

# **I Cry Aloud to God: Lament and Hope in the Face of the Climate Crisis**

**Bible Study Series on Psalm 77**



United  
Women  
in Faith

*I Cry Aloud to God: Lament and Hope in the Face of the Climate Crisis*,  
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# United Women in Faith Mission

United Women in Faith seeks to connect and nurture women through Christian spiritual formation, leadership development, creative fellowship, and education so that they can inspire, influence, and impact local and global communities.

## Vision

Turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world.



United  
Women  
in Faith

# Acknowledgements

## **CONTRIBUTORS:**

- **Writers:** Nora Asedillo Cunningham, Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee, and Ilka Vega
- **Video Testimonies:** Cindy Saufferer, Cynthia Taylor, Ilka Vega, Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee
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## **RESOURCES:**

Creation Justice Ministries Earth Day Resources

*Church Anew* blog

“Abandoned! A Pastoral Word from Walter Brueggemann”

# Contents

As a collaborative effort between the Climate Justice and Spiritual Growth Offices, we offer this kit as a resource to be used throughout the organization and beyond. Included in this kit are:

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# **I Cry Aloud to God:** **Lament and Hope in the** **Face of the Climate Crisis**

**Bible Study Series**

# Context

As a sisterhood of grace organized for mission, United Women in Faith strives to create spaces for material and spiritual transformation. We ground ourselves in our biblical and Methodist calling to continue responding to the needs of the world, showing God's love in our relationships with one another, and through our stewardship of creation. According to our United Methodist Social Principles, we should "meet these stewardship duties through acts of loving care and respect" (Social Principles, ¶160).

Today, we strive to meet our stewardship duties and respond to the urgent need of the climate crisis. All of creation, planet and people, are suffering from human-caused climate changes. The window for addressing the crisis is rapidly closing and disproportionately endangering those who are the least responsible. They are people who are already in vulnerable situations and whom Jesus took special care of and asks us to serve. It is on their voices that we need to center. This is why climate justice is social justice, and it's doing God's work. In these moments of much suffering and fear, we remain faithful in God's promises and Jesus' teachings tackling the climate crisis and mobilizing individual and collective efforts to call for systemic change. This calls for a transformation of our political, economic, cultural, social, and spiritual practices. It also calls us to be courageous to speak with a prophetic voice against systems of injustice and work towards liberation. As one of our justice campaigns, we work towards climate justice by incorporating its principles and sustainability into all our programming and by creating creative spaces for collective action and reflection.

To address the urgent climate crisis, we must transition to just and renewable sources of energy. Fossil fuels like coal, oil, and gas, currently the main sources of energy that power our electricity production, transportation, and other industries, are the biggest contributors to climate pollution and environmental crises. We need a radical but just energy transition, and we need it now. Because a just transition is not guaranteed, we have a responsibility as participants in the energy system and as people of faith to organize, mobilize, and advocate for it.

Our current Just Energy 4 All campaign mobilizes United Women in Faith members and communities to take action and advocate for policies that support 100 percent clean, renewable energy and a just energy transition. We need a just transition that prioritizes opportunities, investments, and participation from frontline communities in decision-making processes. The urgency of the climate crisis is calling us for unprecedented change and action. As bold women in faith, we will strive constantly for self-renewal and material and spiritual transformation of the world in Jesus's name.

# Bible Study

## **Introduction to the Material:**

This Bible study series emerged from a worship service for Earth Day 2022. It was created in collaboration between the climate justice and spiritual growth offices of United Women in Faith. It was written for people involved in the Just Energy 4 All work and/or those concerned about the current climate crisis, environmental pollution, or energy burdens. It came out of the spiritual need to acknowledge that the work for climate justice has been hard and tiring, and we are called to reflect and ask questions about how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing this work.

This five-session study breaks down Psalm 77 into four parts. In this text, we see the people of Israel cry out to God in lament, seek God with questions, remember the redemptive acts of God and of communities of faith, and dare to hope through faith in the resurrection. The fifth study is a reflection on Psalm 77 as a whole and how as people of faith we can refuse denial and refuse despair. This psalm, which starts out seeking help, evolves into a hymn of praise.

