

---

# LOSS, LOVE, LAMENT.

## A RELATIONAL JOURNEY

### THROUGH LENT

#### WEEK 1

---



Thank you for joining us on this journey through Lent. We pray that this season will offer you a deeper understanding of the Larger Story that God is telling and a fresh experience of life with the Trinity as they tell their Story in and through your life. We will be using the book *66 Love Letters: A Conversation with God that Invites You into His Story* as the guidebook for our journey.

Each day, you will have an opportunity to experience one of God's 66 love letters to you and to consider deeply what He is requiring of you—usually something that feels like a loss, and what He is offering you- something that can only be love. This pattern of give and take is regularly experienced by the ones whose stories are recorded in the Bible and in many cases, we see their response- a wholehearted offering of lament.

*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*  
-Job 1:21b

This daily engagement with the Word of God will offer the following elements:

### Read a Love Letter

In this section you will read a short summary of the essence of God's message in that particular book of the Bible. You may choose to read the entire book for your reflection, or you can simply read the passage suggested. You will sample how Larry grappled with the text, the questions he asked himself, and the questions he posed to God. We will use his example as our template during this journey, asking hard questions of ourselves and of God.

### Look at Your Loss

In the Fall, we lost everything good. In this section we will daily consider the magnitude of this loss and how we are now daily required to die to ourselves and give up all to gain Him. And in the spirit of a typical Lenten experience, we will seek to purge and prune, grieve and mourn, surrender and sacrifice.



## Remember His Love

Before the Fall ever happened, God had arranged for all that was lost to be made new—through **Love**. Each day we will look at the ways God constructed His redemptive plan to showcase His love and how He is using the circumstances of your life to manifest that very same love that is making you new.

## Offer Your Lament

**From Dan Allendar:** *To lament is to cry out to God with our doubts, our incriminations of him and others, to bring a complaint against him, thus creating the context for our surrender- the turning of our heart over to him, asking for mercy, and receiving his terms for restoration...*

*Sanctification is a lifetime process of surrendering as more and more intense conflicts with God and others expose and dissolve our urgent preoccupation with ourselves. A lament is the battle cry against God that paradoxically voices a heart of desire and ironic faith in his goodness...*

Each day as you experience your loss and explore what love has done, you will have an opportunity to express your lament back to God. You can read Psalm 3, 6, 13, 28 or 142 to see examples of Lament.

## Have a Conversation that Matters

Because God is a community of three persons, He uses conversation and relationship as a primary way to sanctify us. Each day we offer you a topic for conversation and would encourage you to engage that conversation with your spouse, around the dinner table with your family, with a spiritual friend, during your small group or with your spiritual director.

## Take Time for a Sabbath Reflection

At the end of each week, we will pause in our journey, rest in the embrace of the Trinity, and reflect on what has happened during the past week. This will be a time to seal the work of God on your heart and on your countenance, ensuring that the journey takes you to good places of the heart and brings you into deeper communion with God, greater awareness of yourself, and growing relational holiness with others.

**\*We journey together. \***

Please join us on Instagram or Facebook,  
or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share a story from your journey or  
to purchase a copy of *66 Love Letters* or a study guide for individual chapters.



## Week 1

### *A Fall, a Promise, and the Story Begins*

What is wrong with the world?

What is the solution?

For as many centuries as those questions have been asked, a significant number of intelligent, thoughtful and self-aware people have looked to the first five books of the Bible for at least a beginning answer.

They have believed that the root of all that's wrong with the world and with you and me is turning away from God, a turning that first happened in the first garden by the first man and woman.

And on his own, no one since has wanted to turn back to God.

So God has turned toward us with a promise that begins His love story.



## Day 1- A Love Letter from Genesis

God says, I want you to realize that I never underestimated how thoroughly you'd mess up your life or how painfully you would struggle and suffer, and I don't want you to underestimate your failures or struggles either. They're all part of the story I'm telling.

But neither have I underestimated My determination or ability to enter the mess you've made and the pain you feel, and turn everything around. I can, and I will make everything good again. **Never, never underestimate Me.** I have a plan, a very good one, and it will move ahead to completion. Guaranteed! Trust Me. Why? Because I love you even when you're messing up badly. I love you in the middle of your pain even though I don't relieve it as quickly as you wish. I am worthy of your trust, no matter what happens in your life. I have a good plan and nothing will stop Me from carrying it to completion.

You must live now in the tension between anguish and hope.

### Look at Your Loss

Read Genesis 3 and consider all that was lost in the Fall. Pay close attention to the relationships and the identities of the characters in this chapter. What was lost from their identities? What did they lose relationally?

As you think about the Fall, consider it more personally. What is at the core of what is wrong with you and how has been manifested in your relationships this week?

As you consider your losses, if anything moves you to repentance, express that here.

### Remember His Love

Others have the power to hurt you, but they do not have the power to control how you respond. An unloving response to another's ill-treatment arises out of your own self-centeredness. Only God-centeredness can free you to respond with love, especially in difficult circumstances or painful relationships.

How is that truth taught in Genesis? What story represents this to you? What does that story expose in you, or how does it instruct you to relate differently?



As you thought about your relationships this week, did you respond out of self-centeredness or God-centeredness?

How do you feel about your responses?

If you feel led, repent of your self-centeredness and ask God to grow a God-centeredness in your soul.

## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about all that has gone wrong and all that He is doing to make it right. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

“God, I don’t want to remain blind to my self-centeredness or to excuse it as someone else’s fault. And I don’t want to underestimate Your loving determination to make me other-centered. As best I can, I now open my mind to hear all that You’re saying to me, and I open my heart to whatever You want to do in me. In Jesus’ name, Amen”

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

“Self-centeredness lies beneath all human misery.” Is that sentence naively simplistic or profoundly simple? Considering sharing one of your current “misereries.” How is your self-centeredness undergirding your misery, keeping it alive and making your experience of it worse than the actual circumstances? What might happen if you entered the battle with your own self-centeredness in this situation? Discuss it with your small group or a close spiritual friend.



If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 2- A Love Letter from Exodus

God says, I can and I will detach you from everything that numbs your sacred hunger for Me and makes you feel hungrier for something other than me.

I didn't create you to be miserable or empty. My plan was, is and always will be that you would share My joy. But you got yourself in such bad shape, so far away from Me, that you had no hope of real happiness. I couldn't bear to leave you in that condition.

So I revealed My *power* by setting you free, My *holiness* by letting you know how you must live to stay close to Me, and my passionate *love* by moving in with you. All of that is in Exodus.

Don't every forget: I have a plan, a plan to make you deliriously happy in the circle of My love. As you consider all the laws I gave that you've never kept, and as you see My willingness to go camping to be with My people, know this: I will do whatever it takes to fully restore My family and to be with them forever.

### Look at Your Loss

God promised to rescue His people from slavery and to bring them into a "land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3: 8). Why then did He not simply use His power to get them there as quickly as possible? Why did they endure all the difficult times He could have prevented? Why all the rules He knew they wouldn't keep? Why build the tabernacle when He could have remained on the mountain and from there arranged safe passage for His people to the Promised Land? Where in your life are you asking these kinds of questions of God right now?

Read Exodus 32. When have you become impatient waiting on God to show up? Where have you built a golden calf in your life? What compromises did you have to make to build this golden calf?

How has this golden calf become an idol to you? What might you need to repent of?



## Remember His Love

Read Exodus 34:6-9. This is the only place in Exodus where God specifically say that He is a God of “compassion and mercy, filled with unfailing love”. Many times He reveals Himself as a holy God of power. Why? Why does He want to be known as a holy God of incredible power (Exodus 34: 10) and a strict God of detailed rules (Exodus 19: 3-8) before He reveals Himself as the God of love? Is that how you experience God?

Think about a relational situation in your life right now, maybe a difficult marriage or a painful relationship with a child. Describe the pain or struggle here.

Can you see and feel God’s compassion and mercy in this situation? Is He perhaps telling you something about His power and His holiness? Does this awareness lead you back to His compassion and mercy, or does it make you afraid?

How do you feel about your responses?

Are you drawn to repent? If so, write about that here.





## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about the golden calves in your life, the circumstances which caused you to make them, and all that has been lost as a result. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

“God, humble me enough to accept Your plan for my life as truly good, as the only way to real joy. Enable me to trust in Your power, to bow before Your holiness, and to rest with delight in Your love. Purify my desires so that I no longer want You to join my story but gratefully seize the opportunity Your Son has provided for me to join Your story. In Jesus’ name, Amen”

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have a Conversation That Matters

What God does for us becomes clearly understood only when we realize what God longs to do in us. The good life God provides centers in God changing us on the inside and then blessing us by satisfying our changed desires, no longer our longing for personal comfort but now our yearning for personal relationship with God Himself. We must know Him to want Him. We must know Him to trust Him. Discuss how this works in your life with your trusted community.



If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 3- A Love Letter from Leviticus

God says, You want Me to solve your problems, but you don't know what your worst problem is, the one responsible for all the others. You don't yet realize that distance from Me is the most lethal problem you have.

You assume we're doing just fine together while you run off trying to make life work for you and you expect Me to cooperate. When you read Leviticus, notice that I never solve anyone's secondary problems. In all those verses about skin infection, for example, I never cured the disease, which I easily could have done. I simply told people they couldn't enter My Presence with an oozing sore. The issues was worship and intimacy with Me, not health, wealth, or personal comfort.

So many people identify their needs, then view Me as a god who wants them satisfied and happy before I deal with their unholiness. But because I love them--and you—I've made a way for you to revolve your life around Me as your first thing. Everything else—your marriage, your checkbook, your self-esteem, your cancer—is a second thing. When the first thing (namely, Me) is in first place in your life, every second thing will be yours to enjoy.

You've a long way to go before that's true in your life, but I have a plan to get you there, to make you holy. Stay focused on the core message of Leviticus, that My plan is to make you holy, and you'll see My love—and My Son—all through the letter. My Spirit will help.

### Look at Your Loss

Think about the past week- how have you been distant from God? Have you been trying to make life work without him? How?

How would the realization that distance from God is more destructive to your well-being than anything else impact the way you relate to people who hurt you or in circumstances that scare you?

As you look at Leviticus and your proclivity to make life work without God and remain distant from Him, what can you offer back to Him in repentance?



## Remember His Love

Spend some time, 'skim-reading' Leviticus. For maximum benefit, read all 27 chapters. But if you do skim-read, look more carefully at the first seven chapters. That's where God describes the five main offerings Israel was instructed to give that together provide a rich picture of Christ offering Himself on the cross to God for us. There is no more important event.

How does the idea of these offerings color your picture of Christ offering Himself on the cross? How does this fuller picture impact you- what you think and how you feel about the crucifixion?

Consider a relationship you have that is difficult right now. What is love costing you in that situation? How are you struggling to make the offering love requires?

