



Grace

United Methodist Church

# Lament to Joy

A Lenten Journey

— Lent 2026 —

Grace United Methodist Church  
Pastor Amy Sell

*“Weeping may linger for the night,  
but joy comes with the morning.”*

— Psalm 30:5

## Welcome

Grace and peace,

Lent is a season that invites us into honesty.

We live in a world that often encourages us to move quickly past discomfort: to stay busy, stay positive, and keep going. Yet scripture tells a different story. Again and again, God meets people in places of wilderness, grief, uncertainty, and longing. Faith does not remove struggle. Instead, faith gives us somewhere to bring it.

This devotional is an invitation to walk through Lent together, not pretending life is easy, but trusting that God is present in every season. Over the coming weeks, we will explore the movement from lament toward joy. Not a shallow joy that ignores hardship, but a deeper joy that has told the truth about pain and still discovered hope alive.

Each week includes scripture, reflections, prayer practices, and space for journaling. Move at your own pace. There is no need to complete every page perfectly. If you miss days, simply begin again. God's presence is not dependent on completion.

My prayer is that this journey helps you notice where God is already meeting you, in both the difficult and the beautiful parts of life.

We walk together toward Easter hope.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Amy

Grace United Methodist Church  
Billings, Montana  
February 22, 2026

## How to Use This Devotional

This devotional is designed to accompany you throughout the season of Lent as we move from lament toward joy.

Each week includes:

### Sunday

- Overview of the week's theme
- Centering prayer practice for the week
- A practice of lament
- Family conversation prompt (optional)

### Monday–Saturday

- Short scripture
- Reflection prompt
- Devotional reflection
- Brief prayer

You may choose to spend 5 minutes or 20 minutes each day. Both are meaningful.

Some suggestions:

- Read slowly.
- Notice what stands out.
- Allow silence after reading.
- Write or reflect honestly.
- Repeat the weekly prayer practice throughout your day.

If you miss days, simply begin again where you are. Spiritual growth does not happen through perfection but through gentle returning.

This devotional can be used individually, with family members, or in small groups.

Above all, trust that God meets you exactly where you are.

## What Is Lament?

Lament is honest prayer.

It is the language of people who believe God is present even when life is difficult.

Throughout scripture, people bring their grief, fear, anger, confusion, and longing directly to God. The Psalms are filled with cries of lament. Jesus himself laments on the cross. Lament is not a failure of faith, it is an expression of faith that refuses to give up.

Lament allows us to:

- Tell the truth about pain
- Name what feels broken

- Express longing for change
- Bring questions to God
- Hold grief and hope together

Sometimes we avoid lament because we worry it sounds like complaining. But lament is different. Complaining moves away from relationship. Lament moves toward God with honesty.

Lament does not stay in despair. It opens the door for healing because truth creates space for God's presence.

During this season, we will practice lament gently and honestly, trusting that God meets us in every emotion.

## Practicing Lament

Practicing lament does not require special words or spiritual expertise. It begins with honesty.

You might practice lament by:

- Naming what feels heavy
- Writing a sentence about what you are carrying
- Speaking honestly in prayer
- Sitting quietly with difficult emotions
- Lighting a candle for grief or concern
- Sharing your struggles with someone you trust

Some days you may feel strong emotions. Other days you may feel numb. Both are normal.

Lament is not about staying in sadness. It is about allowing the truth to be present without judgment. When we acknowledge pain, we often discover that God is already with us inside it.

Throughout this devotional, you will find simple prompts to help you practice lament. There is no right or wrong way to respond.

Gentleness is the goal.

## Week 1: Crying Out in the Wilderness

### Sunday Texts:

Genesis 2:15–17; 3:1–7

Matthew 4:1–11

### Sunday: A Weekly Invitation

The wilderness is where we discover what we rely on. Lament begins when we admit how hungry we are, for control, certainty, comfort, and choose trust instead.

Jesus enters the wilderness not as punishment, but as preparation. Hunger reveals truth. Temptation exposes the stories we believe about worth, survival, and power. In the wilderness, Jesus refuses systems of spectacle, domination, and scarcity. He chooses trust in God instead.

Our own wilderness seasons often feel disorienting. We may notice anxiety rising, old fears resurfacing, or longings becoming clearer. Rather than avoiding those experiences, Lent invites us to face them honestly. Lament is not complaining, it is courageous truth-telling. When we name what does not give life, we begin to loosen its hold on us.

Joy begins here: with honesty.

This week we will practice noticing our hunger and bringing it gently to God.

### *Centering Prayer Practice for the Week*

#### **Breath Prayer: God, You Are With Me**

1. Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor.
2. Place one hand on your chest or stomach.
3. Breathe in slowly: **God, you are with me.**
4. Breathe out slowly: **Even here.**
5. Repeat for 1–3 minutes.

If your mind wanders, simply return to the words.

This practice reminds our nervous system that we are not alone.

### *Practicing Lament This Week*

#### **Naming What Feels Heavy**

Each day, notice moments when you feel:

- overwhelmed
- anxious
- frustrated
- discouraged
- tired

Write one sentence:

## **“Today I am carrying...”**

You do not need to fix it. Just name it.

At the end of the week, bring these to prayer.

### ***Family Conversation Prompt***

Sometimes we all feel worried or overwhelmed. Even adults do.

#### **Ask:**

What is something that felt hard this week?

#### **Say:**

God is with us when things feel hard, not just when things are easy.

#### **Prayer:**

“God, help us when we feel worried or hungry inside. Thank you for being with us. Amen.”

### **Monday**

#### **Scripture**

“So he was there in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.” — Mark 1:13 (NRSVue)

#### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you feel stretched or tested right now?

#### **Devotional**

We often imagine the wilderness as a lonely, frightening place. But Scripture tells us something surprising: Jesus was not alone there. The wild animals were present. Angels ministered to him. God’s care surrounded him even in the struggle.

