

## TAKING TIME TO LAMENT

The evening of October 1 was intended to be a night of fun for the thousands of people who gathered at a country music festival in Las Vegas. Instead, it will be remembered as the largest mass shooting in the history of the United States. Tragically, 59 people lost their lives and more than 500 were injured. Even though this event occurred just weeks ago, the media already seems to have moved on to the next news story. It's not a bad thing to move on, but often we do so too quickly in an effort to avoid feeling pain. Sadly, the commonality and frequency of these mass shootings in the United States make it somewhat easy to become desensitized or numb. The more tragedies such as this become routine, the more we try not to feel anything as a defense mechanism. How do we stop ourselves from becoming desensitized or numb to these tragedies? We must take time to lament.

### What Does It Mean to Lament?

Modern Christians tend to think of lamenting as optional instead of a required practice of faith. Lamenting is an expression of admitting things in our lives and the world are not as they should be, as we plea for God's justice and righteousness to be restored. It is an act of admitting dependence on our Creator. Lamenting is not just an expression of sorrow; it's a powerful prayer that can ignite God's plan of redemption for bringing justice and peace to our world. When we lament, we find ourselves worshiping through vulnerability, intimacy, and humility. So how does lamenting actually help during a tragedy?

### Feel Your Feelings

When we become desensitized or numb, we avoid pain. When we don't lament, we risk becoming desensitized, which can keep us from moving towards acts of justice. Also, when we don't take time to lament, our pain may surface in harmful ways towards ourselves or others. Expressing our sorrow is healthy and moves us toward healing and justice. Use this issue of LINC to help teens process tragedy by learning to lament in healthy ways.



### TIP FOR THIS ISSUE

Keep in mind when discussing this tragedy that the range of students' emotions and empathy may be at completely different levels. Also be aware that people process tragedy in a variety of ways. Remind students they shouldn't feel guilty if they didn't react drastically to the shootings. Help youth to understand that not everyone processes grief in the same way or at the same pace. The most important thing is to process grief in healthy and non-harmful ways.

# TEACHER BIBLE PREP

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## HONEST EXPRESSION

**Question of the Day:** How did you learn about the tragedy in Las Vegas?

**Purpose:** To help teens process tragedy by learning to lament in healthy ways.

**Cultural Connection:** Las Vegas Mass Shooting

**Topic:** Lament

## CRY OUT TO THE LORD

### Psalm 142

*I cry out loud for help from the LORD. I beg out loud for mercy from the LORD. —Psalm 142:1*

#### Commentary:

Most scholars believe the author, David, prayed this prayer in agony while hiding in a cave from King Saul who was trying to kill him. David was in severe trial as he desperately sought answers from the Lord. He held nothing back and expressed aloud his pain and misery regarding the situation. After David expressed his frustrations, he also made declarations about who God is even throughout his trial. He acknowledged that God was with him, God as his refuge, and admitted to God's goodness. Even though, at this time, David temporarily believed that nobody cared for him, he still attributed goodness to God.

#### Questions to think about:

- ▶ When is the last time you lamented aloud during a trial or painful time?
- ▶ Why do you think David believed no one cared for him?
- ▶ What characteristics of God are difficult for you to believe during painful situations?

## EVEN JESUS WEPT

### John 11:17-46

*When Jesus saw her crying and the Jews who had come with her crying also, he was deeply disturbed and troubled.*

—John 11:33

#### Commentary:

Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is one of the most significant miracles in the Bible and shows that Jesus has power even over death! During this time in Jewish culture,



The medieval stone Agios Lazaros basilica is built over the tomb of Saint Lazarus in Larnaca, Cyprus.

family members weren't considered dead until after three days. This is why Jesus waited four days before actually bringing Lazarus back from the dead. The other significant and powerful part of this miracle is that Jesus took time to grieve Lazarus' death and express his emotions. Even though Jesus knew Lazarus was going to be OK, he still took time cry. Jesus didn't ignore nor try to fix anyone's emotions or grief. Instead, he joined those who were grieving and expressed empathy and personal sorrow for his friend whom he loved. If Jesus, the Son of God, took time to grieve, we should follow his lead by not side-stepping difficult emotions.

