

INTRO

Jennifer started her sermon by sharing that life can feel like an escape room.

Have you ever engaged with an escape room before? What was the experience like for you? Did you make it out in the end?

The focus of the sermon wasn't on a particular passage but a theme that comes up in both the book of Job and James - contentment.

"We know God calls us to contentment, but there are so many hindrances, and we lack the wisdom to find the key and escape from our fear, resentment, and disappointment into a space of true contentment."

On a scale of 1-10, how would you measure the level of contentment in your life at the moment?

As you think about your current level of contentment:

- **What do you think has helped you experience increase your level of contentment?**
- **What do you think have been hindrances to you experiencing higher levels of contentment?**

IDEA 1

Jennifer shared 4 statements of wisdom with us about how we can experience true contentment in our lives:

- Choose to worship God in all circumstances
- Accept the mystery of God's ways
- Release your expectation of certain outcomes
- Put your trust in God and God alone

Which of these statements have you seen lead to contentment in your own life?

Which of these have you found challenging to apply?

Which of these do you sense God might be leading you to grow in?

IDEA 2

In helping us to further understand true contentment, Jennifer explained what contentment is not. It's not resignation and it's not fatalism.

How would you explain the difference between contentment and resignation or fatalism? What is the fruit of contentment in our lives? What is the fruit of resignation/fatalism?

Read the quote from John Mark Comer below:

"We're no longer trying to get God to bend our life into the shape we want; we're trying to learn how to live with genuine joy inside the contours of the life we actually have. Not the life we thought we'd have, or wanted to have, or wished we had...You must find the goodness of God in your actual life."

What is your reaction to this quote? What do you resonate with? What about it creates resistance in you?

Where do you see the "goodness of God in your actual life" right now?

EXPERIENCING GOD TOGETHER

As part of the Experiencing God Together section for this series, we will be utilizing the Practice of Lament packet included below.

***If you don't have copies for your Life Group already, we recommend printing off a copy for each member so that they can write in and refer to it throughout the series. Also if you are concerned that people will forget to bring their Practice of Lament packet to the group each week, encourage them to leave it with you, or in the room you meet in (if possible).*

EXPERIENCING GOD TOGETHER

This week we are engaging with the fourth and final step of writing our own lament - Choosing to trust

Turn to page 7 & 8 in your Practice of Lament packet and read through these pages out loud together.

After, allow time and space (7-10 minutes) for each person to finish writing out their lament.

PRACTICE THIS WEEK

“As Christians, suffering gives us an extraordinary opportunity to share our faith. People want to know why we’re different. Why we’re not bitter. Why the flames haven’t destroyed us. Especially when the heat seems unbearable. There’s nothing unusual about Christians who are happy in prosperity. That’s natural. Even expected. But joy in suffering is supernatural. The world takes notice. It is in our darkest moments, hottest fires, and deepest pain that we have the greatest opportunity to share the gospel; people want to know the reason for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). A few of us may end up giving our lives for the gospel. Some of us may proclaim Christ through indescribable and extraordinary suffering. But all of us can show the surpassing worth of Christ to others through our mundane, often daily, trials. People want to see how we respond to our challenging children. Our chronic pain. Our difficult boss. Our financial struggles. Our ailing parents. Our unwanted singleness. The situations that we wish were most different are likely the places that others are watching us most closely. They are each, therefore, a precious opportunity to share how Christ meets us in our suffering. Tell people about the hope in you, how God has met you, why your faith has made a difference in your trials. It is the most powerful witness you have.”

This week, as you notice your places of suffering and pain, what could it look like for these to be an opportunity to share with others about the hope that you have in Christ?



TRUST: JOB AND JAMES

WISDOM, HUMILITY & WORSHIP FOUND THROUGH SUFFERING.

Practice of Lament

practice of lament

Over the next 4 weeks, we will be walking through the four movements of lament: ***turning to God, bringing your complaints, asking boldly and choosing to trust.***

For this first lesson we will focus on **Turning to God.**

To lament isn't simply to experience grief or cry out in our pain. It's the process of turning to God, of crying out to Him in our grief and pain.