Our wilderness seasons rarely feel holy when we are inside them. They feel uncertain, uncomfortable, and sometimes frightening. Yet these are often the spaces where clarity begins to emerge. What matters becomes clearer. What we rely on becomes visible. What we truly need comes into focus.

Lament begins when we acknowledge the difficulty without pretending it is easy. Faith is not denying the wilderness, it is trusting that God is present within it.

You may not feel strong today. That’s okay. Strength is not required. Honesty is enough.

#### **Prayer**

God, meet me in the wilderness places of my life today. Amen.

### **Tuesday**

#### **Scripture**

“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”  
— Matthew 4:4 (NRSVue)

#### **Reflection Prompt**

What do you turn to when you feel empty or stressed?

## **Devotional**

Hunger is not just physical. We hunger for reassurance, control, belonging, rest, affirmation, security. None of these needs are wrong. They are part of being human.

Temptation often appears when we try to satisfy deep needs with things that cannot truly nourish us. We overwork to feel worthy. We numb out to avoid pain. We grasp for certainty where none exists. Eventually we discover that these substitutes do not sustain us.

Jesus does not deny his hunger. He simply refuses to meet it in a way that disconnects him from God's trust.

Lent invites us to notice our hunger without shame. Lament says: I need something. I am not whole on my own. I cannot fix everything myself.

That honesty opens space for grace.

## **Prayer**

God, help me notice what I truly need today. Amen.

## Wednesday

### **Scripture**

"The Lord God took the human and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it."  
— Genesis 2:15 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you feel responsible for more than you can carry?

### **Devotional**

From the beginning, humans were created to live in relationship, with God, with the earth, with one another. We were never meant to carry life alone.

Yet many of us move through our days feeling like everything depends on us. We carry expectations, responsibilities, and pressures that slowly drain our energy. When exhaustion builds, we may feel resentment, anxiety, or numbness.

Lament is the spiritual practice of acknowledging limits. It is saying: I cannot do everything. I am not God. I need help.

This is not failure. It is wisdom.

Jesus enters the wilderness immediately after affirmation at his baptism: "You are my beloved." Identity comes before effort. Worth comes before productivity.

You are beloved before you accomplish anything today.

### **Prayer**

God, remind me that I do not have to carry everything alone. Amen.

## Thursday

### **Scripture**

"If you are the Son of God..." — Matthew 4:3 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you feel pressure to prove yourself?

### **Devotional**

The tempter's words begin with doubt: *If you are...*

So many of our internal struggles start the same way.

If you were stronger...

If you were more faithful...

If you were better...

We live inside quiet narratives that question our worth. These stories can come from childhood experiences, cultural expectations, or painful memories. Over time, they become voices we assume are true.

Jesus refuses the invitation to prove himself. He does not perform miracles to earn identity. He rests in what has already been declared: beloved.

Lament can include grieving the ways we have learned to doubt ourselves. It can include mourning the harm caused by unrealistic expectations placed upon us.

Healing begins when we recognize those voices are not God's voice.

God's voice says: You are already loved.

### **Prayer**

God, quiet the voices that tell me I am not enough. Amen.

## **Friday**

### **Scripture**

"Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world."

— Matthew 4:8 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where are you tempted to seek control?

### **Devotional**

Control promises safety. If we can manage enough details, predict enough outcomes, or stay ahead of problems, maybe we will avoid pain. But control is often an illusion. Life remains uncertain no matter how tightly we hold it.

Jesus is offered power, authority over kingdoms. Yet he refuses domination as a path. His mission will unfold through humility, service, and love instead.

Lament includes grieving the reality that we cannot control everything. It includes acknowledging disappointment when life does not unfold as planned. It may include anger, sadness, or fear.

But releasing control also opens space for trust. When we loosen our grip, we discover God has been holding us all along.

Trust does not eliminate uncertainty. It allows us to live within it.

### **Prayer**

God, help me release what I cannot control today. Amen.

Saturday

**Scripture**

“Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.” — Matthew 4:11 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where have you noticed small moments of care or support this week?

**Devotional**

The wilderness does not last forever.

After the struggle, angels come. Care arrives. Relief appears. Strength returns. Sometimes slowly. Sometimes quietly. But it comes.

We often overlook the ways God tends to us because they are not dramatic. A kind conversation. A moment of rest. A deep breath. A supportive friend. A sense of peace that arrives unexpectedly.

Joy often begins in these small mercies.

As you reach the end of this first week of Lent, notice what has sustained you. Even if the week was difficult, something carried you through. Something helped you keep going.

That is grace.

Joy is not the absence of hardship. It is the presence of God within it.

**Prayer**

God, thank you for the ways you have cared for me this week. Amen.

**Weekly Lament Journaling Space**

You may wish to reflect on these questions:

- What felt heavy this week?
- When did I feel most overwhelmed?
- What am I longing for right now?
- Where did I notice even a small moment of hope?

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## *End of Week Blessing*

May you know that honesty is holy.  
May you trust that God meets you in the wilderness.  
May you discover that even here,  
you are not alone.

## **Week 2: What Do We Do with Fear?**

### **Sunday Texts:**

Genesis 12:1–4a

John 3:1–17

### *Sunday: A Weekly Invitation*

Fear often accompanies change. Nicodemus comes to Jesus at night, not because he lacks faith, but because uncertainty makes us cautious. Abram leaves home without knowing where he is going. Faith does not eliminate fear, it gives us somewhere to bring it.

Many of us carry fears we rarely name: fear of loss, fear of failure, fear of conflict, fear of not being enough, fear of what might change. Lament allows fear to come into the open instead of controlling us from the shadows.

God's promises are not individual achievements but communal journeys. Abram becomes part of a people. Nicodemus moves toward understanding within relationship. We are not asked to navigate fear alone.

Joy grows when fear no longer has the final word. Courage is not the absence of fear, it is trust that love is larger than what we are afraid of.

This week we will practice noticing fear gently and bringing it into God's presence.

