

"There are plenty of reasons to throw our hands up in the air and walk away from the church. If we're honest, many of us have experienced it as a neutered counterfeit to the life and community Jesus invited us to embody. In this book, Grace and Graham remind us who we have been called to be all along, a new humanity in Christ who actively participate in healing our broken world. Rich in theological thought and firmly rooted in tangible practice, they invite us to be liberated into a cross-shaped ministry that leads to the flourishing of all. This isn't a church-growth strategy; it's holy provocation guiding us onto a path of confession, repentance, and new life. May this book be read and lived!"

**Jon Huckins**, cofounding director of Global Immersion, author of *Mending the Divides: Creative Love in a Conflicted World*

"This book is simply incredible. Goodness. So needed. I can't wait to get this in our church bookstore. It is robust in theology, rich in ecclesiology, and practical in application. Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill paint the glorious vision of the bride of Christ rooted in the grand narrative of Scripture. Grace and Graham brilliantly put feet on this so any local church can catch a vision for participation in the healing of broken humanity."

**Tara Beth Leach**, author of *Emboldened*, senior pastor at First Church of the Nazarene of Pasadena

# HEALING OUR BROKEN HUMANITY

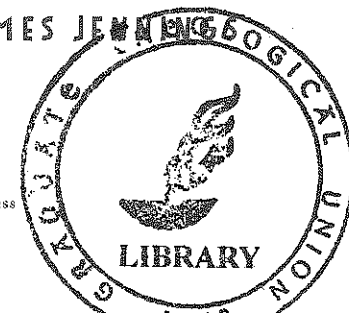
PRACTICES FOR REVITALIZING  
THE CHURCH AND  
RENEWING THE WORLD

GRACE JI-SUN KIM  
AND GRAHAM HILL

FOREWORD BY WILLIE JAMES JEWELL

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*Start “listen and learn” nights.* During these nights, invite someone from a different faith, ethnicity, theological perspective, and so on to come and share. Invite them to share their story and their views in an attentive, nonthreatening environment. Your aim is not to criticize or debate them. It is to listen and learn. It is to reflect together on your learning as a group and on what it means to be the new humanity in Christ. Your group may never share all the perspectives or theologies of your visitor—especially if they contradict your biblical convictions. But you will grow together as you listen, and especially as you listen with respect, humility, prayer, grace, and attention to the Spirit.

## RENEW LAMENT

**I**n his book *Mirror to the Church*, Emmanuel Katongole reflects on the Rwandan genocide. Katongole says that Rwanda is a “mirror to the church” that compels the church to embrace a new identity in Christ. Before the Rwandan genocide, the majority of Rwandans were Christians. Yet in 1994, beginning on the Easter weekend, “Christians killed other Christians, often in the same churches where they had worshiped together. The most Christianized country in Africa became the site of its worst genocide.”<sup>1</sup>

Katongole says that Rwanda is an extreme example of what happens when ethnic, tribal, national, or other identities take the place of our identity in Christ. Rwanda is an extreme example, but it’s a mirror to the church. Rwanda mirrors the deep brokenness of the church, the need for repentance, and the hope that is ours in Jesus Christ. A new church has emerged after the Rwandan genocide. It’s been slow and difficult, but through grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation this Rwandan church is embracing a new identity in Jesus Christ—not as Hutu or Tutsi but as part of the new humanity in Christ.

Reflecting on the Rwandan genocide, Katongole says, “The resurrection of the church begins with lament.”<sup>2</sup> This is difficult for many Americans and others living in Western countries to grasp. Our culture teaches us to embrace a triumphalistic and success-oriented

posture. Thus we avoid lament. Americans are prone to move quickly to try to fix things, and often we need to lament, mourn, and grieve first to fully experience and understand what has taken place. In cases of injustice and atrocities such as genocide, the only real response we can have at first is to lament. Scripture teaches us that we can't move toward hope, peace, transformation, and reconciliation without going through sorrow, mourning, regret, and lament.

Prayers of lament are central to Scripture and especially the book of Psalms. More than a third of the psalms are laments. Psalm 142 begins,

I cry aloud to the LORD;

I lift up my voice to the LORD for mercy.

I pour out before him my complaint;

before him I tell my trouble.