As we look at the life of Job, he did exactly that. Rather than staying silent about his suffering or allowing his bitterness to turn into unbelief, he expressed it all to God (**Job 30:20**).

In the same way we are invited to address God in our pain as we come to Him.

In the space on the next page, start writing out your lament by turning to God. Think about a situation in your life or someone else's that is causing grief and pain and cry out to God about it. Don't be surprised if this feels slightly awkward. For many of us, it is exercising a new muscle as we learn to lament.

Having engaged with the first movement of lament in the previous lesson (turning to God), we will now move on to the second movement: **Bringing your complaints to God**—our fears, worries, concerns, doubts, confusion, hardships, etc.

The practice of godly complaint can feel foreign to many Christians.¹⁰ We often associate complaining with a lack of faith or a sign of immaturity in our suffering. And yet the Bible is full of examples of people bringing their complaints to God. Job did this very well. Throughout this book, we see Job specifically naming the injustices he experienced in his life (**Job 6:29; 16:2; 17:2**). He brought his questions and frustrations to God, all with an unfiltered and unedited honesty. (**Job 3:11-12; 7:19; 9:22; 13:24; 17:6-9; 21:7-18**)

It seems that instead of our complaints being a lack of faith or maturity, it is the biblically appropriate and faith-filled response to bring the injustices, disappointments, and sorrows we and others experience in this broken world to God.

On the next page, continue writing out your lament by bringing your complaints to God. Try not to filter or edit your words as you do. It may be that some of what you write doesn't sound theologically accurate or "appropriate" for a Christian to say (**Job 3:3**). That's okay. That's part of embracing the messy and necessary process of lament.

The third movement of lament is to **Ask Boldly**.

It can be tempting to camp out in complaint and/or to let our complaints consume us. And yet the practice of lament now instructs us to ask boldly—“to fix our eyes on God and specifically call upon Him to act in a manner that fits His character.”

In the Bible we see that there are many examples of what it looks like to ask boldly. The examples include calling on God to act justly (**Psalm 83:16-18**), to remember His covenant faithfulness (**Psalm 25:6**), to bring restoration (**Psalm 80:3**), and to provide mercy (**Psalm 51:1**). Job asked God boldly to vindicate him and to not be silent in his suffering (**Job 17:3; 13:20-22**).

On the next page, continue writing out your lament by presenting your “asks” boldly to God. Look back on your previous movements of lament and call upon God to act according to His character in light of these situations. And remember, we can ask boldly because we have a Savior who understands deeply, who sympathizes with our weakness, and who is a Man of Sorrows acquainted with grief. (**Hebrews 4:15; Isaiah 53:3**)

The final movement of lament is **Choosing to Trust**.

“This is where all laments are designed to lead. ... If you don’t end in trust, you have not lamented. You’ve just been sad.”⁸

We see this progression throughout the book of Job—he turned to God, brought his complaints, asked boldly, and ultimately ended his lament with a declaration of trust.

*“I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted...
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.” (Job 42:2-3)*

Job’s final response to God was one of worship. Despite all the pain and suffering he had and continued to experience, he chose to put his trust in the mystery and majesty of God.

We too are invited to do the same. This isn’t just a one-time act. “We must enter into lament over and over so that it can keep leading us to trust”⁹ It may be a monthly, weekly, or even a daily practice at times.

On the next page, end your lament by choosing to trust. For some, all that you may be able to muster is “Lord I trust You, help my lack of trusting.” For others, you may find yourself drawn to expressing your trust by rehearsing God’s steadfast love and faithfulness in your life.

⁸Vroegop, Mark, et al. “Discover the Grace of Lament.” *The Gospel Coalition*, 4 Oct. 2019, www.thegospelcoalition.org/podcasts/tgc-podcast/discover-grace-lament/.

⁹Vroegop, Mark. *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament*. Crossway, 2019. 74

Throughout the remainder of the study guide, we are going to **practice listening and lamenting together.**

Below are instructions to help you practice this as a Life Group.

For more detailed instructions, see pages 12-15.

Prepare

- Decide who will share their lament and who will facilitate (2-3 people including time keeper).
- Silence cell phones.
- Read through the reminders below before you begin.