In *66 Love Letters*, Larry writes as though God was speaking, "The toughest part of my plan, the part that is costliest to me, is to make you holy." How do you respond to that statement? What do you think, how does it make you feel, what desires does it stir in you?

In light of the relational trial you described above, have you cooperated with God's sacrificial plan to make you holy, or are you rebelling against it? If the Holy Spirit stirs your heart to repent, write about that here.



## Offer Your Lament

Now that you've thought through what God is saying in Leviticus, what comes to mind when you hear the word holiness?

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about the circumstances that keep you distant or the costly relationships that interfere with your holiness. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

'God, you want me to be holy in any situation more that You want me to figure out what to do to be happy in that situation. I can't stop wanting to be happy but I can change my understanding of what it means to be happy. Help me understand what it means to say that Jesus was happy, even as He suffered. And help me want to be happy like Jesus. In His name, Amen'.

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have a Conversation That Matters

The message of Leviticus? The toughest element in God's plan to make me happy and get me to His party is to make me holy, to enable me to love God for God's sake and to love others for God's sake and theirs. And that's what real happiness is. Thanks to Jesus, holiness, loving God and others at any cost to myself in this life, loving like Jesus, is my opportunity for happiness now. As you consider all the elements of Jesus sacrifice for us, what does that tell you about how you should love others? How could the Rejected Man of Sorrows be, at the same time, the Holy Man of Happiness?

What would it mean for you to be 'happy like Jesus' when you are rejected, disappointed, betrayed, or misunderstood?

Where are you struggling most right now with your desire to be happy rather than holy?



If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 4- A Love Letter from Numbers

God says, the road to life is rough. You will begin every new adventure in life with naïve hope and excitement. Every wedding will begin with passion then move into problems. Every decorated nursery will receive a baby that will present unanticipated challenges. Every church plant, every new ministry, every small group that starts with happy hopes, everything you do, no matter how well organized and well intentioned- will run into trouble.

The road to life will expose you to terrible failure and crushing conflict. But only that road leads to the life you want, the life I give you. Spiritual leaders who teach that I am here to solve your problems and make your lives comfortable and prosperous underestimate the energy (and badly misunderstand the nature) of unholiness in the human heart that I must severely deal with to get you to My party.

And that underestimation leads them to underestimate the severity of my love. My servant C.S. Lewis got it right: I'm not safe, but I am good. I will not coddle you any more than a good surgeon only hugs a cancer-stricken child. I will not coddle you, but I will purify you. I only kill to resurrect. Everything in you that's bad, I destroy in order to release everything in you that's good. And I know goodness is in you, lodged deeper in your heart than badness. I know because I put it there. It's the goodness of My Son.

### Look at Your Loss

Read Numbers 21:4-9. What do you notice about this story? How do you feel about the people of Israel? About God? About Moses? How does this story relate to your life right now?

Reflect on when you last received difficult news. What was your reaction? Did you hear yourself saying, "This isn't fair"? Did you retreat into denial with a positive spin response, something like "Things will turn out fine"? Or was your deepest thought, "God is at work for some good purpose"? Write about that time here:

Now reflect on a recent relational event where you felt unfairly treated by someone, perhaps unjustly judged or unkindly dismissed or unlovingly criticized. Or perhaps someone who was supposed to be looking out for your interests failed to do so and, as a result, something important didn't go your way. What words went through your mind? What did you feel? What did you say or do? What goes on in you now as you remember the offending event?



As you think about these situations, what might God be trying to kill in order to resurrect? What bad thing is He after in order to release the good He has already placed in your heart?

## Remember His Love

Remember the statement from above: 'Everything in you that's bad, I destroy in order to release everything in you that's good. And I know goodness is in you, lodged deeper in your heart than badness. I know because I put it there. It's the goodness of My Son.' How is this an expression of God's deep love for you?

How does your heart respond to this expression of God's love?

What would a self-denying, God-honoring response to unfair treatment or frightening circumstances look like?

What's going on in you that makes such a response difficult to offer?

What could be going on in you that would free you to gladly respond in a manner that would delight the heart of God?

If you feel the Spirit moving you to repent, write about that here.







## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about the bad things He is purging from you to release the good things He has already placed in you. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

“God, excite me with the prospect of pleading mercy so that I can extend mercy to others. No matter how painful my circumstances or relationships might be, empower me to respond in a way that honors You. And God, please change the prescription of the lenses through which I look at life. I want to see any suffering, in any form, that comes my way as an opportunity to examine my heart and celebrate both Your grace and the sure hope it provides. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have a Conversation that Matters

How does our spirit of entitlement so badly distort our vision and our thinking that we feel justified in complaining when life gets hard? Share about a hard thing happening in your life right now that you feel entitled to complain about.

How would clearly seeing our self-honoring, God-using inclination free us to surrender to God’s purposes even while we’re emotionally reeling from unfair treatment or frightening circumstances?

Talk about what you need to see in the middle of your emotional turmoil in order to surrender to God’s purpose and love in the hard situations of your life.



If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## A Sabbath Reflection

Perhaps a look through clear glasses at our self-honoring, God-using ways will convict us to the point of repentance. Maybe we'll change our reaction to unjust treatment at the hands of others from "How dare they!" to "I deserve far worse from God". And when unexpected trials hit, perhaps we'll be able to say "God is at work to accomplish good things I cannot yet see" rather than "Why is this happening to me? It's not fair". Only those who live every day in humble gratitude for God's loving forgiveness and merciful goodness, no matter how poorly they're treated by others or how much suffering they're called (and privileged) to endure, only those folks will reveal God's forgiving and merciful spirit to others.