### *Centering Prayer Practice for the Week*

#### **Holding and Releasing Prayer**

1. Sit comfortably.
2. Clench your hands gently into fists as you breathe in.
3. Notice any tension you are holding.
4. Slowly open your hands as you breathe out.
5. Pray silently:  
**Inhale:** God, you are here.  
**Exhale:** I release my fear.

Repeat for several breaths.

Let your body experience release, not just your thoughts.

### *Practicing Lament This Week*

#### **Naming Fear Honestly**

Each day, complete this sentence:

**“Today I am afraid that...”**

You may repeat the same fear multiple days. That is okay.

At the end of the week, place your list somewhere meaningful, a Bible, prayer space, or bedside table, and offer it to God.

### ***Family Conversation Prompt***

Everyone feels scared sometimes, both kids and adults.

#### **Ask:**

What is something that makes you nervous or worried?

#### **Say:**

God is with us when we feel scared. We can talk to God about anything.

#### **Prayer:**

“God, help us when we feel afraid. Thank you for staying with us. Amen.”

### **Monday**

#### **Scripture**

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country... to the land that I will show you.’”  
— Genesis 12:1 (NRSVue)

#### **Reflection Prompt**

What feels uncertain in your life right now?

#### **Devotional**

Abram leaves without a map. No destination details. No timeline. Just a promise: I will show you.

Uncertainty is one of the most uncomfortable human experiences. Our brains crave predictability because predictability feels safe. When we do not know what comes next, anxiety often rises.

Lament includes acknowledging how unsettling uncertainty can be. It allows us to say: I don’t know what will happen, and that scares me.

Faith does not erase that fear. Instead, faith shifts our focus from knowing the future to trusting the One who walks with us into it.

Abram’s story reminds us that clarity often comes after movement, not before it.

Sometimes the next faithful step is simply continuing forward while holding both fear and trust together.

#### **Prayer**

God, walk with me into the unknown places of my life. Amen.

### **Tuesday**

#### **Scripture**

“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God.” — John 3:2 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

When have you approached something cautiously because you were unsure?

### **Devotional**

Nicodemus comes at night. For centuries, readers have speculated about his motives. But what if night simply reflects honesty? Fear often makes us careful. Curiosity mixed with uncertainty is still movement toward God.

We sometimes judge ourselves for not being braver, stronger, or more certain. Yet spiritual growth often begins quietly. Questions whispered in the dark can be just as faithful as bold declarations in the light.

Lament can include grieving the ways fear has limited us, opportunities missed, risks avoided, conversations postponed. But it can also honor the courage it takes to move even slightly toward truth.

Nicodemus shows us that faith does not require certainty. It requires willingness to come closer.

God meets us even when we arrive hesitantly.

### **Prayer**

God, meet me wherever I am today, even if I come with uncertainty. Amen.

## Wednesday

### **Scripture**

“Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.”

— John 3:3 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What change in your life feels uncomfortable right now?

### **Devotional**

Transformation sounds inspiring until we experience it. New beginnings often involve disorientation. Old patterns shift. Familiar identities loosen. We may feel unsteady or unsure.

Jesus speaks of being born anew, a process that is not neat or predictable. Birth involves vulnerability, discomfort, and transition. Yet it also carries possibility.

Lament acknowledges the grief that can accompany change. Even positive change can involve loss; loss of what was familiar, loss of roles we once held, loss of certainty about who we are.

God does not rush transformation. Growth unfolds in its own time.

You may feel unsettled today. That does not mean something is wrong. It may mean something new is emerging.

### **Prayer**

God, give me courage to trust the changes unfolding in my life. Amen.

## Thursday

### **Scripture**

“For God so loved the world...” — John 3:16 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you struggle to believe you are loved?

### **Devotional**

This verse is familiar, but familiarity can hide its depth. God loves the world, not just the parts that are easy, successful, or certain. God loves the fearful parts, the confused parts, the hurting parts.

Fear often tells us we are alone. Love tells us we are held.

When anxiety rises, our bodies shift into protection mode. Our hearts race. Our thoughts spiral. We try to solve problems quickly. These reactions are human, not spiritual failures.

Lament can include naming the ways fear lives in our bodies. It can include acknowledging stress without shame.

God's love does not arrive after we calm down. It meets us in the middle of our racing thoughts and tight chests.

You are loved right now; not later, not when things improve, not when you feel stronger.

Right now.

### **Prayer**

God, help me receive your love today. Amen.

## Friday

### **Scripture**

"I will make of you a great nation... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

— Genesis 12:2–3 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Who supports you when you feel afraid?

### **Devotional**

God's promise to Abram is communal. Blessing spreads outward, family to family, generation to generation. Faith is never meant to be lived alone.

Fear often isolates us. We withdraw, assume others will not understand, or try to handle everything ourselves. Yet connection is one of the primary ways God brings comfort and courage.

Lament can include naming loneliness. It can include acknowledging when we need help. Reaching toward others is not weakness, it is part of how God designed us to survive.

Consider the people who have encouraged you, listened to you, or stood beside you. Their presence is not accidental. It is grace embodied through community.

You are part of a larger story than you realize.

### **Prayer**

God, thank you for the people who walk with me. Amen.

## Saturday

### **Scripture**

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it." — John 1:5 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where did you notice even a small moment of hope this week?

**Devotional**

Fear narrows our vision. It convinces us that danger is everywhere and hope is nowhere. But light continues to exist even when darkness feels overwhelming.

Hope does not always appear dramatically. Sometimes it arrives quietly, a conversation, a moment of laughter, a sense of peace, a reminder that tomorrow exists.

As you finish this week, notice the places where light persisted. Not because circumstances were perfect, but because goodness still found its way into your life.

Joy often begins as a flicker before it becomes a flame.

God is present in those flickers.

**Prayer**

God, help me notice the light that still shines. Amen.