Reminders

- We share our laments with others as an act of faith (**Romans 12:15**).
- The purpose of this time isn't to fix, problem solve, or give advice but to listen well and be lovingly present for the person sharing their lament.
- It might be difficult to be present with someone and feel as if we're offering them nothing in their pain. Our attentive and loving presence is the gift we offer to the one sharing their lament, trusting that God is present in our presence.

Opening prayers

- Start with a time of prayer. We suggest using the prayers on pages 12-13.

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "Let's now spend time in silence, to be still and become aware of God's presence together."*

Read lament and share any additional thoughts (5-7 mins)

- Share the lament.
- *Time Keeper: "Thank you [name] for your vulnerability and courage in sharing your lament with us. Is there anything else you would like to share before we enter a time of silence?"*

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "Let's be silent together and allow ourselves time to sit with and feel the lament that was just shared."*

Facilitators respond with questions (5-7 mins)

- Questions for facilitators to ask in response:
 - *As you think about the issue you're processing, what feelings are you noticing?*
 - *How would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?*
 - *Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?*
 - *How do you think God feels/thinks about you as you experience this situation?*
 - *How would you like Jesus to help you in this?*
- Additional helpful questions to ask may be:
 - *How do you sense we could be helpful to you now?*
 - *Are there any questions you wish we would ask you?*
 - *Would you mind if we just sat in silence for a few minutes?*

Time of silent prayer for person who shared lament (1-2 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "As we end this time of lament with silence, come to God with whatever is on your heart or mind for the person who shared their lament."*

Debrief (3-4 mins)

- *Time Keeper: "We're going to take time now to debrief this experience together. Each of us will get a chance to describe what it felt like to share their lament or what it felt like to listen. Additionally we can share how it felt to engage with the questions and times of silence. Who would like to share first?"*
- *Reminder - This isn't a time to advise or problem solve.*

Practice: Listening & Lamenting Together

When we look at the story of Job, we see three friends who attempted to provide comfort and counsel to their friend in pain. Unfortunately for Job, their efforts provided further reasons to lament. Instead of continuing to mourn with Job in the silence, they provided endless monologues that added to Job's misery.

We can fall into the same trap. We can be quick to offer advice or explain away and minimize people's suffering through our misguided responses.

In **Job 21:2**, Job described to his friends what he really needed in the midst of his suffering, "Listen carefully to my words; let this be the consolation you give me."

It's as we are present with one another in our pain, and as we lovingly listen to each other lament, that we embody what it means to "weep with those who weep" (**Romans 12:15**).

God invites us to listen to and lament with each other.

Throughout this study guide, we are going to practice listening and lamenting together.

The goal of this time is not to fix all of our problems and answer all of life's questions. The goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of them as we listen and lament together.

The following instructions are to help you practice this as a Life Group.

We suggest that you save 20-25 minutes for this practice at the end of your time together. This could replace your regular practice of prayer requests and praying together as listening and lamenting is another way that we intercede with and for each other.

Detailed Instructions and Script for Listening & Lamenting Together Practice:

Prepare

Start by deciding ahead of time who will volunteer to share their lament with the group this week. Also, decide on 2-3 people who will facilitate the practice, including someone who will be the time keeper during this process. (We recommend using a timer on your phone to help you transition from each section. If you follow the time guidelines, this process will take about 20-25 minutes per person. The time keeper will also be the one to move the conversation forward using the prompts provided in each section.) Before you begin, remind everyone to silence their phones so they are not a distraction and then read through the reminders below.

Reminders

- We share our laments with others as an act of faith (**Romans 12:15**).
- The purpose of this time isn't to fix, problem solve or give advice but to listen well and be lovingly present for the person sharing their lament.
- It might be difficult to be present with someone and feel as if we're offering them nothing in their pain. Our attentive and loving presence is the gift we offer to the one sharing their lament, trusting that God is present in our presence.