We know from our own lives that while this cycle may sound comforting and healing, it does not always pan out that way. We cannot expect a linear path to healing. Sometimes it is most helpful for us to find grounding in community that helps us remember acts of solidarity and the ways that God has shown up for us time and time again. Sometimes we feel anger or confusion and need to question God. Sometimes we need to sit in lamentation—our grief is important and rooted in real devastation facing our planet. And sometimes we need to be challenged to believe that there is hope—in the resurrection and in the collective power of people of faith to seek a better tomorrow.



# How to Use This Bible Study Series:

The five studies in this series can be used independently or as a consecutive series.

- **Invitation to Prayer:** A moment for the group to find their center using breath work as they give thanks to God for creation.
- **Land and Indigenous People's Recognition:** Time set aside in each session to show respect and honor Indigenous people and the local land where the study is taking place. It recognizes continued occupation of the land, uplifts truths, and calls us to participate in larger Acts of Repentance to correct harm done.
- **Scripture Reading:** Each session will allow the group to practice different methods of reading Scripture together.
- **Video Reflection:** Videos will include testimonies of United Women in Faith members who lead in climate justice work.
- **Personal Reflection:** Time to pause and reflect. The Hebrew word *selah* is used throughout Psalm 77, indicating the need to pause. Use this time to journal or draw in response to prompts or the Spirit's leading. If this study is being used as a series, all reflections should be kept together for review in the fourth study.
- **Group Conversation Questions:** An opportunity to discuss and learn together as a group in response to these questions.
- **Closing:** A final moment to allow the group to come together as a shared community before going separate ways.

These studies are created with flexibility in mind. Approximate time each section should take is provided so you can adapt the program to match the amount of time you have available. In total, each study is about 30–45 minutes long. If you have 15 minutes, for example, you can read the Scripture and have a group discussion only. Within each study you will also find suggestions for adaptations for virtual or in-person settings. Feel free to be creative in adjusting for the needs of your community.

If it works for your group, you are invited to include a check-in at the beginning of each session. This will allow each person the opportunity to share their voice into the group and start from a place of acknowledging how each person enters the time of Bible study.

## Materials (Virtual or In-Person Adaptations):

For each session, you will need:

- Device with audio/visual capability
- Pen and paper for individual reflection
- Bible study material with accompanying media
- Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide

When preparing for your study, be mindful of accessibility and ensuring that video and other presentation materials will be both large and loud enough for all to participate.

If you are hosting your Bible study on Zoom or another online platform, practice sharing your screen and video (including sound) with a friend prior to the first session.

For many of the speaking parts, you can invite volunteers either on the spot or ahead of time to read prayers, offer land and Indigenous people's recognitions, or lead the Scripture reading.

- For in-person settings, be prepared with printouts or projections of the common text for participants to read together.
- For virtual settings, plan ahead any PowerPoints or word processing materials you may need to share for participants to read together.

For sections with collective reading in a virtual setting, you may select to have everyone unmute and read together, or you may request one person represent the "People" and others to read at home while remaining on mute.

### Group Conversations:

- For in-person settings, be mindful of the space available and the size of your group to ensure conversations can happen comfortably among your participants.
- In a virtual setting, be sure you are comfortable using the breakout room functions on your chosen online platform to split people into smaller groups or rooms.

## Adaptation for Worship

In addition, should you need a resource for a more liturgical moment or worship service, these studies are presented in worship service form in a separate document.

# Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide

Biblical teaching acknowledges the divinity present in connection with creation and those living in it. In line with our Purpose as United Women in Faith, we acknowledge that we occupy lands that have been inhabited by Indigenous people for thousands of years before us, and were stolen by our predecessors. In seeking to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, we uplift and acknowledge the historical and ongoing systems that have caused the oppression and suffering of the land, as well the Indigenous people who have long called the land where we live home.