When my spirit grows faint within me,

it is you who watch over my way. (Ps 142:1-3)

These psalms of lament focus on deep regret and sorrow for the sins and travails of a nation and as a cry for God's intervention. The people address these laments to God. They describe the lamentable situation, confess their sin and complicity and sorrow, call God to intervene and to change the situation, and offer thanksgiving and praise to God in trust that God can and will bring change. These psalms provide a model for contemporary lament.

The book of Lamentations is five distinct poetic laments for the destruction of Jerusalem. The book follows a similar pattern to the psalms of lament. Lamentations 1 describes the lamentable, sorrowful, and shameful situation. Lamentations 2 connects the pain and suffering with national sins and God's anger at his proud, idolatrous, and sinful people. This is a prayer of confession and lament. Lamentations 3 speaks of the hope for God's mercy and intervention. Lamentations 4 connects ruin and desolation with corporate sins and abuses. Lamentations 5 is a prayer for mercy that God would bring healing, hope,

and restoration as the people come to God in repentance. Like the psalms of lament, the book of Lamentations provides a model for present-day lament.

Lament is a demonstrative, strong, and corporate expression of deep grief, pain, sorrow, and regret. Lament and repentance deal with issues of the heart. They pave the way for outer change. Lament is a personal and corporate response to many things: evil, sin, death, harm, discrimination, inequality, racism, sexism, colonization, oppression, and injustice. It is about mourning the painful, shameful, or sorrowful situation, about confessing sin and complicity and sorrow, about calling God to intervene and to change the situation. Finally, lament is about offering thanksgiving and praise to God, knowing that God will intervene and bring change, hope, and restoration.

#### WHY DO WE NEED TO LAMENT?

Lament is about regretting and mourning the past and then moving toward repentance, justice, and new life together. Patricia Huntington states, "We suffer and labor in travail, this is the stuff of lamentation."<sup>3</sup> From there we move toward hope.

Lament is necessary for repentance, healing, wholeness, and hope. It challenges injustice, racism, exploitation, and the status quo. Walter Brueggemann says that when "lament as a form of speech and faith is lost" (as it currently is in North America), the church loses its ability to confront and redress abuses, wrongs, and inequalities. "A theological monopoly is reinforced, docility and submissiveness are engendered, and the outcome in terms of social practice is to reinforce and consolidate the political-economic monopoly of the status quo."<sup>4</sup>

Soong-Chan Rah writes, "The American church avoids lament. The power of lament is minimized and the underlying narrative of suffering that requires lament is lost. . . . The absence of lament in the liturgy of the American church results in the loss of memory. We forget the necessity of lamenting over suffering and pain. We forget

the reality of suffering and pain."<sup>5</sup> The United States suffers from amnesia. It is time that the United States recovers its memory and laments for our sins.

Lament becomes a crucial practice as we embrace the new humanity in Jesus Christ. We must enter lament and repentance to experience reconciliation, justice, unity, peace, and love.

### WHAT DO WE LAMENT?

We lament the exploitation and destruction of black lives and communities; the abuse of basic human rights; and systemic injustice, expressed in policing, judicial, educational, economic, social, and other systems and structures. We lament the murders of Alton B. Sterling, Philando Castile, the five Dallas police officers, and the numerous black women and men killed in this and previous centuries. We lament the United States' demons, as Willie James Jennings writes:

Is America willing to be freed from its demons? . . . Racial antagonism structures our imaginations as does our love of weapons. The former creates our enemies, and the latter constructs a false sense of independence and freedom. . . . We have learned to structure our fear geographically and unleash it through police violence set up to protect our spaces. Land developers, civil engineers, city planners, real estate agencies, builders, insurance companies and a whole host of others all profit from our barrier-building and fear-mongering. . . . We have been in a racial cold war for centuries, and now a real war beckons us. . . . The demons tempt us to violence, but there has always been a way to resist that temptation. We must follow the way of a God who will not release us either to our demons or to our despair.<sup>6</sup>

We lament corruption among politicians, police forces, and bankers; military interventions and the militarization of society and

police forces; uncaring government agencies and big business; and urban poverty and homelessness. We lament the enslavement, rape, exploitation, and oppression of people of color and their communities; systems of slavery and institutionalized racism; the proliferation of guns in society, and the idolatry and death associated with gun cultures; the violation and oppression of women (and especially black women); and the way people and people groups have been imprisoned instead of rehabilitated. We lament rampant Islamophobia, reinforced by Donald Trump's announcement of a ban of people from seven Muslim-dominated countries from entering the United States. We lament the nature, extent, and effects of white privilege, nationalism, xenophobia, and racism; the unwelcome shown to refugees and asylum seekers; and the fear, anxiety, and suffering experienced by undocumented migrants.