### Look at Your Loss

Look back at your journal from this week and consider all the ways you have said- "How dare they? Why is this happening? This is not fair!" Remember those here:

Do your best to meaningfully quantify how these costs and losses impacted your heart.

What lies were you tempted to believe?

What negative emotions beset you?

What distorted or destructive desires assailed you?

How did you choose your own self-protection and self-interests?

As you look at the week in its entirety, is there something deeper calling for your repentance?



## Remember His Love

Now look back at your journal from this week and consider all the ways God has met you, the ways He has incarnated with you to join you in your pain and struggle. Like He pitched a holy tent to live with the Israelites in the wilderness, He has moved toward you with love this week. Capture those encounters with Him here:

Day 1-

Day 2-

Day 3-

Day 4-

What has been the theme of this week with God?

What is He offering you?

What is He asking of you?

Where do you need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with others?

Where is He prompting you to offer forgiveness and mercy to others?





## Rest in the Trinity's Embrace

Recall Joseph's words to his brothers at the end of their life-long relational trial

*As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. Genesis 50:20 ESV*

Reflect on that story and the mysterious workings of God in Joseph's heart that he could say authentically say those words to brothers who had abducted, abused, and abandoned him. Consider your own relational trials and how God is caring for you during them. Even in the pain of relational dysfunction, the Trinity has invited you into their perfect union. Enter in with them. Sit for a few minutes and rest in the joy of their happiness together.

## Respond from Your Heart

Read Exodus 15 where Moses and Aaron lead the people in a triumphant song of praise and thanksgiving to the God who had just rescued them from slavery and oppression. God has been doing the same thing for you this week. Use this passage as an inspiration for your own song of praise and thanksgiving to God.



---

# LOSS, LOVE, LAMENT.

## A RELATIONAL JOURNEY

### THROUGH LENT

#### WEEK 2

---



Thank you for joining us for Week 2 of this journey through Lent. We pray that this season will offer you a deeper understanding of the Larger Story that God is telling and a fresh experience of life with the Trinity as they tell their Story in and through your life. We will be using the book *66 Love Letters: A Conversation with God that Invites You into His Story* as the guidebook for our journey.

Each day, you will have an opportunity to experience one of God's 66 love letters to you and to consider deeply what He is requiring of you—usually something that feels like a loss, and what He is offering you- something that can only be love. This pattern of give and take is regularly experienced by the ones whose stories are recorded in the Bible and in many cases, we see their response- a wholehearted offering of lament.

*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*  
-Job 1:21b

This daily engagement with the Word of God will offer the following elements:

### Read a Love Letter

In this section you will read a short summary of the essence of God's message in that particular book of the Bible. You may choose to read the entire book for your reflection, or you can simply read the passage suggested. You will sample how Larry grappled with the text, the questions he asked himself, and the questions he posed to God. We will use his example as our template during this journey, asking hard questions of ourselves and of God.

### Look at Your Loss

In the Fall, we lost everything good. In this section we will daily consider the magnitude of this loss and how we are now daily required to die to ourselves and give up all to gain Him. And in the spirit of a typical Lenten experience, we will seek to purge and prune, grieve and mourn, surrender and sacrifice.





## Remember His Love

Before the Fall ever happened, God had arranged for all that was lost to be made new—through **Love**. Each day we will look at the ways God constructed His redemptive plan to showcase His love and how He is using the circumstances of your life to manifest that very same love that is making you new.

## Offer Your Lament

**From Dan Allendar:** *To lament is to cry out to God with our doubts, our incriminations of him and others, to bring a complaint against him, thus creating the context for our surrender- the turning of our heart over to him, asking for mercy, and receiving his terms for restoration...*

*Sanctification is a lifetime process of surrendering as more and more intense conflicts with God and others expose and dissolve our urgent preoccupation with ourselves. A lament is the battle cry against God that paradoxically voices a heart of desire and ironic faith in his goodness...*

Each day as you experience your loss and explore what love has done, you will have an opportunity to express your lament back to God. You can read Psalm 3, 6, 13, 28 or 142 to see examples of Lament.

## Have a Conversation that Matters

Because God is a community of three persons, He uses conversation and relationship as a primary way to sanctify us. Each day we offer you a topic for conversation and would encourage you to engage that conversation with your spouse, around the dinner table with your family, with a spiritual friend, during your small group or with your spiritual director.

## Take Time for a Sabbath Reflection

At the end of each week, we will pause in our journey, rest in the embrace of the Trinity, and reflect on what has happened during the past week. This will be a time to seal the work of God on your heart and on your countenance, ensuring that the journey takes you to good places of the heart and brings you into deeper communion with God, greater awareness of yourself, and growing relational holiness with others.

**\*We journey together. \***

Please join us on Instagram or Facebook,  
or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share a story from your journey or  
to purchase a copy of *66 Love Letters* or a study guide for individual chapters.





## Week 2

### *History Tells His Story*

In the next set of love letters a theme emerges:

We're in trouble and God wants to rescue us!

As we continue the story, we realize that the severity of what's wrong with us only highlights the wonder and enormity of what God must do to move His love story along to its terrific conclusion.

The next five books are full of loss and lament. Get ready for a roller-coaster ride.  
Your emotions will sink to new lows and then rise to new heights.

Because we're so out of sync with God's plan, many things go wrong and suffering is rampant.

But even when things are darkest, love still shines through. In each of these love letters,  
God reveals a little more of how His love is all we need.