Setting aside time for a land and Indigenous people's recognition can be a powerful way of showing respect and honoring Indigenous people, especially as an entry point to other Acts of Repentance (Social Principals).<sup>1</sup> A land and Indigenous people's recognition can be verbal or visual, with the goal of uplifting the truth while hopefully accompanying larger efforts to develop relationships and correct harm done. We have moved away from asking a local Native American to welcome us to the land taken from their ancestors to a more appropriate land recognition, which acknowledges the violent dynamics under which the land was taken and the call on settlers to larger acts of repentance that go beyond building relationships to engaging in restoration in substantial and material ways.<sup>2</sup>

In preparation for creating a land and Indigenous people's recognition, start with prayer. Ask God for guidance and wisdom. This guide may help you create your statement: **[nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment](https://www.nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment)**. To find local information, you can visit **[native-land.ca](https://www.native-land.ca)** to learn about the land that you are on. The website provides various resources to deepen your education. You can look up:

- People who were indigenous to your area and people who are there now.
- History of the Indigenous peoples on this land and related displacement treaties and where they are today.
- Names of living Indigenous people from the communities.
- Indigenous place names and language.
- Correct pronunciation of the names of individual people, places, and tribes or nations being acknowledged.

By learning and uplifting the history and ongoing situation of the Indigenous peoples and land in our locality, we acknowledge that what has happened to Indigenous peoples in the Americas was in direct contradiction to the will of God. This history includes genocide,

dispossession of land, murder of Native people, abuse of children, and additional atrocities involved with settler colonialism.<sup>3</sup> For current settlers, there is a mandate to reflect on what repentance and healing could look like. Land and Indigenous people's recognition should be part of intentional action to support and uplift Indigenous communities. This could include work on reparations, giving land back, decolonization, equity, respecting Native sovereignty, or other actions that can yield material benefits and spiritual healing for Native communities.<sup>4</sup>

Possible format for your land and Indigenous people's recognition:

I. Introduction – Why is this important?

Example: The land is a source of deep spirituality and connection with the divine. Throughout much of the Bible we hear stories and metaphors written in reference to the land or nature, because much of the community existed in agrarian contexts. People were in touch with the land.

In the North American context, after centuries of settler colonialism, genocide, slavery, and removal from the land – we acknowledge that historical and ongoing systems of oppression continue to harm and desecrate the land we occupy and continue to oppress the Indigenous people who have lived in connection with this land for thousands of years. We name the people who are indigenous to this land, as part of an effort to stop the erasure of their existence and to repent for this history.

II. Why is it important to you?

III. Name the land and Indigenous tribe(s). Add details about the history of why (if) they no longer reside there.

IV. Close in prayer

Example: Eternal God, we lift up the lands on which we reside and the Indigenous peoples who were here before us. May we honor and remember their history in ongoing ways. We commit ourselves to action towards justice and reparations for the harm that has been done and actively seek to decolonize our spiritual practices, minds, and spaces of power. Amen.

## Endnotes

1. "Trail of Repentance and Healing," 3324, *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church—2016*. [umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/trail-of-repentance-and-healing-3324](https://umcjustice.org/who-we-are/social-principles-and-resolutions/trail-of-repentance-and-healing-3324).
2. "The goal of settler-colonialization is the removal and erasure of Indigenous peoples in order to take the land for use by settlers in perpetuity. ... Historically, the settler, colonial agenda involved committing genocide by murdering Indigenous peoples... That agenda also meant stealing land through treaties that were later broken or ignored ..." ("What is Settler Colonialism?" *Learning for Justice Magazine*, accessed October 7, 2022, [learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-settlercolonialism/](https://learningforjustice.org/magazine/what-is-settlercolonialism/).)
3. Ibid.
4. "Native People and The United Methodist Church," *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church—2016*. [umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-native-people-and-the-united-methodist-church](https://umc.org/en/content/book-of-resolutions-native-people-and-the-united-methodist-church).

## STUDY 1:

# Lamenting, Psalm 77:1–3

(45–60 minutes)

This program is part one of a five-part Bible study series based on Psalm 77. It was adapted from an Earth Day 2022 Worship Service and created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice.

This session focuses on lament, as we join the people of Israel crying out to God.

## Preparation:

1. Review the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your session. You could repeat the same recognition before each study, invite different people to research something new for each study, or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
2. Provide copies of the Scripture to your participants. Copies can be on recycled paper and/or on half sheets. Each participant will need their own.
3. Choose and test the equipment that will play the video testimony to be sure the speaker can be heard by all your participants.