We lament the treatment of women in society and church. Too often women suffer multiple oppressions. We lament gender inequalities, the discrimination and harassment women suffer, the sexualization of women and girls, and the domestic violence many women suffer daily. We lament the sex trafficking of poor young Asian girls whose bodies are sold for sex, domination, and exploitation. We lament the theological and religious constructs that seek to make women subordinate, submissive, and silent.

We lament the colonization, devastation, and assimilation of First Nations and indigenous peoples, and the role Christianity has played in this. We lament colonialism, paternalism, expansionism, and the oppressive dimensions of Christendom. We lament the United States' segregated churches and neighborhoods, its near-genocide of Native American peoples, and its enslavement of one another. We lament the United States' original sins: racism, sexism, and addiction to power.<sup>7</sup> We lament American exceptionalism and all its effects, predatory lenders and real estate speculators, and the colonization and devastation of Native American and indigenous and aboriginal cultures.

We lament America's treatment of Latinx immigrants and the pain and trauma caused to those who are undocumented. While Christian faith is vibrant among Latinx immigrants, many feel unwelcome, marginalized, and discriminated against. We lament the treatment of Asian immigrants who worked as indentured workers and who died building the railroad. Those who survived never made enough money to go back home.

In Australia we lament our treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the high level of violence against women, the spread of Islamophobia, and our treatment of asylum seekers on the high seas and in offshore detention centers.

We lament when my Muslim friend is called racial slurs and when my Asian American friend is told to "go back to China." We lament when my Asian American dad is called "chink" and "worthless Chinaman" because racism exists and is breeding hate.

We lament the silence of the people of God about many of these things. We lament the complicity of the church in many of these things.

This practice of lament is necessary if we are to experience healing and hope and transformation.

## HOW DO WE LAMENT?

The personal nature of lament is important. But lament is best when it's both individual and corporate.

The psalms of lament and the book of Lamentations provide a model for present-day lament. This model is flexible and adaptable and shouldn't be used rigidly. But it shows us that lament typically has nine elements:

1. *Invocation.* We address our lament to God. "How long, LORD?" (Ps 13:1).
2. *Worship.* We describe who God is (loving, just, merciful, and good) and how God promises to be with us in times of crisis.

"Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises" (Ps 22:3).

3. *Description.* We describe the lamentable, sorrowful, and shameful situation. Complaint about the problem and description of the problem often go together in lament. This is often expressed as questions to God (a) about God's action or inaction, (b) about our enemies, (c) and/or about our suffering and pain. "Dogs surround me" (Ps 22:16).
4. *Connection.* We connect the lamentable situation and our pain and suffering with individual and corporate sins (such as pride, racism, sexism, idolatry, power seeking, fear-mongering, etc.). "We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence" (Ps 90:7-8).
5. *Repentance.* We express deep sorrow for the sins and travails of our people, and our desire to change. "If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due. Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom" (Ps 90:11-12).
6. *Confession.* We confess our sin, complicity, sorrow, and desire to repent and change. "We have sinned, even as our ancestors did; we have done wrong and acted wickedly" (Ps 106:6).
7. *Petition.* We cry for God's intervention and mercy, and that God would bring healing, hope, and restoration as we come to God in lament and repentance. "Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days" (Ps 90:13-14).
8. *Trust.* We express our trust in God because of who God is and in remembrance of God's past saving and redeeming actions.

We acknowledge that God listens and responds, "From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me" (Ps 22:21 NRSV).

9. *Praise*. We offer thanksgiving and praise to God for who God is and what God has done. We offer praise in trust that God can and will bring change. "From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly" (Ps 22:25).

