a messenger to shut the lions' mouths and save him. The sins that Daniel is confessing as his, as "we", he himself was not party to.

Daniel is our model. Not that we blame people groups for disasters that come upon them, but that we take responsibility as citizens for the brokenness of our past and our present. Daniel prays out of love for his people, for the ways in which they fell short of their ideals and their calling. Every nation falls short of their potential; each has its brokenness. Like Daniel, we own the brokenness of our past, and pray for mercy for our future. Protesting that we didn't own slaves, or steal Native American land, or fight in various wars, or exploit migrant workers, or support tyrants and terrorists, or vote for various presidents- that we didn't participate in the sins of our nation- is not the way of righteousness. We are called to pray as Daniel did, confessing the sins of our nation as ours.

Lord, we are ashamed—we, our kings, our leaders, and our parents who sinned against you. Compassion and deep forgiveness belong to my Lord, our God, because we rebelled against him. We didn't listen to the voice of the Lord our God

by following the teachings he gave us through his servants, the prophets. Daniel 9:8-10 (CEB)

One of my questions as we embarked on this series is how we are to lament communally. What does that process look like? How can we lament together on Sunday, gathered as a fellowship, confessing and mourning and begging for mercy? While also rejoicing in the gift of the Holy Spirit, friendships new and old, the ability to sing and make music together. Today's teaching is going to be in two parts. As we have voiced some of the reasons for lament- and hold many more in our hearts- we are going to take these to the Lord in a space of music, pausing here to practice, to engage our senses beyond our thinking minds.

[Steve Bell](#) is a Canadian singer songwriter who has also covered several of Jim Croegaert's songs, which is how I came to know of him. Today we are going to listen to the instrumental of his [Moon over Birkenau, performed with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra](#). I encourage you to give yourself space to feel the pain and the hope, the suffering and the joy, and whatever the music evokes in you. It is about 6 minutes long, which gives us some time to express a range of feelings to God. With Daniel we say

We pray our prayers for help to you, not because of any righteous acts of ours but because of your great compassion. My Lord, listen! My Lord, forgive! Daniel 9:18b-19a (CEB)

This is a space for us to focus on our hearts and emotions in God's presence together. May the space of this music allow you to turn to God- face to face- lamenting the brokenness of our world and our part in that brokenness- and to allow God to give the comfort of presence and forgiveness, that our hope might be strengthened as we learn to trust more fully in the God of the Universe.

Hello, again friends. I pray that was a helpful practice for you. As each of us responds to music in different ways, I encourage you to seek out art and music that help you in this process, and even to share them with friends as we continue on this journey together.

I was reminded again this week of the mysterious connection between joy and suffering. The [Oct 7 meditation of the Center for Action and Contemplation](#) delves into this mystery, beginning with a quote from Christian Wiman, Everything Belongs podcast:

There is some inexplicable connection between suffering and joy. One of the greatest graces of this existence is that we are able to experience joy in the midst of suffering. We might not be able to experience happiness. You can't in the midst of suffering, but there can be moments of great joy in the midst of the worst suffering. I take that to reveal that these two things are raveled up in ways that we don't understand, but which are essential to our existence.

—Christian Wiman, *Everything Belongs* podcast

Father Richard Rohr shares his deepening understanding of the relationship between tragedy, tears, and joy:

I keep being more and more convinced that tears are an appropriate response to reality. I think they always will be, yet I don't equate that with modern depression or cynicism. It's the acceptance of what we cannot change that normally makes people cry: He's dead forever; I'm never getting well; the church I love has never been perfect. The part of us that can surrender to that reality is somehow bright. Remember, God is always present in reality as it is, not merely as it should be. When we meet people who can smile in the presence of sadness, there's a brightness about them—a clarity, a truth, and a freedom. -Richard Rohr

This series on Lament is not to depress us or to become cynical or to divide us by emphasizing one tragedy or area of brokenness at the seeming neglect of another. Our tears are an appropriate response to reality in which God is somehow present in the suffering- present with us as we mourn our part in the brokenness and present with the victims of our violence. And we savor the moments of joy and beauty, both individually and communally. Gorgeous fall days, bonfires, pumpkin carving. Gratitude for the blessings and mercies of our everyday lives.

Perhaps you have noticed that the Biblical examples of lament often include fasting. At this critical time in our own nation's story, we too may be called upon to fast and pray for God's mercy and forgiveness.

This past week I have been listening to stories set in the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl, Georgia in the 1930s and the terror of the Ku Klux Klan. I attended an art exhibition in Marfa, Texas entitled *To the River*- a documentary of the Rio Grande by Zoe Leonard of five years of photographing the border and the river from west of El Paso to the Gulf of Mexico from 2016-2021. Meanwhile, in Texas from 2019-2022, there was a 56% rise in maternal mortality, compared to an 11% rise in maternal mortality nationwide. The song that follows this teaching is also entitled *To the River*. *To the River*,

I am going, bringing sins I cannot bear. Come and cleanse me, come forgive me, Lord I need to meet you there.

As we listen and sing, we acknowledge that we cannot bear the sins of our nation on our own. We need to bring them to the Lord, for forgiveness and freedom from despair. May we experience the healing waters, as we turn again and again, asking for faith and deeper trust in the God of our salvation.