*(Visit [bit.ly/JE4Aresources](https://bit.ly/JE4Aresources) to access the full materials, which includes the five-part study, a worship service, and accompanying multimedia.)*

## PROGRAM

### Prayer (5 minutes)

#### Invitation to Prayer

*Invite participants to a time of centering. Encourage them to find a comfortable position in a chair, standing, or on the floor.*

Take a couple breaths and feel the air moving through the body. Let us acknowledge the presence of God in our midst.

## Opening Prayer

God of Life, we pray to you today with the same wind in our lungs that drives ocean currents, erodes rock, and disperses seeds.

Sustaining God, we pray to you today with feet grounded on the same earth that nourishes forests and crops, filters water, and helps regulate the planet's temperature.

God of Hope, we pray to you with tears made from the same water that grows our plants, houses our ocean life, and provides nutrients to sustain our lives.

God of Love, we ask you to draw near that we may find space for our sorrow, solidarity in our community, and hope for the work to be done.

Amen.

## Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (5 minutes)

*See Guide to Land and Indigenous People's Recognition to plan this section of the program.*

## Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

*Invite someone to read the Scripture for the group. You can have multiple readings, as well.*

Psalm 77:1–3 (NRSVUE)

I cry aloud to God,

aloud to God, that [God] may hear me.

In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;

in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;

my soul refuses to be comforted.

I think of God, and I moan;

I meditate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*

## Video Testimony: Cindy Saufferer (5 minutes)

Cindy Saufferer is the United Women in Faith Minnesota Conference president, former secretary to the board of directors, and a deaconess candidate. (See: [bit.ly/CryAloudSaufferer](https://bit.ly/CryAloudSaufferer).)

## **Selah: Pause & Personal Reflection** (5–10 minutes)

As you reflect on the Scripture and testimony shared, write a letter to God about your experience with grief or lament. What practices do you use when lament strikes?

## **Group Discussion** (10–15 minutes)

*Discuss the following as a group:*

- What words of lament are on your heart right now?
- How do you process grief?
- Where do you find support when you experience lament?

## **Closing** (5 minutes)

As you reflect on the words shared, let us gather what words of lament are on our hearts.

*Depending on the size of your group, you can invite people to share their words popcorn style or around the circle. You can also gather words on chart paper or sticky notes, or digitally on a projected screen.*

We cry out to God. God, hear our prayers. Amen.

### **Virtual Adaptation:**

- If you are on a platform such as Zoom, you can gather words verbally or in the chat.
- You can also use a tool like **Mentimeter.com** to set up a slide that participants can add words to, creating a word cloud that you can share on the screen.

## STUDY 2:

# Questioning, Psalm 44:4–10

(45–60 minutes)

This program is part two of a five-part Bible study series based on Psalm 77. It was adapted from an Earth Day 2022 Worship Service and created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice.

This session focuses on questions, as we join the people of Israel seeking God with questions.

## Preparation:

1. Review the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your session. You could repeat the same recognition before each study, invite different people to research something new for each study, or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
2. Provide copies of the Scripture to your participants. Copies can be on recycled paper and/or on half sheets. Each participant will need their own.
3. Choose and test the equipment that will play the video testimony to be sure the speaker can be heard by all your participants.

*(Visit [bit.ly/JE4Resources](https://bit.ly/JE4Resources) to access the full materials, which includes the five-part study, a worship service, and accompanying multimedia.)*

## PROGRAM

### Prayer (5 minutes)

#### Invitation to Prayer

*Invite participants to a time of centering. Encourage them to find a comfortable position in a chair, standing, or on the floor.*

Take a couple breaths and feel the air moving through the body. Let us acknowledge the presence of God in our midst.

#### Opening Prayer

*Invite someone to pray for the group.*



## Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (5 minutes)

See *Guide to Land and Indigenous People's Recognition* and preparation instructions for this session.

## Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

Invite one or more participants to read the Scripture for the group twice. The first time it is read, invite people to just listen for what stands out for them. Pause for a moment to allow time to reflect before reading it again. The second time the passage is read, invite participants to circle, highlight, or underline parts of the Scripture that stand out. Share insights with one another after the reading.

Psalm 77:4–10 (NRSVUE)

You keep my eyelids from closing;

I am so troubled that I cannot speak.

I consider the days of old,

and remember the years of long ago.

I commune with my heart in the night;

I meditate and search my spirit:

“Will the Lord spurn forever,

and never again be favorable?

Has his steadfast love ceased forever?

Are his promises at an end for all time?

Has God forgotten to be gracious?

Has he in anger shut up his compassion?” *Selah*

And I say, “It is my grief

that the right hand of the Most High has changed.”

## Video Testimony: Ilka Vega (5 minutes)

Ilka Vega is originally from the Texas/ Mexico borderlands. She is the executive for Economic and Environmental Justice with United Women in Faith and former member of the Charter for Racial Justice support team. (See: [bit.ly/CryAloudVega](https://bit.ly/CryAloudVega).)

## Selah: Pause & Personal Reflection (5–10 minutes)

As you reflect on the Scripture and testimony shared, write a list of questions you have for God, for neighbors, for legislators. What practice would you use when these times of questioning strike?

## Group Discussion (10–15 minutes)

Name a time you held challenging questions for God. If you found resolution, how did you get there? If you did not, what else did you find?

## **Closing** (5 minutes)

*Choose someone to read the Leader lines of the following prayer. Inform your participants that the communal response to each line is “Lord, hear our prayer.”*

### **Prayers of the People – Creation Justice Ministries – Earth Day Resources<sup>5</sup>**

**Leader:** For all those around the world who have lost their homes, livelihoods, or communities to the climate crisis.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For our nonhuman siblings whose habitats are destroyed by the effects of greed and accumulation.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For decision-makers, that their choices might create a more beautiful, whole, resilient world.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**Leader:** For our own church, that we might be bearers of hope and resilience in our community, a place of refuge in the midst of crisis and disaster.

**People:** Lord, hear our prayer.

**All:** Amen.

### **Endnote**

5. From Creation Justice Ministries, “Weathering the Storm: Faithful Climate Resilience,” 2022 Earth Day Sunday resource, Accessed November 20, 2022, [creationjustice.org/resource-hub/earth-day-2022-weathering-the-storm](https://creationjustice.org/resource-hub/earth-day-2022-weathering-the-storm).

## STUDY 3:

# Remembering, Psalm 77:11–15

(45–60 minutes)

This program is part three of a five-part Bible study series based on Psalm 77. It was adapted from an Earth Day 2022 Worship Service and created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice.

This session focuses on remembering, as we join the people of Israel in remembering the redemptive acts of God and of communities of faith.

## Preparation:

1. Review the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your session. You could repeat the same recognition before each study, invite different people to research something new for each study, or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
2. Provide copies of the Scripture to your participants. Copies can be on recycled paper and/or on half sheets. Each participant will need their own.
3. Choose and test the equipment that will play the video testimony to be sure the speaker can be heard by all your participants.

*(Visit [bit.ly/JE4Aresources](https://bit.ly/JE4Aresources) to access the full materials, which includes the five-part study, a worship service, and accompanying multimedia.)*

## PROGRAM

### Prayer (5 minutes)

#### Invitation to Prayer

*Invite participants to a time of centering. Encourage them to find a comfortable position in a chair, standing, or on the floor.*

Take a couple breaths and feel the air moving through the body. Let us acknowledge the presence of God in our midst.

## Opening Prayer<sup>6</sup>

From the dust of the earth, the Holy One breathed us into life.

Through the breath of God we are all connected.

Shaped in her image, God formed us with a purpose:

To create

To service

To tend

To protect

To love

That life may flourish in all its forms,

May the Spirit of the Living God be manifest in us!

## Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (5 minutes)

*See Guide to Land and Indigenous People's Recognition and preparation instructions for this session.*

## Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

*Invite one person to read Scripture for the group. The first time the passage is read, invite participants to circle, highlight, or underline parts of the Scripture that stand out. The second time it is read, invite participants to read the specific words they underlined in unison with the main reader.*

Psalm 77:11–15 (NRSVUE)

I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;

I will remember your wonders of old.