## Day 5- A Love Letter from Deuteronomy

God says, I am the only true God. There is none other. When you don't like what I'm doing, there is no plan B. I brought you out to bring you in. You were locked in the prison of self-centeredness, just as Israel was in painful bondage to Egypt, where all they could think about was themselves- how can we get a better life, not how can we love God.

In Deuteronomy, Moses preaches three sermons which all repeat one message: Here's God's law. Keep it. If you do, life will go well for you in the land of promise. If you don't, even Canaan will become a land of hardship and disaster. When Moses completed his third and final sermon, God met him as he left the pulpit and told him, "Nobody listened. This new generation will prove no better than the earlier one" (Dt. 31: 15-16, 19-21). I can only imagine what Moses felt. "Forty years I've put up with these demanding whiners. I never got through to the first crop of adults. And now, with no retirement plan for a pleasant life in Canaan and knowing I'm about to die in this miserable wilderness, I'm not getting through to this next bunch".

And yet, in the midst of profound disappointment, something deep in Moses knew something deep in God. His final worship hymn, sung after his final sermon, ended with these words: "Rejoice... he will... make atonement for his people" (Dt. 32: 43). He then gathered the leaders of Israel's twelve tribes to pronounce a blessing on each son of Jacob. When he completed his individual blessing on each of the twelve tribes, his last recorded words before he died were addressed to all of Israel: "Blessed are you, O Israel. Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord" (Dt. 33: 29).

God asks nothing of you but respecting Him for who He is, following Him wherever He leads, serving Him with your whole heart, and obeying all His commands. But that's asking something neither you nor Israel could do. You are not capable of loving Him like that. No one can please Him unless He puts the life of His Son, who always pleases Him, into their hearts. And that's what He did. He is faithful to faithless people. Believe that, and you can learn to live in rhythm with His Son, a little more gracefully each day.

### Look at Your Loss

Failure is inevitable. We do fail and we will fail. But every failure, every unkind word we speak, every selfish thing we do, is not only cause for humility, brokenness and repentance, it is also an opportunity to discover and celebrate God's unfailing love, His offer of relationship. What does that mean to you?

Think of a recent relational exchange when things didn't go your way. What did you most want to do? What urge can you identify that was strongest within you?



In this situation, where was there cause for humility, brokenness and repentance?

## Remember His Love

Our love for God is sustained, not primarily by enjoying His blessings or keeping His rules, but rather by Spirit-nourished confidence in God's heart and Spirit-empowered release of our passion for Him. Read Deuteronomy 33:29. How does the reality described here impact the relational situation you just described? Where was God offering you relationship out of His unfailing love?

How is the Spirit nourishing your confidence in God through this situation?

Now take a moment to look deep into your heart for how the Spirit is releasing a passion for Him.

## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about all the ways you have experienced the failure of others and all the ways you have failed. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God, I want to obey you and I want my own way. The battle within me is real. Don't let me use the relationship of grace you offer to become sloppy about obedience. And don't let your call to obedience blind me to the rest I can know in the relationship You provide. I know I fail, and I know that you never do. Help me to live in the security of that without ceasing to battle my own failures.

Cry out to God:



Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

Moses knew God. He knew that the holy God who imposed rules and punished rule-breakers was also a loving God who provided relationship, relationship with Him that promised forgiveness and joy. How do you experience God as a wise parent who offers relationship and sacrificial love while establishing rules with real consequences? Share about a time where you received forgiveness and experienced joy.

Jesus came and reinforced God's rules, interpreting them even more strictly. But He also revealed the relationship God offers, an offer that bears indisputable evidence that the holy God of wrath is more deeply the gracious God of love. He forgives disobedience and empowers obedience by giving us hearts that long to draw close to His. How do you see Jesus living obediently from this secure place of relationship with the Father? Share how you experience God empowering your obedience. What do you need from Him in the relational challenges you are facing today, to be obedient to His rule?

If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 6- A Love Letter from Joshua

God says, invite Christians to live for Jesus and imply that the Christian life is all about blessings, about entering a land filled with milk and honey with no real battles, and they'll all come forward. Churches that never deal with the real fight that following My Son requires often grow large but mostly with small Christians.

Defeating their enemies involved conflict for Israel, failure, and the need for discernment, just as it does in your life. Israel had to fight real battles with real swords that shed real blood. Some of the people, like Achan, preferred blessings to battle. That preference led to failure as it will in your life.

Our worst enemy, if not the worst then certainly the easiest to overlook, is our flesh, that self-serving tendency to protect ourselves against whatever hurts and to provide ourselves with whatever quickly satisfies. When we "live in the flesh", we back away from the battles that must be fought if our journey into the Promised Land is to yield spiritual maturity. When we "live in the Spirit", we identify the battle and move into it, depending on God's power in order to reveal God's character as we fight against everything that opposes God's purpose.

A spirit of entitlement and jealousy will plague you until you die. You'll need discernment to identify it, recognize it as wrong, and know how to navigate your way through it. You will have to learn to hate your sin more than you hate your suffering. Substantial victory is available in this life, but only with struggles that remain until heaven.

### Look at Your Loss

Read Joshua 23:14-16. Respond to the reminder of God's faithfulness in vs. 14. What has that looked like in your life the past few days?

What is your fiercest battle against your flesh right now? Where do you feel entitled?

How difficult is it for you to identify that battle? How is that flesh battle played out in your closest relationships?

Think about a relationship that is causing you suffering right now. How are you responding from the flesh- to get your own needs met or to preserve your own felt well-being?



And how aware are you of your urge to ignore the battle against your sin and live to avoid suffering, grabbing whatever is available to be enjoyed in this life?

