

A Self-Guided Retreat on Grief and Loss: Recommended Resources for Prayer and Reflection



Saturday, October 10th

Hope Lutheran Church, College Park
St. George's Episcopal Church, Glenn Dale
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, College Park

Schedule for the Day

10 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Gather via Zoom for introductions, a review of resources and suggestions for the day, and prayer.

3 p.m.

Optional in-person gathering at Hope Lutheran Church (4201 Guilford Drive, College Park, MD) for Holy Communion and healing prayer. Parking on-site available. Please wear a mask, and maintain social distancing.

7:45 p.m. – 8:45 p.m.

Gather via Zoom to reflect upon the day.

8:45 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.

Closing night-time prayers via Zoom.

Zoom link for all online gatherings:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86170114301?pwd=c3lJNEtwK1h6V1JTTUVhbmZYbHRHQQT09>

In order to give yourself the gift of this retreat, consider how you may carve out time to pray. Perhaps share with your family or housemates that you'd like an hour or two to yourself; if you can, avoid reading the news; consider putting away your phone or other devices; maybe you will drink tea or play soothing music. We know life is unpredictable right now, give yourself grace for whatever you can manage. And if you are able, plan for some extra spaciousness in your day.

Resources for the Day

I. Recommended Reading & Questions for Reflections

(Suggestions: Read the readings aloud. Use the suggested questions for reflection. If it is helpful, write out your reflections in a journal or on a computer. Consider drawing, “doodling,” or using another artistic form to express your reflections.)

*What sighs to do you want to express to God right now?
How can we pray this psalm at a time when it appears that God does “delight in the wicked?”*

Psalm 5

¹Give ear to my words, O LORD; give heed to my sighing.

²Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray.

- ³O LORD, in the morning you hear my voice;
in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.
- ⁴For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not
sojourn with you.
- ⁵The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all
evildoers.
- ⁶You destroy those who speak lies; the LORD abhors the
bloodthirsty and deceitful.
- ⁷But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love, will enter
your house,
I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you.
- ⁸Lead me, O LORD, in your righteousness because of my
enemies; make your way straight before me.
- ⁹For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are
destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter
with their tongues.
- ¹⁰Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own
counsels; because of their many transgressions cast them
out, for they have rebelled against you.
- ¹¹But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing
for joy. Spread your protection over them, so that those
who love your name may exult in you.
- ¹²For you bless the righteous, O LORD; you cover them with
favor as with a shield.

What distress might you be experiencing right now that you want to express to God? What helps you move from lament to trust?

Psalm 31:9-24

- ⁹Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress;
my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.
- ¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;
my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones
waste away.
- ¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors,
an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me
in the street flee from me.
- ¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have
become like a broken vessel.
- ¹³For I hear the whispering of many— terror all around!—
as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take
my life.
- ¹⁴But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, “You are my God.”
- ¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my
enemies and persecutors.
- ¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your
steadfast love.
- ¹⁷Do not let me be put to shame, O LORD, for I call on you;
let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded
to Sheol.
- ¹⁸Let the lying lips be stilled
that speak insolently against the righteous with pride and
contempt.

¹⁹O how abundant is your goodness that you have laid up for those who fear you, and accomplished for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of everyone!

²⁰In the shelter of your presence you hide them from human plots; you hold them safe under your shelter from contentious tongues.

²¹Blessed be the LORD, for he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was beset as a city under siege.

²²I had said in my alarm, "I am driven far from your sight." But you heard my supplications when I cried out to you for help.

²³Love the LORD, all you his saints.

The LORD preserves the faithful, but abundantly repays the one who acts haughtily.

²⁴Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the LORD.

What in your life causes you to weep right now? What would Jesus be weeping over? What needs unbinding in you?

John 11:28-44

²⁸Martha called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹And when Mary heard it, she got up quickly and went to Jesus. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹Those who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They

followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and those who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So they said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Are there times when you have felt overwhelmed by the “fires and rivers” of your life? Have you found comfort in God in those times? How?