#### Questions to think about:

- ▶ How did Jesus respond to those who were blaming him for Lazarus' death?
- ▶ Why do you think Jesus wept?
- ▶ When was the last time you cried and why did you cry?

## WHAT GOD REQUIRES

### Micah 6:1-8

*He has told you, human one, what is good and what the LORD requires from you: to do justice, embrace faithful love, and walk humbly with your God. —Micah 6:8*

#### Commentary:

Micah was a prophet who spared nothing and no one in describing the reasons for God's judgment against Judah and Israel. At the beginning of chapter 6, a courtroom scene is described in which God was first the defendant and then the plaintiff bringing charges against Israel (6:2). The rest of the chapter is a fresh reminder that faith without action is meaningless. Micah's audience wanted to find the proper

# TEACHER BIBLE PREP

religious ceremony to make their nation right with God, even though that would never work. It isn't our external religious practices that make us right with God; it is through our obedient actions. God is not fooled by our outward habits. The Lord requires for us to walk humbly, love mercy, and to do what's right. When we find ourselves in the midst of tragedy, we must take time to grieve and lament. It is through lamenting that we often are motivated to act. We don't have to sit and do nothing. We can pursue justice, humility, and love for our neighbors.

## Questions to think about:

- ▶ What can you do to help those who are suffering?
- ▶ How can you help fight evil in your community?
- ▶ What evil lies within your own heart that requires repentance?



*“Certainly the faithful love of the LORD hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through! They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness.” —Lamentations 3:22-23*

## DEVOTION: STAY ALERT

*Spend a few minutes reading 1 Peter 5:6-11.*

With so many stories and tragedies appearing frequently in our social-media feeds, it's easy to just keep scrolling through to the next thing. However, when we move through tragedies too quickly, we become desensitized or distracted and we fail to deal with the accompanying pain.

Instead, Jesus invites us to be mindful of others' suffering. This doesn't mean we must constantly despair over all the tragedies in the world. It *does* mean we must stay mindful and alert. Lamenting grief is a way to align our heart with God's heart. First Peter 5 reminds us that the devil wants us to be distracted. But when we embrace suffering and lament to God, we admit our dependence on the Lord. It is through brokenness we receive power and strength. Lamenting is one way to lay down our pain before the One who brings redemption.

*“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, the one who called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, empower, strengthen, and establish you.” —1 Peter 5:10*



**NEXT WEEK:** In the wake of devastating hurricanes, people responded with an outpouring of social media support, financial aid, and even feet on the ground where possible. Next week in LINC we'll take a look at a unique group of financial contributors: A group of Texas prisoners came together and donated to hurricane relief from their commissary funds, setting a terrific example of “giving as you are able.”

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**Getting Ready:** You will need copies of Youth Page 6, pens or pencils, Bibles, markers, and at least 4 sheets of posterboard or large sheets of paper.

## OPEN

### The Tragic Facts (8–10 minutes)

Begin by asking the Question of the Day, “How did you learn about the tragedy in Las Vegas?” Allow teens to process and discuss this situation for a few minutes. Then read aloud the following statements, one at a time, pausing to ask if teens believe the statement to be true or false.

- ☉ The Las Vegas shooting is the largest in US history. (*True*)
- ☉ This horrific shooting targeted people at a country music festival. (*True*)
- ☉ There were 35 people who died and 200 who were injured. (*False—59 died; nearly 500 injured*)
- ☉ Police believe a second shooter may have been involved. (*False*)
- ☉ In his hotel suite, the shooter had 23 fire arms that were legally purchased in the United States; even more guns were found in his home. (*True*)
- ☉ The shooter had connections to international terrorist groups. (*False—his motive remains unknown.*)
- ☉ The shooting lasted for approximately 10 to 15 minutes. (*True*)

Say: “This horrific tragedy happened only weeks ago, and yet, as the media moves on to other news stories, so do we. It’s not bad to move on from tragedy, but often we try to move forward before we allow ourselves to feel and process the pain. Expressing sorrow is defined as *lamenting*, and it’s actually a spiritual practice that God requires of us.”