I will meditate on all your work,

and muse on your mighty deeds.

Your way, O God, is holy.

What god is so great as our God?

You are the God who works wonders;

you have displayed your might among the peoples.

With your strong arm you redeemed your people,

the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

## Video Testimony: Cynthia Taylor (5 minutes)

Cynthia Taylor, a United Women in Faith member, is a lay leader at Mount Olive United Methodist Church in Randallstown, Maryland, and a member of the Baltimore-Washington Conference Creation Care Team. (See: [bit.ly/CryAloudTaylor](https://bit.ly/CryAloudTaylor).)

## **Selah: Pause & Personal Reflection** (5–10 minutes)

As you reflect on today's Scripture and Cynthia Taylor's testimony, take a minute to write down who the different members of your community are. Choose one or two and reflect: what reminder do they offer you in your commitment to seek climate justice? What practice would help you to remember those who came before you, and the work that God has already done?

## **Group Discussion** (10–15 minutes)

Share about when you have felt the Spirit of God in the movement for justice. How is the Spirit calling you now to move forward in the work for climate justice?

## **Closing** (5 minutes)

Play the song, "**Your Labor Is Not in Vain,**" sung by Latifah Alattas found online in DropBox [bit.ly/LaborNotVain](https://bit.ly/LaborNotVain).

## **Endnote**

6. "Calls to Worship," Enfleshed, accessed November 2, 2022, [enfleshed.com/liturgy/calls-to-worship](https://enfleshed.com/liturgy/calls-to-worship).

## STUDY 4:

# Hoping, Psalm 77:16–20

(45–60 minutes)

This program is part four of a five-part Bible study series based on Psalm 77. It was adapted from an Earth Day 2022 Worship Service and created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice.

This session focuses on hope, as we find faith in God's steadfastness and the resurrection.

## Preparation:

1. Review the Land and Indigenous People's Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your session. You could repeat the same recognition before each study, invite different people to research something new for each study, or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
2. Provide copies of the Scripture or Bibles to your participants in a few different translations. Copies can be on recycled paper and/or on half sheets and may be shared.
3. Choose and test your device that will play the video testimony and song to be sure the speaker and musician can be heard by all your participants.

*(Visit [bit.ly/JE4Resources](https://bit.ly/JE4Resources) to access the full materials, which includes the five-part study, a worship service, and accompanying multimedia.)*

## PROGRAM

### Prayer (5 minutes)

#### Invitation to Prayer

*Invite participants to a time of centering. Encourage them to find a comfortable position in a chair, standing, or on the floor.*

Take a couple breaths and feel the air moving through the body. Let us acknowledge the presence of God in our midst.

## **Opening Prayer<sup>7</sup>**

We cannot merely pray to you, O God, to end war;  
For we know that You have made the world in a way that people must find their own  
path to peace within themselves and with their neighbors.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end starvation;  
For You have already given us the resources with which to feed the entire world,  
if we would only use them wisely.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to root out prejudice;  
For You have already given us eyes with which to see the good in all people,  
if we would only use them rightly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end despair;  
For You have already given us the power to clear away slums and to give hope,  
if we would only use our power justly.

We cannot merely pray to You, O God, to end disease;  
For You have already given us great minds with which to search out cures and  
healing, if we would only use them constructively.

Therefore we pray to You instead, O God, for strength, determination and will power,  
To do instead of just pray,  
To become instead of merely to wish.

## **Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (5 minutes)**

*See Guide to Land and Indigenous People's Recognition and preparation instructions  
for this session.*

## **Scripture Reading (5 minutes)**

*Invite a participant to read the Scripture for the group. You can have multiple  
readings, as well.*

Psalm 77:16-20 (NRSVUE)

When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.  
The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered;  
your arrows flashed on every side.  
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.  
Your way was through the sea,  
your path, through the mighty waters;  
yet your footprints were unseen.  
You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

### **Video Testimony: Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee** (5 minutes)

Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee is the director for Mobilization and Advocacy at United Women in Faith. Previously, she was the executive for Economic and Environmental Justice and Climate Justice lead. (See: [bit.ly/CryAloudLee](https://bit.ly/CryAloudLee).)