## Remember His Love

Do you struggle to believe that victory can be consistently yours to enjoy when you hate your sin of greed and unbelief more than the suffering of not getting what your covetous heart wants?

Ask the Spirit to lovingly and gently help you to hate your sin more than whatever suffering you are experiencing right now.

Reflect again on Joshua 23:14 where he says, "Deep in your hearts you know that every promise of the Lord God has come true. Not a single one has failed." What promises of God do you need to be depending on as you stay in the battle against your flesh?

What desires and passions are most deeply stirred as you let the message of this love letter fill your mind and penetrate your heart?





## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about your struggle to hate your sin more than you hate your suffering. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God, don't let me think of my journey through life as an opportunity to maximize personal comfort. Open my eyes to see the battles I must fight if I am to really live as an authentic follower of Jesus. Expose to my awareness where I value comfort over holiness and convict me with how wrong that is so that I might repent and fight against sin more than I fight against suffering. In Jesus name, Amen.

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

The title of this chapter is "Learn to Hate Sin More than Suffering." Reflect on that title until you're gripped by the enormity of the challenge it lays down and the wonder of the invitation it extends.

Share one of your current relational sufferings? Can you see any sinful aspect of your response to the suffering?

Honestly discuss how you feel about your suffering compared to how you feel about your sin. After your conversation, take some time to pray for each other.

If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 7- A Love Letter from Judges

God says, I never heal superficially. Many of My people wish I did and think I do. I don't. My plan is to change you from the inside out, to change your motives-why you do what you do- and to change your impact on people so that how you relate to others will make them thirsty for Me and will draw them to dependence on Me.

Without ongoing, frequent, and deepening repentance of the sin lodged so deeply in all of us that it either remains hidden from our sight or, if recognized, seems as natural and normal and necessary as breathing, we fall short of the soul-satisfying maturity that, thanks to the gospel, is now within our reach. Without repentance of our deepest sin, we aim too low. And we continue to most want and settle for the blessings of a materially comfortable and relationally enjoyable life, the good life to which we feel entitled.

Only when people look deeply into themselves will they truly repent. My people in Judges never repented. They remained in love with their own sense of well-being, with no understanding that love, real love, the love that defines Me, involves suffering the loss of wellbeing for the sake of another.

That lack of understanding is epidemic, not only in culture, but in churches today. And it is in you. You and everyone else are included to depend on Me for the good life of blessings and to mistake that dependence for love. You're more afraid of losing the good life than of losing (or never gaining) a close relationship with Me. You do not yet see that being with Me is your greatest blessing, no matter what else may be happening in your life.

### Look at Your Loss

Where had God called you this week to suffer the loss of your own wellbeing for the sake of someone else? How did you respond?

Are you more afraid of losing than good life than of losing (or never gaining) a close relationship with God? Reflect on your answer.

Honestly consider a difficult relationship you are experiencing. Are you willing to suffer the loss of your own well-being, be it internal or external, for the well being of the other person? Reflect on the struggle you are experiencing as you consider this loss.

Does your struggle feel normal, natural or justified?



Does your response require you to repent?

## Remember His Love

When you love God above all else, what you do will bring Him pleasure, because your motives, though never pure, will be holy. How are you experiencing God's pleasure as you seek to truly love Him during this Lenten journey?

And when you love others with an authenticity and passion that draws them toward God, you will feel a little of the pleasure God feels. Are there places in your life right now where you experience this?

Relational tensions, job disappointments, financial concerns, health issues, emotional struggles all give opportunity to identify the real enemy of your spiritual progress and to wage war against it. What difficult experiences in your life right now are most exposing the "real enemy of your spiritual progress"? And what are these difficult experiences exposing in you?

What do you need to do to see these experiences as God's merciful invitation to join the battle with Him for your holiness?



## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about how deeply sin is lodged in you. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God, let me wake up every morning welcoming the battle You've called me to fight every day, knowing I'm privileged and equipped to fight it. Let me value maturity above convenience and make me aware of the depth of my sin.

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

If we fail to repent of our relational failure at the exact moment when we are most painfully failed by another, if we fail to repent of our entitled-to-blessings attitude when things don't go well for us, we will never know what it means to "gain Christ" as our deepest reality (see Philippians 3:8 NLT). How does that statement strike you? Talk about the challenge of repenting of your own relational failure at the exact moment when you were most painfully failed by another. Share examples if possible.

Considering your discussion, ponder the message of Judges: the freedom repentance brings opens us to the Spirit's filling that empowers us to live more fully alive lives. What might that look like in the examples you shared?

Pray for each other to experience this kind of repentance and growth.

If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 8- A Love Letter from Ruth

God says, no matter what happens in your life, I can reach into your heart with the power to form you into someone who values Me above everyone and everything else. I am determined to reverse your values.

My plan has a happy ending, a wonderful finale far better than you can imagine, but the happy ending is only for the holy. I am committed to your holiness at any cost to Me, required by My nature, and at any cost to you, required by yours, and on whatever timetable is necessary. There are intractable obstacles I must overcome to make you holy. I deal with three in Ruth: natural disadvantages that to you seem more important to overcome than an unholy value system, shattered dreams that bring so much pain into your life that it's difficult to welcome the opportunity they provide for new levels of trust, and material resources that make it easy to disguise narcissism behind non-sacrificial generosity.