*Weekly Lament Journaling Space*

You may wish to reflect on:

- What fears surfaced this week?
- When did I feel most uncertain?
- What helped me feel supported?
- Where did I notice hope?

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*End of Week Blessing*

May you know that fear does not define you.  
 May you trust that God walks beside you.  
 May courage grow gently within you.  
 And may hope continue to shine in the darkness.

## Week 3: Thirsty

### Sunday Texts:

Exodus 17:1–7

John 4:5–42

### Sunday: A Weekly Invitation

Thirst tells the truth. In the wilderness, the Israelites cry out for water because survival depends on it. At the well, the Samaritan woman asks honest questions because she longs for something deeper than what she has known. Lament is what thirsty people do when they believe water exists.

We often try to ignore our deeper needs. We distract ourselves, push through exhaustion, or convince ourselves that needing something means weakness. But Jesus treats thirst differently. He listens. He engages. He honors the questions.

This story crosses boundaries: gender, ethnicity, religion, respectability. The conversation itself becomes healing. Lament becomes dialogue, not dismissal.

Joy flows when our deepest needs are named, not shamed.

This week we will practice noticing our thirst, physical, emotional, and spiritual, and bringing it to God with honesty.

### Centering Prayer Practice for the Week

#### Water Prayer

Each time you drink water this week:

1. Pause for a moment before drinking.
2. Notice the water: its temperature, movement, sensation.
3. Pray silently:  
**God, you are the source of life.**
4. Take a slow sip.
5. Pray:  
**Fill what is empty in me.**

Let ordinary moments become prayer.

### Practicing Lament This Week

#### Naming What You Need

Each day, complete this sentence:

**“Today I need...”**

Try not to judge your answer.

Needs are not weaknesses. They are part of being human.

At the end of the week, bring your list to prayer and notice patterns.

### Family Conversation Prompt

Our bodies tell us when we are thirsty. Our hearts do too.

**Ask:**

What helps you feel better when you are sad or tired?

**Say:**

God cares about what we need, even small things.

**Prayer:**

“God, thank you for water and for taking care of us. Help us when we need things. Amen.”

### Monday

**Scripture**

“The people quarreled with Moses and said, ‘Give us water to drink.’” — Exodus 17:2 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What need in your life feels urgent right now?

**Devotional**

The Israelites are often criticized in this story for complaining. But thirst is not a moral failure. It is a survival signal. Their cries come from fear, exhaustion, and uncertainty.

Sometimes we judge ourselves the same way. We tell ourselves we should be stronger, more patient, more grateful. Yet underneath those expectations are real needs, rest, reassurance, support, clarity, connection.

Lament allows us to acknowledge need without shame. It says: Something is missing, and that matters.

God does not respond to the Israelites with punishment. God provides water.

Your needs matter to God too, not just the spiritual ones, but the practical and emotional ones as well.

You are allowed to need things.

**Prayer**

God, help me trust that my needs matter to you. Amen.

### Tuesday

**Scripture**

“Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink.’” — John 4:7 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

How comfortable are you with asking for help?

**Devotional**

Jesus begins this encounter by expressing his own need. He is tired. He is thirsty. He asks for water.

There is something profoundly human about this moment. The Son of God asks a stranger for help. Vulnerability becomes the doorway to relationship.

Many of us struggle to admit when we need others. We fear being a burden or appearing weak. Yet mutual care is how communities survive. Giving and receiving support creates connection.

Lament can include acknowledging where we have tried to be self-sufficient beyond our limits. It can include grieving the loneliness that comes from carrying too much alone.

Jesus shows us that needing others is not failure. It is part of being human.

### **Prayer**

God, help me receive help when I need it. Amen.

## Wednesday

### **Scripture**

“Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” — John 4:14 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What brings you a sense of deep nourishment or peace?

### **Devotional**

Jesus speaks of living water, not a one-time solution, but an ongoing source. This water becomes “a spring... gushing up to eternal life.” The image suggests renewal, movement, sustainability.

We often try to satisfy deep thirst with temporary relief: distraction, busyness, consumption, avoidance. These may help briefly, but the deeper longing remains.

Spiritual nourishment often looks different. It may include connection, rest, prayer, creativity, nature, meaningful conversation, acts of kindness. These experiences do not remove hardship, but they replenish our capacity to live within it.

Lament helps us identify what does not truly satisfy so we can seek what does.

God’s living water is not scarce. It flows freely.

### **Prayer**

God, guide me toward what truly nourishes my spirit. Amen.

## Thursday

### **Scripture**

“Sir, give me this water.” — John 4:15 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What are you longing for right now?

### **Devotional**

The Samaritan woman’s request is direct. She wants relief. She wants something better than the patterns she has known. Her honesty opens the door to transformation.

Longing can feel vulnerable. When we admit what we desire, healing, peace, belonging, purpose, we risk disappointment. Yet longing also reveals hope. We do not yearn for what we believe is impossible.

Lament includes expressing desire without knowing whether it will be fulfilled. It is saying: This is what my heart wants.

God meets us in those places of longing, not with judgment but with presence.

Your desires matter. Your hopes matter. Your heart matters.

### **Prayer**

God, hear the longings of my heart today. Amen.

## Friday

### **Scripture**

“Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!” — John 4:29 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where have you experienced being truly seen or understood?

### **Devotional**

One of the most healing parts of this story is not the water metaphor, it is the experience of being known. Jesus sees the Samaritan woman fully, without condemnation. That recognition becomes liberation.

Many of us carry stories about ourselves shaped by shame or regret. We assume that if others knew everything, they would turn away. Yet healing often begins when someone sees us honestly and remains present.

Lament can include grieving the ways we have felt misunderstood, judged, or unseen. It can include acknowledging the loneliness that comes from hiding parts of ourselves.

God’s knowledge of us is never shaming. It is compassionate. Being known by God is meant to free us, not bind us.

You are seen with love.

### **Prayer**

God, help me trust that I am fully known and fully loved. Amen.