Opening prayers (optional wording)

Prayer to be read aloud by person sharing their lament:

- *"O God who inhabits our sorrows, it is no easy thing to admit another person into my grief. For grief, even if it is a grief common to many, is ever an intimate, personal thing. It can feel such a risk to allow anyone else to access these, my most wounded places. And yet you, O Lord, have clearly called your children to bear one another's burdens. You have instructed us to mourn with those who mourn, even naming such service as an act of worship. But this command can only be fulfilled when each of us, in the midst of our own sufferings, are also willing to allow others who know and love us well to walk alongside us, granting them access to the places where we are most hurting and vulnerable. In light of this truth, give me the grace Jesus, to take this courageous step of letting others listen to my lament. Amen."*¹

¹ McKelvey, Douglas. *Every Moment Holy: Death, Grief, & Hope*. Vol. 2, Rabbit Room, 2021. 243-245

Prayer to be read aloud by a person who is helping to facilitate the practice:

- *“Give us wisdom, grace and empathy, O Lord, to simply walk beside, to let our friend lead as they learn to navigate this grief, and not to ever in arrogance believe that we can somehow set them straight, or make it right, or give advice they do not need from us. Teach us how to set aside our own discomfort, so that we might compassionately perceive, in the context of their specific loss and their specific need, what true encouragement and helpfulness would mean. Above all, let us learn to remain present in their life, being ever ready to listen, however much they choose to entrust to us, and so let us serve our friend well by a close and constant willingness to bear some small part of their long burden. Amen.”²*

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

Take this time of silence to be still and become aware of God’s presence together. Relax your body and breathe deeply. If distracting thoughts come to mind, you may find it helpful to have a word or phrase that brings your attention back to God, for example: “Father” or “I love You, Jesus.”

Read lament and share any additional thoughts (5-7 mins)

The person who has decided to share their lament will start by reading what they have written for each section of their own lament (Lessons 1-4)—turning to God, bringing your complaints, asking boldly and choosing to trust. (Don’t feel obligated to read every word if something doesn’t feel appropriate to share in a group setting.)

For the lamenter: don’t feel like you have to fill the whole time if you run out of things to say.

Also, if the timer goes off while someone is sharing, allow the person to wrap up their final thought and move on to the next section.

Time of silence (1-2 mins)

Use this time of silence to sit with the lament the person has just shared. Allow yourself to feel and enter into the emotion of the experience that has been presented.

Facilitators respond with questions (5-7 mins)

The purpose of this time is to ask questions in order to help the person sharing explore their thoughts and feelings, as well as notice God's presence in the midst of their lament.

Questions for facilitators to ask in response:

- *As you think about the issue you're processing, what feelings are you noticing?*
- *How would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?*
- *Where have you sensed God's presence (or absence) in this situation?*
- *How do you think God feels/thinks about you as you experience this situation?*
- *How would you like Jesus to help you in this?*

Additional helpful questions to ask may be:

- *How do you sense we could be helpful to you now?*
- *Are there any questions you wish we would ask you?*
- *Would you mind if we just sat in silence for a few minutes?*

Unhelpful responses or questions might sound like:

- *"Don't worry—it will get better"*
- *"Trust God. God always know best"*
- *"At least it's not as bad as so and so"*
- *"I know just how you feel"*
- *"Why do you think you are in this situation?"*

In a group setting it may be tempting to ask too many questions and interrupt the work God is doing. Go slowly, allow for silence, and be sensitive to Holy Spirit.

Time of silent prayer for person who shared lament (1-2 mins)

Come to God in silent prayer with whatever is on your heart or mind for the person who shared their lament.

Debrief (3-4 mins)

End by debriefing your time together. Give each person a chance to share about their experience. Encourage reflection on what it was like to share their lament or listen to it, as well as what it felt like to engage with the questions and times of silence.

Don't be surprised if you feel at the end of this time that the person who shared still has questions or unresolved issues. That's okay. The goal of this time is not to fix all of our problems and answer all of life's questions. The goal is to draw closer to God in the midst of them as we listen and lament together.

Practices of Lament FAQ's

How can we best prepare our Life Group to engage with the Practices of Lament?

- We encourage you to watch the "Practices of Lament" video with your Life Group. This will provide your Life Group helpful explanations and reasons for engaging with the practice of lament. The video could be watched individually before your first Life Group of the sermon series or watched together during your first meeting of the sermon series.
- We have also provided another video that is a live modeling of the Listening and Lamenting Together practice. Some Life Groups may benefit from watching this together on the 5th week of the sermon series as an introduction to this communal practice of lament before you try it out for yourselves. You will receive an email with both of these videos after the January leader training that you can view and share with your Life Group

What if I don't have anything to lament?