Ruth's life is a they-all-lived-happily-ever-after story, but it is not a parable of My power to make life comfortable; it is a parable of My power to make people holy. Know this: holiness and only holiness brings joy. No problem in your life, whether difficult problems such as disadvantages and loss or agreeable problems such as wealth, can stop My plan. Faith and hope together release love. And love is holiness. *Hear what I'm, saying in this love letter: no matter how dark the world around you, no matter how difficult the worlds inside you, My plan overcomes all obstacles to holiness.*

### Look at Your Loss

In the book of Ruth, God exposes 3 intractable obstacles He must overcome to make you holy. What is He exposing in you through:

1. Natural disadvantages that seem more important to you to overcome than an unholy value system.
2. Shattered dreams that bring so much pain into your life that it's difficult to welcome the opportunity they provide for new levels of trust.
3. Material resources that make it easy to disguise narcissism behind non-sacrificial generosity.

Take a moment to mourn or repent as needed.



## Remember His Love

Consider Naomi: She endured the darkness of shattered dreams and emerged into the light as a loving mother-in-law, a happy grandmother and a grateful relative of Boaz. During her dark night, love seemed impossible. What is going on in your life right now that makes loving seem impossible?

Consider Ruth: It would have made more sense for her to stay with her people, to find another husband within her culture, and to look for work in familiar surroundings. But she loved Naomi with “foolish” love. What are your opportunities right now to exhibit foolish love? What makes that hard for you to do?

Consider Boaz: He knew that the pleasure of blessings is less valuable to the human soul than the joy of relationships. He understood that joy depends on giving, that we’re wrong to assume that getting provides the deepest pleasure. To believe that lie makes love seem unnecessary. How convinced are you that loving is necessary for joy? Where is God calling you to love someone by giving without getting?

Love without ongoing sacrifice of felt self-interest is cheap love. Where are you struggling with this reality in your everyday relationships?



## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about where you offer cheap, self-centered love. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God teach me that love is wise no matter the cost, that love is possible because of Your grace, and that love is necessary for joy no matter how fully blessings seem to satisfy my soul. In Jesus name, Amen.

Cry out to God:

Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

The story recorded in Ruth hints at the *sacrifice of self* that love requires (Ruth), the *hope in God* that love involves (Naomi), and the *depth of passionate commitment* that love reveals (Boaz). Talk about these different facets of love shown in the book of Ruth. Share which one are struggling with the most right now?

Love without ongoing sacrifice of felt self-interest is cheap love. Love without anchoring hope in God when we can't find Him in the darkness of shattered dreams is cheap love. Love without a consuming desire to give to another that is stronger than every desire to get from another is cheap love. Discuss each variation of cheap love defined here. Share what is convicting about it? Have you been offering a cheap love to those in relationship with you?



If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.





## Day 9- A Love Letter from First Samuel

God says, I'm aware that things go wrong in your life, that family and friends don't always treat you well, that nothing goes exactly as you want it to. I grieve with you over the pain that life causes you. But our priorities differ. You ask what will work to make your life better, to correct the injustice you suffer, to see to it that more things go as they should in your life. I want you to ask what holiness would look like in your situation, whatever it is; holiness that might not right the wrongs you suffer but that would let us enjoy each other.

I told Samuel's story to let you see how Israel's spiritual leaders, when they saw trouble brewing at the end of Samuel's life, forgot Me—no, they rejected Me—and honored their own agenda to make life work according to their own wisdom. They insisted Samuel appoint a human king, a king other than Me, to lead them. They wanted to fit in with the way other people ran their lives that seemed to be working for them. Israel had never had a king other than Me.

It hurts Me to see My people chase after a lesser good than knowing Me. It disturbs Me to watch them follow so-called proven methods to make good things happen and to value those managerial methods more than the holy and self-denying relating that pleases Me no matter what happens. You will understand My central message in this letter when you understand the tragedy of asking for a king other than Me. Following the ways of another may work for a season. It often leads to the shallow and short-lived laughter of pride in an accomplished agenda.

Following My ways will lead you through trouble and emptiness to real laughter, to the laughter that only persons in holy relationship can enjoy.

### Look at Your Loss

Read Samuel 1-3 and consider Hannah's story full of hurt, difficult relationships, disappointment and loss. What do you think enabled Hannah to endure the suffering and stay faithful to her part in God's story?

Protecting ourselves from pain in difficult relationships seems so legitimate. What makes it so wrong? Where have you protected yourself in your relationships this week?

In light of Hannah's example, where might you need to repent of self-protection?



## Remember His Love

Weeping over both our loneliness and our demand that God cooperate with our desire to feel good now releases the passionate desire to relate with holy love no matter what pain is involved. Why? How?

God will make us holy even though living a holy life involved suffering that unholiness can relieve. Only those who are willing to cry from the heart over personal pain that obedience requires will learn (eventually) to laugh from the belly with joy over God's promise to change us into relationally holy people who can please God now and enjoy love with him forever. What unholiness do you engage in to relieve your suffering?

What is God offering you instead?

## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about the unholy responses you offer when you are hurt. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God, the more clearly I see Your plan to make me holy, the more sadly I realize how far short I fall of Your desire. Convict me of my failure to love and of my tendency to complain about the cost of loving until I joyfully celebrate the wonder of Your costly love for me.

Cry out to God:



Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

Notice:

- What did Hannah feel when she sent her long prayed for child away to live in the tabernacle at Shiloh?
- What did Samuel feel when God's people rejected his counsel and demanded a king other than God?
- What did Saul feel when he was chasing after David to kill him?
- What did David feel when he learned that Saul, the man who had tried to kill him was dead?