## Saturday

### **Scripture**

“Many Samaritans... believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.”

— John 4:39 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What part of your story could bring hope to someone else?

### **Devotional**

The woman who came to the well alone becomes a messenger to her community. Her encounter with Jesus transforms isolation into connection. Her story becomes a source of hope for others.

Our experiences, including struggles, often carry wisdom we do not recognize immediately. What we have endured can become compassion for someone else. What we have learned can become encouragement.

Joy frequently grows through connection. When we share honestly, we discover we are not alone, and neither are others.

As you end this week, consider how your journey might encourage someone else. Not because everything is resolved, but because God continues to meet you along the way.

Your story matters.

**Prayer**

God, use my story to bring hope where it is needed. Amen.

*Weekly Lament Journaling Space*

You may wish to reflect on:

- What needs surfaced for me this week?
- When did I feel empty or drained?
- What helped me feel nourished?
- Where did I notice hope or connection?

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*End of Week Blessing*

May living water flow within you.  
May your needs be met with compassion.  
May you know you are seen and loved.  
And may joy begin to rise like a spring within your soul.

**Week 4: Learning to See**

**Sunday Texts:**  
1 Samuel 16:1–13  
John 9:1–41

*Sunday: A Weekly Invitation*

Healing begins with seeing honestly. In Scripture, blindness is never just physical, it is also spiritual, communal, and systemic. We sometimes fail to see what is right in front of us: injustice, pain, truth, or even our own need for healing.

In John 9, Jesus rejects the assumption that suffering must be someone's fault. Instead of blame, he offers compassion. Instead of judgment, he brings restoration. The man born blind gains sight, but others remain unable to see because they cling to certainty and control.

Lament teaches us to see more clearly. It allows us to grieve what we did not notice before, harm done, opportunities missed, realities ignored. That grief can feel uncomfortable, but it is also the doorway to transformation.

Joy emerges as clarity, courage, and new vision.

This week we will practice noticing, both within ourselves and in the world around us.

### *Centering Prayer Practice for the Week*

#### **Seeing Prayer (Gentle Examen)**

At the end of each day, reflect on two questions:

1. **When did I feel most alive today?**
2. **When did I feel disconnected or heavy?**

Notice without judgment. Simply observe.

Pray:

**God, help me see with your compassion.**

### *Practicing Lament This Week*

#### **Naming What I Did Not See**

Each day, complete this sentence:

**"Today I noticed..."**

You might notice:

- a feeling you ignored
- someone else's struggle
- your own exhaustion
- beauty you overlooked
- injustice you hadn't considered

Lament includes grieving what becomes visible.

### *Family Conversation Prompt*

Sometimes we don't notice things right away.

**Ask:**

Did you notice something new today?

**Say:**

God helps us see people and the world with kindness.

**Prayer:**

“God, help us see others with love. Amen.”

**Monday****Scripture**

“The Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” — 1 Samuel 16:7 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where might you be judging yourself or someone else too quickly?

**Devotional**

When Samuel searches for the next king, he assumes strength and appearance will reveal God’s choice. Instead, God chooses David, the youngest, overlooked, unexpected son.

We often evaluate ourselves and others using similar surface measures: productivity, success, confidence, appearance, competence. These standards can create pressure, shame, and misunderstanding.

Lament can include grieving the ways we have been misjudged, or the ways we have misjudged others. It can include acknowledging the pain caused by unrealistic expectations.

God’s vision operates differently. God sees worth where others see limitation. God recognizes possibility where others see failure.

Today, consider what might change if you viewed yourself with God’s compassion rather than human judgment.

**Prayer**

God, help me see with your eyes today. Amen.

**Tuesday****Scripture**

“Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” — John 9:2 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where do you find yourself asking “Why?” about suffering?

**Devotional**

Humans instinctively search for causes when something painful happens. If we can explain suffering, we feel more secure. The disciples’ question reflects this instinct: someone must be responsible.

Jesus refuses that framework. He rejects blame-based theology entirely. Instead of explaining suffering, he responds with compassion and action.

This shift is liberating. Not everything painful is punishment. Not every hardship has a clear reason. Sometimes suffering is simply part of living in a complex world.

Lament allows us to express confusion and frustration without forcing answers. It creates space for grief without judgment.

God’s presence does not depend on understanding everything. Compassion comes first.

## **Prayer**

God, meet me in the questions I cannot answer. Amen.

## **Wednesday**

### **Scripture**

“He spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes.”

— John 9:6 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What healing process in your life feels messy or slow?

### **Devotional**

Healing in this story is physical and earthy. Mud. Touch. Time. Movement. It is not instantaneous perfection but a process.

We sometimes expect healing to be quick and clean, emotional growth, recovery from grief, reconciliation in relationships. When progress feels slow, we may assume something is wrong.

Lament acknowledges the frustration of gradual healing. It allows us to grieve the time it takes for change to unfold.

Yet slow healing is still healing.

God often works through ordinary means, conversations, therapy, rest, prayer, community support, reflection. Transformation unfolds step by step.

Today, honor whatever healing process you are in, even if it feels incomplete.

## **Prayer**

God, be present in the slow work of healing. Amen.

## **Thursday**

### **Scripture**

“One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” — John 9:25 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What new understanding has emerged in your life recently?

### **Devotional**

The healed man does not have theological certainty. He does not explain how everything works. He simply names his experience: something has changed.

Growth often happens this way. We cannot always articulate it fully. We just know we see differently than before.

Lament can include recognizing truths we once avoided, patterns that were unhealthy, relationships that were harmful, systems that were unjust, needs we ignored. That awareness may bring grief, but it also brings freedom.

Clarity is a form of healing.

You may be seeing something differently now than you did a year ago. That is growth. That is movement toward life.

## **Prayer**

God, thank you for the ways you are helping me see more clearly. Amen.

## **Friday**

### **Scripture**

“They drove him out.” — John 9:34 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Have you ever felt excluded or misunderstood because of your growth or beliefs?