## EXPLORE

### Talk Topic 1: Express It (10–15 minutes)

#### Middle School Option

Read aloud the paragraph following the subheading, “What Does It Mean to Lament?” on Page 1. Then ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ When mass tragedies happen, such as the Las Vegas shooting, is it easier for you to lament or to avoid thinking about it?
- ▶ Why do you think it’s so important to lament tragedies?
- ▶ What does it mean to be desensitized? (See Page 1.)
- ▶ How can these type of tragedies desensitize us when they happen so often?
- ▶ What can you do to prevent yourself from becoming numb?

Ask teens to read Psalm 142 silently, then use the commentary in Teacher Bible Prep to explain the context of the Scripture. Emphasize that even though David expressed his pain, he still praised the good attributes of God. Hand out copies of Youth Page 6 and ask teens to write a psalm/prayer in the space provided. Say: “You don’t have to be expert writers. What matters most is that, like David, you honestly express your feelings.”

When most everyone is finished, call on a teen to read aloud his or her prayer as a group prayer of lament to God.

#### High School Option

Say: “Mass tragedies affect everyone differently. Some people tend to have stronger reactions than others, even if they have no personal connection with the tragedy. Be honest: How did you react to this particular tragedy?”

Ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Why do you think some people seem to react more strongly than others to tragedy?
- ▶ Is it better to react strongly or to have no reaction? Why?
- ▶ How do we stop ourselves from becoming desensitized or numb to these tragedies?

Ask teens to take a moment to read Psalm 142 silently. Then discuss the following questions:

- ▶ Why do you think David was in such agony? (Use the commentary in Teacher Bible Prep to prompt discussion.)
- ▶ Even though David was in distress, how did he continue to trust in God?
- ▶ What’s the purpose of lamenting?

**Expressing sorrow is defined as lamenting, and it’s actually a spiritual practice.**

Hand out copies of Youth Page 6 and ask teens to write in the space provided a brief psalm of lament about the Las Vegas shooting, or another incident on their hearts.

## Talk Topic 2: Take Time to Grieve (10–15 minutes)

### Middle School Option

Form three groups of teens and assign each one of the following Scripture passages:

**Group 1:** John 11:1-16

**Group 2:** John 11:17-36

**Group 3:** John 11:38-46

Hand out a posterboard or large sheet of paper and marker to each group. Ask groups to create a storyboard/comic strip that illustrates their assigned Bible passage. When finished, call on groups to tell the story by presenting their work, one at a time. Begin with group 1.

After all the presentations, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Why didn't Jesus rush to save Lazarus after hearing he was ill?
- ▶ Why do you think Jesus cried, even though he knew he was going to bring Lazarus back to life?
- ▶ What does this story tell us about Jesus?
- ▶ How often do you cry or deal with your pain?
- ▶ Why do you think most people try to avoid feeling grief?

Ask, "If Jesus, the Son of God, took time to feel sad—even though in the end he knew everything would be fine—then how important is it for us to take time to grieve?"

### High School Option

Summarize the story of Lazarus and/or ask students to help you tell the story from John 11:17-46. After the story, ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Why do you think Jesus took time to cry and grieve even though he knew everything would be fine?
- ▶ What does the story of Lazarus tell us about Jesus?

As a group, think of phrases people say in an attempt to help us feel better or to rush us into a place of healing. List these sayings on a large sheet of paper.

Ask and talk about the following:

- ▶ Are these sayings helpful?
- ▶ Why do you think people, and even the media, try to rush us into feeling better?
- ▶ What is the most helpful expression of care someone has shown you during a time of grief in your life?

Say: "Make sure you give yourself and others time to grieve and lament. Do not rush yourself or others into a place of healing without first sitting with the grief as Jesus did."

## Talk Topic 3: Do Something (15 minutes)

### Combined Middle School and High School Option

Call on a teen to read aloud Micah 6:1-8, then ask and talk about the following questions, using the commentary in Teacher Bible Prep to guide answers.

- ▶ What imagery came to mind as you listened to this passage? (Talk about the courtroom imagery mentioned in the commentary.)
- ▶ What is the main message you think the prophet Micah was trying to communicate?
- ▶ What is it that the Lord requires us to do, according to Micah 6:8?
- ▶ How can lamenting motivate someone to take action?