Isaiah 43:1-7

But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you. ⁴Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life. ⁵Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; ⁶I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth— ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.”

Can you identify times when it is hard for you to “be still, and know that God is God?” How do you get from there to trusting that “The Lord of hosts is with us and the God of Jacob is our refuge?”

Psalm 46

¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains
tremble with its tumult.

⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he
has brought on the earth.

⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the
shields with fire.

¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God!

I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

¹¹The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

How do you connect with the promise that nothing will or can ever separate us from Christ's love?

Romans 8:35-39

³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Blessing for the Brokenhearted

There is no remedy for love but to love more. – Henry David Thoreau

Let us agree
for now
that we will not say
the breaking
makes us stronger
or that is better
to have this pain
than to have done

without this love.

Let us promise
we will not
tell ourselves
time will heal
the wound,
when every day
our waking
opens it anew.

Perhaps for now
it can be enough
to simply marvel
at the mystery
of how a heart
so broken
can go on beating,
as if it were made
for precisely this-

as if it knows
the only cure for love
is more of it,

as if it sees
the heart's sole remedy
for breaking
is to love still,

as if it trusts
that its own
persistent pulse
is the rhythm
of a blessing
we cannot
begin to fathom
but will save us
nonetheless.

-Jan Richardson from
The Cure for Sorrow

II. Write a Psalm of Lament

1. In ***quiet, take a moment to identify the issue*** you wish to cry out to God about. You might cry out by questing God, Why? Or How long?

The lament can be complaining about human enemies, circumstances of life, against God, against one's self as an enemy. Sometimes a psalm confesses a sin that has made one suffer.

2. ***Address your lament to God***, calling on God to hear you. Articulate your complaint forcefully, repeatedly, as strongly as you can. Petition what you want from God.
3. ***Confess your trust in our God of compassion and assurance of the covenantal bond we have*** with God who as saves before. You can use the words "But," "Still," or "Nevertheless" to make the transition from lament to trust.
4. ***Vow to praise God***. Offer God your promise of praise in the face of this stubborn situation.

Example:

"Psalm 13" - from Nan Merrill's Psalms for Praying,
Continuum Press, 1996

How long, my Beloved? Will you forget me forever?
How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear this pain in my soul, and live with sorrow
all the day?

How long will fear rule my life?

Notice my heart and answer me, O my Beloved; enlighten me,
lest I walk as one dead to life;

Lest my fears say, “we have won the day;”

Lest they rejoice in their strength.

As I trust in your steadfast Love, my heart will rejoice, for in You
is freedom.

III. Lectio Divina (translation: *divine reading of Scripture*)

(Lectio Divina is a centuries-old approach to praying and meditating with Scripture. There are different ways to approach Lectio Divina; below is one suggestion. If possible, set aside a least thirty minutes to engage in the suggested Lectio Divina practice outlined below.)

1. Find a comfortable, quiet place where you may sit without distraction or noise. Choose one of the Scripture readings suggested in this packet, or choose a favorite passage from the Bible that resonates with you.
2. Consider lighting a candle if you have one available to you. Candles help calm and center our hearts and minds.
3. Sit quietly for a few moments, and pray, “God, let me hear from you.” Repeat this prayer several times.
4. Read your chosen passage aloud simply just to hear it and familiarize yourself with it.

5. Read the passage a second time aloud. As you read it, pay close attention to any images, words, or phrases to strike you or “jump out” to you.
6. Read the passage a third time, pausing at those words, phrases, or images that “jumped out” to you.
7. After the third reading, sit quietly, and reflect on what God may be saying to you through this passage in general, and particularly through the words, phrases, and images that jumped out to you. If helpful, ask God again to allow you to hear from God. Be careful not to slip into a “Bible study mode or analytical mode.” Simply allow God to speak to you.
8. Bring your time in Lectio Divina to a close by simply sitting quietly for ten minutes, using your candle as a focal point.