### **Devotional**

Transformation sometimes disrupts relationships. The man who receives sight also experiences rejection. Others cannot accept his new reality because it challenges their assumptions.

We may encounter similar experiences when we grow, setting boundaries, changing perspectives, healing from past wounds, or embracing new convictions. Not everyone understands these shifts.

Lament includes grieving relationships that change. It includes sadness when growth leads to distance or conflict.

Yet Jesus seeks the man out again after he is cast out. Isolation is not the end of the story.

God remains present even when human acceptance wavers.

### **Prayer**

God, stay close when I feel misunderstood or alone. Amen.

## **Saturday**

### **Scripture**

“Lord, I believe.” — John 9:38 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you sense trust growing in your life?

### **Devotional**

Trust rarely appears all at once. It develops gradually, through experiences of care, insight, resilience, and grace. The man’s journey moves from confusion to clarity, from uncertainty to belief.

As this week ends, notice where trust may be emerging in your life. Perhaps you trust your own strength more than before. Perhaps you trust God’s presence more deeply. Perhaps you trust that healing is possible.

Joy often begins as quiet trust before it becomes celebration.

You do not need perfect faith. Growing trust is enough.

### **Prayer**

God, nurture the trust that is growing within me. Amen.

## **Weekly Lament Journaling Space**

You may wish to reflect on:

- What became clearer for me this week?
- What was difficult to see?
- What emotions surfaced as I noticed more?
- Where did I experience hope?

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**End of Week Blessing**

May your eyes open gently.  
May compassion guide what you see.  
May truth bring freedom rather than fear.  
And may joy grow through clarity and courage.

**Week 5: When Hope Feels Late**

**Sunday Texts:**  
Ezekiel 37:1–14  
John 11:1–45

**Sunday: A Weekly Invitation**

Grief changes our sense of time. When we are waiting for healing, relief, or resolution, hope can feel delayed, even absent. In John 11, Jesus arrives after Lazarus has died. Martha and Mary both say the same words: “If you had been here...” Their lament is honest, raw, and deeply human.

Jesus does not correct them. He weeps.

Love tells the truth about loss. Faith does not prevent grief. Even when resurrection is possible, grief still matters.

In Ezekiel, dry bones come to life only after breath enters them. Restoration unfolds in stages. God’s timing does not always match our expectations, especially when we are hurting.

Lament insists that waiting matters. It gives voice to disappointment and longing without abandoning hope.

Joy does not erase grief; it rises from love that refuses to abandon us.

This week we will practice acknowledging where hope feels delayed in our lives.

### *Centering Prayer Practice for the Week*

#### **Holding Prayer**

Hold a small object (stone, cross, coin, or anything meaningful).

As you hold it:

**Inhale:** God, you are with me.

**Exhale:** Even in waiting.

Let the object represent what you are carrying.

### *Practicing Lament This Week*

#### **Naming What Feels Late**

Each day, complete:

**“I wish...”**

or

**“I thought this would be different by now...”**

Allow honesty without correction.

### *Family Conversation Prompt*

Waiting can feel hard for everyone.

#### **Ask:**

What is something you wish would happen sooner?

#### **Say:**

God is with us while we wait.

#### **Prayer:**

“God, help us when waiting feels hard. Amen.”

### *Monday*

#### **Scripture**

“O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.” — Ezekiel 37:4 (NRSVue)

#### **Reflection Prompt**

Where in your life do things feel lifeless or stuck?

#### **Devotional**

The valley of dry bones is a powerful image, scattered, disconnected, beyond hope. Ezekiel is asked whether life is possible again. His response is honest: “O Lord God, you know.”

Sometimes we reach places where we cannot imagine change. Relationships feel distant. Energy feels depleted. Circumstances feel immovable. Hope feels thin.

Lament allows us to acknowledge those realities without pretending optimism. It gives language to discouragement while leaving space for God's possibility.

God does not begin with instant transformation. First comes attention. Then connection. Then breath. Even when you cannot see how life might emerge, God remains present in the valley.

### **Prayer**

God, breathe life into what feels dry within me. Amen.

## *Tuesday*

### **Scripture**

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." — John 11:21 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

Have you ever felt disappointed with how something unfolded?

### **Devotional**

Martha's words carry grief and frustration. She names what she believes should have happened. Many of us carry similar thoughts: If only... Why didn't... It shouldn't have...

These feelings are part of love. When we care deeply, loss hurts deeply. Expectations reveal what matters to us.

Lament gives permission to express disappointment without guilt. Faith does not require pretending everything is fine. God can hold our frustration as well as our trust.

Jesus does not rebuke Martha. He listens. He stays present.

God meets us in disappointment too.

### **Prayer**

God, hold my grief and my questions together. Amen.

## *Wednesday*

### **Scripture**

"Jesus began to weep." — John 11:35 (NRSVue)

### **Reflection Prompt**

What losses are you carrying right now?

### **Devotional**

This shortest verse in Scripture carries immense meaning. Jesus weeps, even knowing resurrection will come. His tears validate grief itself. Love mourns what is lost, regardless of what may follow.

We sometimes rush past grief in search of solutions. We try to stay strong for others. We tell ourselves we should be over it by now. Yet grief has its own rhythm.

Lament honors loss without timeline.

Today, allow space for whatever sadness you carry, recent or old. Tears, silence, or quiet acknowledgment are all forms of prayer.

God meets us in sorrow, not after it.

**Prayer**

God, be with me in my grief today. Amen.

**Thursday****Scripture**

“Take away the stone.” — John 11:39 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What feels blocked or closed off in your life?

**Devotional**

Before Lazarus emerges, the stone must be moved. Obstacles often stand between us and new life — fear, exhaustion, doubt, unresolved pain. Removing them may feel risky.

Martha hesitates. The reality of death feels overwhelming. Yet movement begins with one step of trust.

Lament includes acknowledging barriers without pretending they are easy to overcome. It recognizes how heavy stones can feel.