In chapters two and three of *Prophetic Lament*, Soong-Chan Rah makes two important observations about lament. First, the genre of lament is *funeral dirge*. Second, lament provides opportunities for us to hear and respond to the voices of the silenced, marginalized, and suffering. After the murders of Alton B. Sterling, Philando Castile, and five Dallas police officers, Soong-Chan Rah summarized these two observations in this way:

(1) Lamentations deals with a funeral, not a hospital visit (See Lam 1, 2, 4). We cannot pretend that the problem of racism is solved by a hospital visit: a quick prayer and the person will leave the hospital eventually. Our racial history is littered with abused, beaten, murdered dead bodies of black men and women. If you do not acknowledge the long history of dead bodies, you are only playing the game of reconciliation. (2) Lamentations offers the opportunity to hear from all the voices that have suffered. While a prophet/narrator (probably Jeremiah) compiles the laments, it is really the voice of the suffering: women, children, orphans, widows, the sick, the lame and the blind. IT IS NOT the voice of the privileged that is lifted up. Listen and relay the voices of the suffering today. Do not spin the events of this past week to make your own culturally-based application of "personal responsibility" or "law and order." Lamentations speaks the voice of the suffering not the voice of the privileged.<sup>8</sup>

The practice of lament is crucial for the healing, reconciliation, and transformation of the church.

## WHAT DO LAMENTS LOOK LIKE?

Following the nine elements of lament listed above, we recommend you practice writing your own lament. Here are two examples of laments. Both are adapted from Lamentations 5.

Grace wrote the first one as a lament for Sandra Bland, who was found hanged in a jail cell in Texas on July 13, 2015. This was three days after being arrested during a traffic stop. Her death was ruled as a suicide and was followed by public protests that disputed the cause of death and instead alleged racial violence. Graham wrote the second lament for Australia's treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

You may design different kinds of laments, but we hope these can serve as examples to get you started.

### *A lament for Sandra Bland.*

- 1 God who creates and loves us all,  
We turn to you as we lament the death of Sandra Bland.
- 2 You are a creative God,  
You made Sandra and each of us in your image.
- 3 Yet society failed to welcome Sandra, rejecting her and her beautiful, young, black body.  
She died hanging in a jail cell.
- 4 Her unexplained death rips an unspeakable hole in her family as they lose a daughter and a sister.  
Her friends experience a profound loss. Grief remains.
- 5 You are a comforting God. You understand the sorrows, grief, and agony of your children.  
You stand with Sandra's family and friends in their grief.
- 6 Inspire us to stand with those who love Sandra,  
and demand justice for her death.

7 You are a loving God. You create a diverse humanity to love you and to love one another.

Our value comes from you as our Creator.

8 We confess we fall short of your intentions.

We judge and discriminate against one other; we wound and violate each other.

9 We have created and sustained a system based on the sin of racism,

which proclaims that the color of our skin gives us value.

10 Racism denies your love for all your children;

denies your invitation to us to love one another.

11 Racism privileges some of your children and oppresses others,

giving rise to events such as the death of Sandra Bland.

12 You are a merciful God. Forgive us for how we fall short.

Pour your Holy Spirit afresh upon us. Open us to the healing you offer. Draw us together.

13 Lead us from despair to wholeness,

that we might love one another and work to end racism.

14 You are a faithful God.

We give thanks for the life and love and witness of Sandra Bland.

15 We give thanks for the ways you are at work within the brokenness of our lives,

and the woundedness of our communities and nation.

16 We give thanks that through Jesus we are freed to join in your work;

through the Holy Spirit we are empowered to join in your transformational work.

17 Through Jesus we pray,

Amen.

*A lament for Australia.*

1 Remember, O Lord, what has happened to us;  
look, and see our disgrace.

2 Our nation has ignored and denied the inheritance of ancient cultures,

the desert, fresh water, and sea peoples,  
who've lived here for 60,000 years.

3 Over 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have been displaced,

lands and children have been stolen.

4 We ask for recognition and basic human rights,  
dignity and freedom for all Australians alike.

5 Those who pursue us are at our heels;  
we are weary and find no rest.

6 We submitted to those who introduced new diseases,  
forcibly acquired lands,  
and thrived on violent conflict and colonization.

7 Our ancestors invaded this beautiful land and are no more,  
but we, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples together,  
bear the shame and enmity and suffering.