### **Selah: Pause & Personal Reflection** (5–10 minutes)

As you reflect on the Scripture and testimony shared today, take a minute to write down where you feel hope right now. During challenging times, where do you know for sure that God is? What practice would help you to find hope in trying times?

### **Group Discussion** (10–15 minutes)

How does hope take root in our souls?

Share with your group: Invite participants to share the reflections they have been gathering each week on practices they can use in lamenting, questioning, remembering, and hoping. If you are using this as a standalone session, share with your group around what practices you use in your life to root yourself in hope.

### **Closing** (5 minutes)

*For the closing prayer, go around the group one by one, inviting each person to share their response to the following question:*

What is one practice you will take with you from today's session?



*Close the prayer with:*

God of Grace, hear us in our laments, our questions, our remembering, and our hope. Accompany us in our faith practices as we grow in relationship with ourselves, one another, our planet, and you. Amen.

## **For Next Session**

In preparation for the final session, invite participants to bring a digital or printed copy of ***“Abandoned! A Pastoral Word from Walter Brueggemann”*** with them to the next session. Link can be sent out via email.

### **Endnote**

7. “A Sabbath Prayer,” Justice Prayers, accessed November 2, 2022, [socialjusticeresourcecenter.org/prayers/justice](https://socialjusticeresourcecenter.org/prayers/justice).

## STUDY 5:

# Refuse Denial, Refuse Despair, Psalm 77 (45–60 minutes)

This program is part five of a five-part Bible study series based on Psalm 77. It was adapted from an Earth Day 2022 Worship Service and created out of the spiritual need to ask questions and reflect on how our faith supports us in our commitment to doing the hard and tiring work of seeking climate justice.

This session focuses on the whole arc of Psalm 77, and how as people of faith it can show us how to refuse denial, refuse despair.

## Preparation:

1. Invite participants to bring a digital or printed copy of **“Abandoned! A Pastoral Word from Walter Brueggemann”** with them to the next session. Link can be sent out via email.
2. Review the Land and Indigenous People’s Recognition Guide and prepare an appropriate recognition for your session. You could repeat the same recognition before each study, invite different people to research something new for each study, or talk about a commitment to an act of repentance and repairing harm in this time.
3. Provide copies of the Scripture or Bibles to your participants in a few different translations. Copies can be on recycled paper and/or on half sheets and may be shared.
4. Choose and test your device that will play the video testimony and song to be sure the speaker and musician can be heard by all your participants.

(Visit [bit.ly/JE4Aresources](https://bit.ly/JE4Aresources) to access the full materials, which includes the five-part study, a worship service, and accompanying multimedia.)

## PROGRAM

### Prayer (5 minutes)

#### Invitation to Prayer

*Invite participants to a time of centering. Encourage them to find a comfortable position in a chair, standing, or on the floor.*

Take a couple breaths and feel the air moving through the body. Let us acknowledge the presence of God in our midst.

#### Opening Prayer

*Invite someone to pray for the group.*

## Land and Indigenous People's Recognition (5 minutes)

See *Guide to Land and Indigenous People's Recognition* and preparation instructions for this session.

## Scripture Reading (5 minutes)

Invite someone to read the Scripture for the group.

Psalms 77 (NRSVUE)

I cry aloud to God,  
aloud to God, that [God] may hear me.  
In the day of my trouble I seek the Lord;  
in the night my hand is stretched out without wearying;  
my soul refuses to be comforted.  
I think of God, and I moan;  
I meditate, and my spirit faints. *Selah*

You keep my eyelids from closing;  
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.  
I consider the days of old  
and remember the years of long ago.  
I commune with my heart in the night;  
I meditate and search my spirit:  
"Will the Lord spurn forever  
and never again be favorable?  
Has his steadfast love ceased forever?  
Are his promises at an end for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be gracious?  
Has he in anger shut up his compassion?" *Selah*  
And I say, "It is my grief  
that the right hand of the Most High has changed."