God invites participation in transformation. We do not create resurrection ourselves, but we can take small steps toward openness.

Consider what one gentle movement toward hope might look like today.

**Prayer**

God, help me move what feels immovable. Amen.

**Friday****Scripture**

“Lazarus, come out!” — John 11:43 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where do you long for renewal or freedom?

**Devotional**

Jesus calls Lazarus by name. Restoration is personal. Resurrection is relational. Life returns not through force, but through invitation.

We may not experience dramatic miracles, yet God continues calling us toward life, toward healing, connection, courage, purpose. Sometimes that call feels faint. Sometimes we hesitate to respond.

Lament includes longing for change without certainty it will come. It acknowledges how vulnerable hope can feel after disappointment.

Still, God calls. Still, life emerges.

Your story is not finished.

**Prayer**

God, call me toward life again. Amen.

**Saturday**

**Scripture**

“Unbind him and let him go.” — John 11:44 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What might freedom look like for you right now?

**Devotional**

Lazarus emerges still wrapped in burial cloths. Others must help remove them. Healing often requires community. Transformation unfolds over time.

We may carry emotional bindings, fear, shame, habits, grief, expectations. Freedom rarely happens instantly. It unfolds step by step.

As this week ends, consider where loosening might begin. Not complete change, just the beginning.

Joy grows when we experience even small movements toward freedom.

God invites you into life, gently and patiently.

**Prayer**

God, help me step into freedom one moment at a time. Amen.

*Weekly Lament Journaling Space*

Reflect on:

- Where does hope feel delayed for me?
- What grief surfaced this week?
- What am I longing for?
- Where did I notice even small life returning?

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*End of Week Blessing*

May God meet you in waiting.  
 May love hold your grief.  
 May breath return to weary places.  
 And may hope rise, even slowly, within you.

## Holy Week

### Between Shouts and Silence

#### Sunday Texts:

Matthew 21:1–11

Psalms 118:1–2, 19–29

#### Sunday: A Weekly Invitation

Palm Sunday is full of celebration. Crowds gather. Cloaks are spread on the road. Branches wave in the air. Voices shout, “Hosanna!” Hope feels visible and alive.

Yet we know the story does not end here.

The same city that welcomes Jesus will soon fall silent. Fear, confusion, and power will shift the mood. Palm Sunday holds joy and grief in the same moment, celebration and uncertainty together.

Our lives often feel this way too. We experience moments of hope while still carrying worry. We celebrate progress while knowing challenges remain. Lament helps us stay present without denial. Joy becomes deeper when it tells the truth.

Jesus enters Jerusalem humbly, not on a war horse, but on a donkey. His way of power is nonviolent, grounded in love rather than domination.

Real joy is not loud denial. It is courageous hope.

This week we will practice staying present to both celebration and uncertainty.

#### Centering Prayer Practice for the Week

##### Heartbeat Prayer

Place your hand gently over your heart.

Feel your heartbeat if you can.

Pray slowly:

**Inhale:** God, you are here.

**Exhale:** I am not alone.

Let your heartbeat remind you that life is present even in uncertainty.

#### Practicing Lament This Week

##### Holding Two Truths

Each day, complete both sentences:

**Today I am grateful for...**

**Today I am worried about...**

Allow both to exist without choosing one over the other.

#### Family Conversation Prompt

Palm Sunday is a happy day, but the story gets sad later.

**Ask:**

Have you ever felt happy and worried at the same time?

**Say:**

God is with us in all our feelings.

**Prayer:**

“God, thank you for happy times and for staying with us when things feel hard. Amen.”

***Palm Sunday Evening***

Holy Week invites us to slow down.

We have walked through wilderness, fear, thirst, clarity, grief, and hope. Now we enter the most sacred part of the story, the days where love is tested, loss becomes real, and God’s presence remains steady even when everything feels uncertain.

You may notice deeper emotions this week. That is natural. Move gently. Pause when you need to. Allow yourself to experience these days without rushing toward Easter.

Joy is coming, but first, we walk through love that stays present in suffering.

***Holy Week: Monday***

**Scripture**

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume... and anointed Jesus’ feet.” — John 12:3 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What feels precious or meaningful to you right now?

**Devotional**

Mary’s act is extravagant. She offers something valuable without hesitation. Her gesture reflects love, gratitude, and perhaps an awareness that time is limited.

Holy Week reminds us that life is fragile. Moments we assume will continue may change quickly. That awareness can feel unsettling, but it can also deepen appreciation for what we have now.

Lament includes recognizing impermanence. It acknowledges that nothing in life is fully secure. Yet love expressed in the present becomes meaningful regardless of what comes next.

Consider what feels precious to you today, relationships, memories, opportunities, small moments of beauty. Let yourself notice them fully.

Love given now matters.

**Prayer**

God, help me recognize and honor what is meaningful today. Amen.

***Holy Week: Tuesday***

**Scripture**

“Now my soul is troubled.” — John 12:27 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What has been weighing on your heart recently?

**Devotional**

Jesus names his distress openly. He does not hide his troubled spirit. Even knowing his purpose, he feels the emotional weight of what lies ahead.

We sometimes assume faith means calm certainty. Yet Scripture shows that spiritual maturity includes honesty about emotional struggle. Anxiety, sadness, and fear are not failures, they are part of being human.

Lament allows us to speak what troubles us without shame. Naming emotional weight often reduces its intensity and creates space for support.

If your soul feels troubled today, you are not alone. Jesus understands this experience from the inside.

God meets us in honesty.

**Prayer**

God, hold what feels heavy in my heart today. Amen.

**Holy Week: Wednesday****Scripture**

“One of you will betray me.” — Matthew 26:21 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Have you experienced disappointment or hurt in a relationship?

**Devotional**

Betrayal cuts deeply because it involves trust. Holy Week does not avoid this reality. Jesus faces abandonment, denial, and misunderstanding from those closest to him.