- If you are asking this question, here are a couple things to consider. First, you may need to broaden your understanding of what is deserving of lament. Lament isn't just for the loss of a loved one. We can lament being misunderstood, unfulfilled desires and expectations, poor health, loneliness, God's felt absence in a situation, and a whole list of other things. Second, if you still feel like there's nothing in your life to lament personally, then is there someone else in your life or is there a situation you are aware of in the world that you could bring to God in lament? We can lament on the behalf of others and for evil and unjust situations in our world. Ask Holy Spirit to highlight who or what situation He may be inviting you to lament for.

I'm concerned we won't have enough time to engage with the Practices of Lament. Any suggestions?

- We recommend engaging with the Practices of Lament during the time you typically would set aside for prayer or worship. If you still need more time, consider reducing the time for your discussion to accommodate.
- We do provide a timeframe for each part of this practice and recommend sticking to that as much as possible.

How will writing your own lament work for Life Groups engaging with the Sermon Response Guide?

- For Life Groups who are using the Sermon Response Guide, you may not be used to having an assignment to do at home throughout the week. Since writing your own lament builds on itself for the first 4 weeks, we encourage Life Groups using the Sermon Response Guide to set aside time (5-10 mins) during your Life Group for people to write these portions of their lament. This will provide your Life Group the space and accountability to fully engage with this practice.

How can we do the Listening and Lamenting Together practice in a larger group?

- If you have a larger Life Group (15+ people), we encourage you to split up into smaller groups. Life Groups that meet on Sundays over at Broadway Commons could split up into table groups. You can also get in touch with your Life Group coach to help facilitate this time with you.

Does everyone have to share their lament to engage with the Listening and Lamenting Together practice?

- Not everyone will be willing or ready to share their lament with their Life Group, and that's okay. Even if you don't plan on sharing your written lament with your Life Group, we also believe there's value in observing and being present in others' laments.
- As a Life Group leader, we encourage you to consider sharing your lament in the first or second week of the Listening and Lamenting Together practice as a way of opening the door for others to do the same.
- Make sure to decide beforehand who is willing to share their lament and who will be facilitating for that week so that everyone is able to prepare.

Should I stick to the script for the Listening and Lamenting Together practice?

- Yes! Please do. The main reason for this is, the Listening and Lamenting Together practice is designed in such a way to protect our communal times of lament from turning into advice giving sessions. It's so easy for us to turn into Job's friends and try to fix or solve or explain. These instructions are guard rails to protect the person lamenting from unhelpful responses, as well as retrain those listening how to truly listen and be present in someone else's pain so that we keep the focus on the individual lamenting and how God is present to them through this experience.
- There will be times when using the script where it may be helpful to contextualize. For example, you may like to reference what someone shared in their lament as you ask one of the questions ("In your lament you shared (fill in the blank), how would you describe your thoughts/feelings toward yourself or God because of this?")

Why is there a "Debrief" time at the end of the Listening and Lamenting Practice?

- The purpose of this debrief time is for people sharing their lament, and those who helped facilitate, to be able to notice and name how the experience was for them.
- The debrief time is NOT a time to start sharing advice or critique how things went.

How should I respond as a Life Group leader if someone in my group slips into giving advice and problem solving?

- Each week when you engage with the Listening and Lamenting Together practice, there will be reminders to be read as part of the script that explicitly say "this isn't a time to give advice or problem solve." Hopefully, if you read through the reminders each time you won't run into this situation. That said, if it does happen, gently remind the individual that our primary role during this time is to listen and give space for the person lamenting to share.

What if we don't currently engage with the Bible Study Guide or Sermon Response Guide?

- The Job/James sermon series and Practices of Lament are not mandatory for Life Groups to engage in. And yet, we seriously ask you to consider doing so. Lament is a largely overlooked topic of conversation and practice in the Western church and is an extremely relevant and loving way to engage with those who are suffering in your Life Group and beyond.