
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 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.



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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.



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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?



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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.



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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.