Most of us have experienced relational pain, broken trust, unmet expectations, and distance that developed unexpectedly. These wounds can linger long after events pass.

Lament includes grieving relational hurt. It allows space for sadness, anger, and confusion without rushing toward resolution.

Yet even in betrayal, Jesus continues to love. Love does not always prevent pain, but it remains stronger than it.

God understands relational heartbreak.

**Prayer**

God, comfort me in places where relationships have hurt. Amen.

**Maundy Thursday****Love That Kneels****Scripture**

John 13:1–17, 31–35 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

What does it feel like to be cared for by someone else?

## **Devotional**

On the night before everything changes, Jesus kneels.

He knows what is coming, betrayal, suffering, death. Yet he does not withdraw. He does not protect himself emotionally. He takes a towel, pours water into a basin, and begins washing the disciples' feet.

This is love with eyes open.

Foot washing is intimate. Vulnerable. Ordinary. It requires closeness. Touch. Presence. Jesus communicates something profound: love does not disappear when circumstances become difficult. Love moves closer.

Peter resists. His reaction feels deeply human. Being cared for can feel uncomfortable, especially when we are used to being the strong one, the helper, the responsible one. Receiving love requires vulnerability.

Jesus insists: "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Receiving care is not weakness. It is connection. It is communion.

Lament often softens when we allow others to support us. When someone sits with us in grief, listens without fixing, or offers presence without judgment, healing begins.

Maundy Thursday teaches us that joy begins not at the empty tomb, but here, when love refuses to leave the table.

Tonight, consider how love has shown up in your life. Consider also where you might need to receive care rather than provide it.

You are worthy of being tended to.

## **Prayer**

Jesus, teach me to receive love as freely as you give it. Amen.

## **Good Friday**

### **Love That Stays**

#### **Scripture**

Luke 23:32–49 (NRSVue)

#### **Reflection Prompt**

Where do you feel grief or sorrow most deeply right now?

#### **Devotional**

Good Friday is the day we do not rush past.

The cross represents suffering, injustice, violence, and loss. It holds the reality that love does not prevent pain. Even the Son of God experiences abandonment, fear, and physical agony.

Jesus cries out: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

These words give permission for our own cries. Moments when God feels distant. Moments when life feels unfair. Moments when grief overwhelms understanding.

Lament lives here, in the honest recognition that suffering exists and hurts deeply.

Yet even on the cross, love remains present. Jesus offers forgiveness. He entrusts himself to God. Others remain nearby, witnesses who refuse to leave entirely.

God's presence does not disappear in suffering. Sometimes it is quiet, hidden, or difficult to perceive, but it remains.

Good Friday reminds us that God fully enters human pain. Nothing we experience is beyond God's understanding.

Sit with the story today. Move slowly. Allow whatever emotions arise to be part of prayer.

Love stays, even here.

**Prayer**

God, stay with me in sorrow and suffering. Amen.

**Holy Saturday**

**Waiting and Rest**

**Scripture**

"They rested on the Sabbath according to the commandment." — Luke 23:56 (NRSVue)

**Reflection Prompt**

Where do you feel suspended between endings and beginnings?

**Devotional**

Holy Saturday is quiet. The story pauses. Nothing appears to be happening. Jesus lies in the tomb. The disciples grieve. Hope feels uncertain.

This day reflects many seasons of life, times when something has ended but new life has not yet appeared. Waiting can feel uncomfortable. We want movement, answers, resolution. Instead, we receive silence.

Yet Scripture tells us the women rested.

Rest in grief is holy. Rest in uncertainty is allowed. Rest does not mean giving up hope; it means honoring human limits.

God often works beneath the surface in ways we cannot see. Transformation may already be unfolding even when nothing feels different.

Today is an invitation to gentle rest. Breathe. Move slowly. Release the pressure to solve or understand everything.

You are allowed to pause.

Hope is closer than it feels.

**Prayer**

God, hold me in the waiting. Teach me to rest. Amen.

**Easter: Joy That Has Told the Truth**

**Scripture**

Matthew 28:1–10 (NRSVue)

*Easter Reflection*

Easter begins in uncertainty.

The women go to the tomb carrying grief, spices, and love. They are not expecting resurrection. They are honoring loss. Yet in the place of death, they encounter surprise: the stone rolled away, the angel’s message, the words, “Do not be afraid.”

Resurrection does not erase what happened. The cross remains part of the story. Grief remains real. But death does not have the final word.

Joy arrives, not as shallow happiness, but as something deeper. Joy that has passed through fear. Joy that has walked through sorrow. Joy that has witnessed loss and still discovered hope alive.

This is resurrection joy.

Many of us experience Easter this way. Life may not suddenly become perfect. Challenges may still exist. Yet something shifts. We notice strength we did not know we had. We feel hope returning. We recognize God’s presence in new ways.

Joy that tells the truth is resilient. It does not deny hardship. It grows alongside it.

Christ is risen. And new life continues to unfold within us.

**Prayer**

God of resurrection, awaken hope within me. Help me recognize the new life you are bringing. Amen.

*Easter Week Reflection Prompts*

*Noticing Resurrection*

Consider reflecting on these questions over the coming days:

- Where have I noticed new life recently?
- What feels different in me compared to the beginning of Lent?
- What strength have I discovered?
- What grief am I still carrying, and how has it changed?
- Where do I sense hope growing?
- What brings me joy right now?

Resurrection often appears in small ways before it becomes obvious.

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*Personal Reflection Page*

**My Lenten Journey**

You may wish to reflect on:

- What did I learn about myself during Lent?
  - What practices helped me most?
  - What surprised me?
  - What am I carrying forward into the coming season?
  - Where did I encounter God?
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*Closing Blessing*

May resurrection find you in unexpected places.  
May hope rise gently within you.  
May joy take root in your heart  
not because life is perfect,  
but because love is stronger than death.  
And may you walk forward knowing  
you are never alone. Amen.