I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;  
I will remember your wonders of old.  
I will meditate on all your work  
and muse on your mighty deeds.  
Your way, O God, is holy.  
What god is so great as our God?  
You are the God who works wonders;  
you have displayed your might among the peoples.  
With your strong arm you redeemed your people,  
the descendants of Jacob and Joseph. *Selah*

When the waters saw you, O God,  
when the waters saw you, they were afraid;  
the very deep trembled.  
The clouds poured out water;  
the skies thundered;  
your arrows flashed on every side.  
The crash of your thunder was in the whirlwind;  
your lightnings lit up the world;  
the earth trembled and shook.  
Your way was through the sea,  
your path through the mighty waters,  
yet your footprints were unseen.  
You led your people like a flock  
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

## Reading (10 minutes)

Read **“Abandoned! A Pastoral Word from Walter Brueggemann.”** As you read, highlight or underline words or phrases that stand out to you.

*As folks finish reading, collect the quotes together onto the screen, sticky notes, or newsprint. Alternatively, you can leave adequate time for people to read, and then share the quotes with larger group during a short discussion.*

**Virtual adaptation:** You may find it easier to gather quotes in the chat. You can also screen share a Google Document or Google Jamboard and share the link in the chat, so that people can each add to the document.

## Reflection

Renowned Old Testament scholar and theologian Walter Brueggemann wrote about times of abandonment in his column published by *Church Anew*. In it he states that in seasons of abandonment people of faith tell sustaining stories, they sing defiant songs, they pray without ceasing, and they perform story, song, and prayer.

These acts, “do not permit faithful people to withdraw into a closed or simplistic sense of ‘I-Thou’ or ‘me and Jesus,’ but rather push them, through their faith, to practice neighborly love—to show kindness and mercy to one another, to not oppress the widow, orphan, immigrant, or poor. These are not remarkable acts, but basic tenets of the faith.”

He writes:

Such actions *refuse despair*, because they constitute an act of both remembering and hoping. At the same time these disciplines *refuse denial* because they look circumstance full in the face. For every praise there is a lament. For every thanks there is voiced need. For every act of neighbor, there is a sense of the legitimacy of self. By such resolved practices faithful people are not overwhelmed by circumstance. They rather redefine circumstance as a venue for a chance to live differently by fidelity that yields energy, courage, and even joy.

For every act of praise, there is a lament. For every loss, there is a hand to hold. For every step closer to justice, there is rest to be had. For every act of solidarity with community, there is a more intimate relationship with Jesus.

Our previous reflections on Psalm 77 showed us the ways the people of Israel practiced lament, questioning, remembering, and hoping in their time of exile. In these reflections we're reminded that this cycle of grief is not a linear process. We do not walk in one direction through it until achieving hope, but rather we experience it in varying ways in any order over an expanse of time. As we learn more about the impact humankind is having on the planet and commit ourselves to advocating for the wellness of the earth and all within it, we can see how these moments of grief show up and how our faith offers us resources to process it.

This is the calling of Christ—not to walk up a ladder of better and better, but to walk with the work wherever it needs to be done. This is the practice of faith—to embrace lament, to hold on to hope—to refuse despair, and refuse denial.

### **Selah: Pause & Personal Reflection** (5-10 minutes)

Take time to reflect on the reading and identify which of Brueggemann's points resonates with you most. Do you feel most called to sustaining stories, singing defiant songs, or praying without ceasing? Or does another idea come to mind?

### **Group Discussion** (10-15 minutes)

Share with the group your reflections. Which of Brueggemann's points resonates with you most?

## **Closing** (2 minutes)

*Read the litany, allowing time for participants to repeat each line.*

Raise one hand and say:

As children of God, we refuse despair.  
There is hope in the resurrection;  
There is strength in our community;  
There is faith in the unknown.

Similarly, raise your other hand and say:

As followers of Jesus, we refuse denial.  
We see the state of climate change;  
We acknowledge the destruction that has been going on for too long.  
Our work is important.

As people of the body of Christ, we are bound together in the Christian commitment to seek healthy, abundant life for all on and the earth, to dismantle systems that oppress people and of the earth, and to choose neighborly love in times of joy and in times of struggle.  
Amen.