Remember, God will make us holy even though living a holy life involves suffering that unholiness can relieve. Discuss each of the situations above and talk about what each person did with their negative feelings, and how God used the situation to offer them maturity and greater holiness. Which situation most relates to your life right now? Share with the other(s) in the conversation.

If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## Day 10- A Love Letter from Second Samuel

God says, only when you see the moral evil in the human heart will you surrender to the mystery of My plan.

In this world, I am destroying moral evil in My people. In the next, I will eliminate natural evil. You must trust that I permit terrible things, natural evil that grieves My heart far more than yours, as part of the process of destroying the moral evil that offends My heart. In ways you cannot understand, I have the power and wisdom needed to move My plan forward through the evil of bombs and the injustice of suffering.

No matter how great your pain or how confusing and intense your suffering, live in the mystery of My love. Struggle to trust Me.

Do not live with the priority of making your life in this world as good as you can make it. You will suffer, at times unfairly, but you will be given what you need to enter strongly and wisely with supernatural love into every circumstance you face.

Doing so will be your joy, your hope, and your deepest fulfillment now as you look forward to a world where every child runs and laughs.

### Look at Your Loss

It is excruciatingly painful to see a vision of how wonderful things could be and to then live in the reality of how difficult things are, and continue to be, despite fervent prayer and sincere effort to make things better. Where is this playing out in your life right now?

Read 2Samuel 23:1-7. Imagine David at the end of his life. He had experienced heady highs- kingship, military success, the admiration of a nation, even being called a man after God's own heart. And he experienced incredible suffering- betrayal of friends, wives, children, the dire consequences of his own sin, hardship, fear of war and murder. As you read his last words, and think about the extremes of his life, what is stirred in you? How did David deal with the vision and experience of how wonderful things could be juxtaposed with the reality of how difficult his reality was?

Where do you need to experience the virtue of waiting like David did?



## Remember His Love

The power of hope, a God-appointed and a God-empowered vision of what would be, of who David would become, sustained him through his struggles and failures. And that same power can sustain you. Where is God offering you the sustaining power of His hope right now?

In the face of how far you have yet to go to become the person you most long to be, consider how the *power of hope* could sustain you. What vision do you have for yourself that fills you with the joy of anticipation?

What vision does God have for you that anchors you in the confidence that He will complete the good work He has already begun?

## Offer Your Lament

Use the prayer below as an introduction to your own lament before God about the difficulty of waiting for His plan to come to fruition. Offer the authentic cry of your heart, your genuine surrender to His love, and your praise and thanksgiving for his mercies which are new every morning.

God, deliver me from living on a timetable for unstable results, in my world, my church, my family, myself. Help me to face things as they are. Let my discouragement yield to confidence in Your plan, for both my life and for everything I see in this world.

Cry out to God:



Surrender to Him:

Praise Him:

## Have A Conversation that Matters

Read together David's *last words* in 2 Samuel 23:1-7. Read of David's *last sin* in 2 Samuel 24:1-17. Read David's *last act of worship* in 2 Samuel 24: 18-23. Discuss how the record of his last words, his last sin, and his last act of worship might strengthen in you the *virtue of waiting* and *the power of hope*.

If you were unable to have a conversation with someone significant in your life today, you can join a conversation with us at Larger Story. Join us on Facebook or Instagram, or go to [www.LargerStory.com/lent](http://www.LargerStory.com/lent) to share your story and read about what is happening in the lives of others.



## A Sabbath Reflection

What happens in the lives of God's people is sovereignly orchestrated by God to serve one dominant purpose that trumps all others: to expose our self-centeredness until, more than anything else, we hate it more than we hate all of life's difficulties, and to reveal His forgiving love until, more than anything else, we want to relate as He does with confidence that He will get the job done. Any energy spent in pursuing our well-being at another's expense is **relational sin**.

### Look at Your Loss

Keeping in mind that relational sin can be far more subtle than demeaning a friend or willfully ignoring someone, look back at your journal from this week and list examples of what your relational sin looked like with those closest to you. Remember those here:

Do your best to meaningfully quantify how these relational sins impacted your heart.

What lies were you tempted to believe?

What negative emotions beset you?

What distorted or destructive desires assailed you?

How did you choose your own self-protection and self-interests?

As you look at the week in its entirety, is there something deeper calling for your repentance?



## Remember His Love

Now look back at your journal from this week and consider all the ways God has met you, the ways He has incarnated with you to join you in your pain and struggle. Like He met Ruth and Naomi, He has moved toward you with love this week.

Capture those encounters with Him here:

Day 1-

Day 2-

Day 3-

Day 4-

Day 5-

Day 6-

What has been the theme of this week with God?

What is He offering you?





What is He asking of you?

Where do you need to seek forgiveness and reconciliation with others?

Where is He prompting you to offer forgiveness and mercy to others?

## Rest in the Trinity's Embrace

Recall Naomi's words to Ruth as they were waiting for Boaz to take action:

*"Sit back and relax, my dear daughter, until we find out how things turn out." Ruth 3:18 MSG*

Reflect on that story and the mysterious workings of God in Naomi's heart that she could wait with confidence after all her suffering. Consider your own relational trials and how God is caring for you during them. Even in the pain of relational dysfunction, the Trinity has invited you into their perfect union. Enter in with them. Sit for a few minutes and rest in the joy of their happiness together.

## Respond from Your Heart

Read Ruth 4:14-17 where Naomi is encouraged by the birth of her grandson. God met her in her loneliness and brought her back into a family and a home. God has been doing the same thing for you this week. Use this passage as an inspiration for your own song of praise and thanksgiving to God.