Lament is defined as “a passionate expression of grief or sorrow.” In Jewish and Christian tradition, lament is the act of laying bare your rawest emotions before God. Just listen to this line of lamentation from Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?”

You may notice that the line quoted above is one of the things the disciples remember Jesus crying out from the cross (Mark 15:34). Yes, Jesus lamented. Jesus cried out with real, strong emotion to God, honest and sharp as it was. There is no shame in such an act.

In fact, to let God know what most deeply troubles your spirit is to trust that God is capable of saving you from that trouble. While lament seems like hopelessness, it is actually a profound act of hope. Moreover, proclaiming our pain relieves us from bearing wounds within ourselves where, in the darkness of our hidden hurts, they will multiply until they overwhelm us. Like a surgeon must open a person up to fix what is wrong, lament permits God to open us up in order to heal what pains us so.

May the Lord give you peace through these prayers.

What will you need?
1. A Bible.
2. A pen and notebook.

Where should you be?
Anywhere will do, but preferably somewhere dark and quiet. If you’re in the living room, try shutting the blinds, leaving only a candle or a lamp on for light.

Who should you be with?
This liturgy is prepared for individuals, though it could be great for small groups as well. If you’re with a small group, I encourage you to pray all the prayers in unison, to refrain from speaking to one another until you’ve concluded the time of prayer, and to resist platitudes (“Everything will be okay,” etc.) in the conversation following the prayer.

How should I prepare for this liturgy?
Prepare yourself by reminding yourself that God’s heart is for you so much that your laments will not make God love you less. And prepare yourself by setting aside more time than you think you’ll need to rest in silence and to reflect on what causes you fear, pain, anger, or sadness.
A Liturgy of Lament

Prepare for Worship in Silence
Take several minutes, or longer, to sit or kneel in meditative silence. Take deep breaths. Your goal here is not to hear something so much as to clear your mind.

Prayer for God’s Presence
Standing up
How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever?
   How long will you hide your face from me?
How long must I wrestle with my thoughts
   and day after day have sorrow in my heart?
   How long will my enemy triumph over me?!

O Lord, hear my/our prayers.

Confession
Kneeling or bowing in your seat
God Almighty, I confess that in a time such as this,
I wonder how good and just You truly are.

Lord Jesus, I confess that in a time such as this,
I wonder whether Your Kingdom is as powerful as you say.

Holy Spirit, I confess that in a time such as this,
I wonder if You have left us on our own.

Triune God, I confess that in a time such as this,
I wonder if faith, hope, and love simply isn’t enough.

And so, I suppose, amen.

Time of Meditation
During this moment you may wish to sit at a table or to pace the room or to lay facedown on the ground. As you do, grapple with what is causing your fear, pain, sorrow, or anxiety. Try not to settle for generalities. (For example, “COVID-19” is too broad.) If you can, identify specific causes. (For example, “I am troubled that my aunt, who is immunocompromised, may suffer from this disease.”)

As the cause(s) become clearer, write them down on a paper or in a journal. This is an important ritual action. Writing the cause down moves them from dwelling solely within you to somewhere outside you. They are no longer hidden. Whatever is causing your pain is known and exposed.

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1 Psalm 13:1-2
After you’ve written the cause(s) down. Read each one again. Pause after you read it for at least thirty seconds. Try to sum the source(s) up into one to four word phrases. (It’s okay if these summaries are more general. For example, “I am troubled that my aunt, who is immunocompromised, may suffer from this disease” might become “the suffering of family.”)

*Act of Repentance*

**Stand up** and clear your throat, because things are about to get noisy.

Choose one of the below lines and shout it—I mean, scream it—to God. Fill in the blanks with the short summary phrase you came up with to name the source of your fear, pain, sorrow, or anxiety.

**Option 1:** I am worn out from my groaning. All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of ___________ (Psalm 6:6-7).

**Option 2:** Do not be far from me, for ___________ is near and there is no one to help (Psalm 22:11).

**Option 3:** How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? How long will _______________ triumph over me?

*SILENCE*

**Kneel or bow low again** and observe a time of silence again. Pay attention to how your heart feels having named these sources of inner turmoil to God in such an impassioned way.

*Scripture Reading*

Matthew 26:36-46

*Questions for Reflection*

1. What does Matthew tell us about Jesus’s emotional state? How does that make you feel? What questions does it raise for you about Jesus?
2. What deductions might we make about Christian prayer based on this passage?

*Prayer of Consolation*

O Lord,
In the garden of Gethsemane,
Christ prayed to you with a troubled spirit.
Through prayer You parted the waters
Of Christ’s death-like sorrow,
To lead him through his overwhelming anxiety,
Into the resolve of faith, hope, and love.
May my own cries to you,
as anguished as they may be,
Help me to discover how to walk
according to your will
In just such a time as this.
I believe, help my unbelief.
In Christ,
Amen.

Closing Hymn

Rising and turning on lights/opening the shades
Praise God from whom all blessings flow.
Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God above you heavenly hosts.
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Closing Prayer

Look on me and answer, Lord my God.
   Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death,
and my enemy will say, “I have overcome him,”
   and my foes will rejoice when I fall.
But I trust in your unfailing love;
   my heart rejoices in your salvation.
I will sing the Lord’s praise,
   for he has been good to me.

In the name of Christ,
Who is the Crucified Savior,
And through the Holy Spirit,
Who is the Mighty Comforter,
I pray to You, Father of Mercy,
Amen.

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2 Adapted from Psalm 13:3-6