8 Slavery, colonization, and invasion oppressed us,  
and we cried out for freedom from their hands.

9 We get our bread at the risk of our lives,  
young and old are imprisoned and forgotten.

10 Our skin is hot as an oven,  
chained, beaten, imprisoned, and murdered, in the blazing outback sun.

11 Colonizers have violated women since Australia's earliest days,  
and we mourn Stolen Generations.

- 12 Children and adults have been hung by their hands,  
murdered and driven off cliffs,  
elders are shown no respect.
- 13 Children and youth are in our jails, separated from culture  
and family,  
mothers are in refuges or on the streets.
- 14 The elders still speak, but our nation does not listen,  
the Dreamtime continues to show our nation another way.
- 15 Joy is gone from our hearts;  
our dancing has turned to mourning and lament.
- 16 The crown of colonization and cultural superiority has  
fallen from our head.  
Woe to us, for we have sinned!
- 17 Because of this our hearts are faint,  
because of these things our eyes grow dim,
- 18 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,  
with loan sharks, drug dealers, corrupt officials, and  
others, prowling about us.
- 19 You, O Lord, reign forever;  
you live among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations,  
and among non-Indigenous Australians,  
on this beautiful and sacred and ancient land,  
since time immemorial.
- 20 We witness the vibrancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander cultures,  
your presence in art, music, languages, beliefs,  
and practices.
- 21 Restore us to yourself, Lord, that we may return;  
renew our days as of old,

- 22 unless you have utterly rejected us,  
and are angry with us beyond measure.
- 23 Restore to us a heart of flesh,  
rid us of our heart of stone.
- 24 Restore in us a desire for justice and truth,  
a desire to see all people restored to their place and lands.
- 25 Speak to us through your Spirit,  
present in the voices and cultures and desires of ancient  
and modern peoples.
- 26 Rid us of one-sided or superficial calls for reconciliation,  
and lead us toward true lament and repentance and justice.

### PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND ACTIVITIES FOR SMALL GROUPS

Here are some practices and activities for your small group. These will help you explore and experience lament.

*Write a group lament.* Following the nine elements of lament, spend some time in your small group writing and sharing your laments. Remember, you don't need to be rigid or legalistic with the elements. Be flexible, adaptable, and creative as you write a lament. Make the lament your own. What breaks your heart? What weighs you down? What grieves you in church and culture? What relationships or situations bring you pain? What do you rage against? What do you mourn? What do you feel regret for? What do you confess? Write a lament together as a small group, following these steps.

1. Together choose an issue or subject that angers or grieves your group. It might be racial injustice, environmental destruction, the treatment of undocumented immigrants, or some other issue.
2. Brainstorm why this issue is important and why it angers, grieves, and pains your group.



3. Write a lament together, structured around these nine stages or elements (described earlier): invocation, worship, description, connection, lament, confession, petition, trust, and praise. You might do this by asking people in pairs to write one or two of these nine stages or elements.
4. Ask one or two people to read your finished lament aloud so you can get a sense of how it sounds as spoken word.
5. Spend time together in prayer over the themes in the lament.
6. At the end of the time of prayer, have someone read your group's lament aloud once again.
7. During the week, make sure everyone in your group gets a copy of your shared lament. You may even ask your pastor whether you can share your group lament during a Sunday service.

*Organize a lament table liturgy (an evening of shared lament in your small group).* The Practice is a group that meets regularly for experimental worship in South Barrington, Illinois. On their website they provide a model for a small group evening of lament.<sup>9</sup> They call it a "Lament Table Liturgy." Here's a summary of that model:

1. Send out invites to a small group of Christians, asking them to join you for a night of shared lament. Choose people you want to connect with, and choose people who are different from you (if possible, try to make your group a mix of genders, ages, ethnicities, etc.). In the invite, explain what lament is and why it is important.
2. Ask those who are coming to the evening of lament to write their own lament. Encourage them to follow the guide provided by The Practice.<sup>10</sup> This guide gives people nine steps for writing their own lament.
3. At the beginning of the evening, share a meal together around a common table. Hospitality, welcome, friendship, and food provide the perfect environment for shared lament.

4. Create holy space by praying the liturgy of lament. This is a "table liturgy" because it is shared around a common table. Use the beautiful table liturgy created by Kellye Fabian and The Practice community.<sup>11</sup> Make sure you print off a copy of the table liturgy for each person attending the evening of lament. Provide them with a candle too. This candle is a symbol of the lamentable situation, of their cry to God, and of their hope.
5. Enjoy the "Lament Table Liturgy" together. Commit to finding fresh and creative ways to engage in praise and lament.