Say, "Use the conversation starters on Youth Page 6 to talk with a partner about how you can embrace love, do justice, and walk humbly with God."

### BONUS SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

To begin, show this fun summary of the Book of Job at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WisOPTRoM5U&t=7s>. Then call on a teen to read aloud Job 3:25-26, before asking:

- ▶ Would you say Job is complaining or lamenting his grief?
- ▶ What's the difference between complaining and lamenting?
- ▶ After Job expressed his grief, what conclusions did he reach about who God is?
- ▶ When we lament, does it mean we will get everything we want in the end?
- ▶ How does lamenting tragedy deepen our relationship with God?

### TAKE AWAY

Ask a teen to close by reading aloud this prayer: "Lord, thank you for being Emmanuel, God with us, in the face of evil and tragedy. We pray for those who continue to grieve and lament over the shooting in Las Vegas. May we turn our grief into prayers of lament toward you. Help us to be people of peace in the face of evil as we seek to do justice, embrace love, and walk humbly before you. Amen."

# WORKING IT OUT

## DO SOMETHING

Use the following conversation starters to talk about questions and answers with a partner.

**1. How do we walk humbly with the Lord?**—*Admit the sin/evil inside you.*

☉ **What is a personal struggle that you know is displeasing to God?**

☉ **Examples:** selfishness, pride, laziness, idolatry, perfectionism, coveting, jealousy

**2. How do we embrace love?**—*We choose to love instead of hate.*

☉ **How have you (or someone else) shown love to a person even when you didn't feel like it?**

☉ **Examples:** forgive, let go, reach out, share, serve, sacrifice, give

**3. How do we do justice?**—*Stand up for those who are persecuted, marginalized, poor, or outcasts.*

☉ **What is one thing you can do this week to stand up for someone else in need of justice?**

☉ **Examples:** be a friend, write a letter of encouragement, speak up, get involved, give, serve

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## In the Bible: Readings for the Week

**MONDAY:** Read Psalm 102:1-2.

Do you believe God hears your prayers when you cry out?

**TUESDAY:** Read Lamentations 3:39-40.

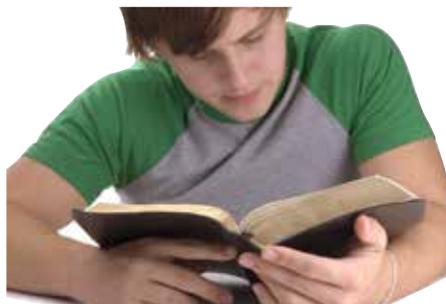
What sins do you need to surrender to God?

**WEDNESDAY:** Read Job 19:25-27.

Our hope is in our Redeemer!

**THURSDAY:** Read Habakkuk 1:3-4.

When did you last lament over a lack of justice?



**FRIDAY:** Read Revelation 21:4.

Our grief and tears will come to an end.

**SATURDAY:** Read Ecclesiastes 7:3.

Can we know true joy without sorrow?

## Express It

Write your own prayer/psalm of lament.

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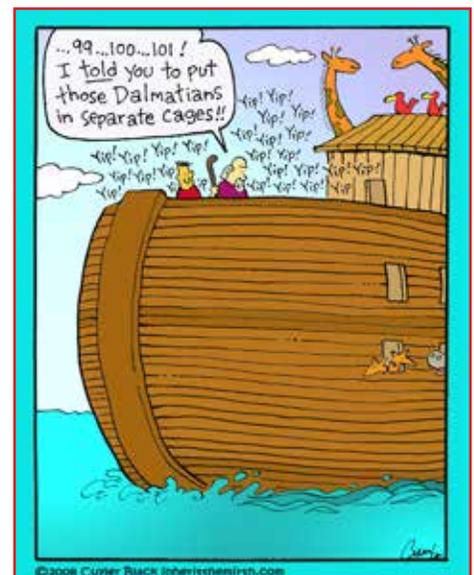
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## Inherit the Mirth



## WHAT'S TRENDING?

Write a sentence prayer of lament. Tweet or post your prayer with the hashtag #lament on Twitter to @YMPartners or on facebook.com/youthministrypartners