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Speaker 2 ([00:29](#)):

You're listening to the Faith and Work Podcast where we explore what it means to be a follower of Christ in the workplace.

Dustin Moody ([00:40](#)):

Hello and thanks for listening to the Faith and Work Podcast. I'm Dustin Moody, Director of Communications at Denver Institute for Faith and Work, and today we're continuing to look at the effects that the coronavirus pandemic is having on our work.

Dustin Moody ([00:52](#)):

We read in Ecclesiastes that there is a time and a season for everything, including a time to mourn. And many of us are finding ourselves in a season of lament. If you're anything like me, this idea of lament might be a bit foreign. But as Professor in Theologian N.T. Wright recently explained, "Lament is what happens when people ask why and don't get an answer." We see examples of this throughout scripture, from the Psalm to the New Testament, and there's no shortage of questions of why these days. Whether it's about a loved one contracting coronavirus, the disruptions the pandemic is having on our homes, our organizations, our schools, and our churches, the toll that it's having on our economy, or the massive job losses that people across the country are now experiencing.

Dustin Moody ([01:29](#)):

To get us started and to help us make sense of these questions and this time of lament, I talk with Ryan Tafilowski. Ryan is an instructor in the division of Christian Thought at Denver Seminary and an associate pastor at Foothills Fellowship Church in Littleton. Ryan is also a writer and content manager for us at Denver Institute where he focuses on our online learning platform called the Faith and Work Classroom.

Dustin Moody ([01:48](#)):

After that, we'll hear from Brian Gray, a familiar voice to this podcast who serves as COO of Denver Institute and Director of the 5280 Fellowship.

Dustin Moody ([02:01](#)):

Ryan, thanks for joining me on the Faith and Work podcast.

Ryan Tafilowski ([02:04](#)):

Great to be here, thanks.

Dustin Moody ([02:06](#)):



So you recently wrote a blog post for us called Recovering Lament: What Should We Do With Unresolved Pain? And I'm curious besides the fact that we asked you write that, what led you to think about lament in this season of coronavirus and everything that we're going through?

Ryan Tafilowski ([02:22](#)):

Yeah. The first thing to say is that I felt a little disingenuous is not the right word, but I should say from the outset that I have not been touched by this in really direct or catastrophic ways like so many have. People close to me have been, and I started to think about it too through my work with the fellowship where we had some fellows who have been really adversely effected professionally because of what happened. Some folks in my family, my sister got laid off really suddenly after she thought she'd have work for a while, and the situation changed so rapidly of course. And I like theology, so I read a lot of theology blogs, and I follow people on Twitter and just checked in on what's being said all over the spectrum theologically. And I was struck by, as I mentioned in the blog, on the right and left politically and also religiously how quick people are to give this virus and all the aftermath a coherent narrative. Where I just don't think when you look at suffering in the Bible that anyone really resolves it quite so neatly or so quickly. So I thought it was just a relevant theme.

Dustin Moody ([03:33](#)):

So let's talk about that a little more because as you mentioned in the blog post, we, particularly in the West in the US, often want to frame and explain things in order to make sense of them. But when we look to scripture, we don't see that same process. There are plenty of examples of people crying out, asking hard questions in examples that you mention without explanation or without those issues ever seemingly to be resolved through scripture. So what can we learn about lament from the Bible? Where does it come from? What is it, and what are some examples that you found in this writing project?

Ryan Tafilowski ([04:06](#)):

Yeah. So I mentioned an article by the New Testament scholar N.T. Wright that he recently wrote for Time Magazine on recovering lament, and he I think gave a really helpful definition of lament. He said, "Lament is what happens when people ask why and then don't get an answer," which is difficult for us for a few reasons culturally I think because we for better, for worse are living in an age where we're used to manipulating nature through technology. We're used to being able to master even very difficult problems, which makes us quite a bit different than people living in the agent world who would've written the Bible and would've heard those scriptures read because they were much more familiar with living in a universe that they can't control and where things happen that are inscrutable or unintelligible. And just they never get an explanation for. This is difficult for us, but I think once you start to look all over the Bible, you see it all over the place across of course the Hebrew scriptures, which are the product of a much more expressive culture than us, but also in the New Testament.

Ryan Tafilowski ([05:05](#)):

And so what struck me is that across all these different genres that make up our Bible, you have people I don't think confronting is too strong a word. People confronting God in their grief or in their pain, and that's really what a lament is, people raising questions, not getting answers, and maybe not even expecting to get answers. So you see a good example is the book of Job all throughout the wisdom literature, but Job is an extended example of lament who he's lost everything, can't tell why, and never actually really finds out why, even when he gets his hearing with God. But you also see it all over the Psalms. I used an example from Matthews gospel where Herod kills all the young boys in Bethlehem



because he's frantic to find the Messiah who's going to challenge him for his throne. So it says when these women lost their children, they would not be consoled. And I think that's one element of biblical lament is that it refuses to be consoled.

Dustin Moody ([06:03](#)):

It seems like, at least in many contexts of churches in the US, we've moved away from expressing many emotions, particularly anger. And what comes to mind when the coronavirus first started rolling out, was a flippant treatment about it from pastors that I was hearing. A lot of times it was said, "God's got this. It's under control. Everything will be fine." And I believe that to be true. But that doesn't get us from here to there, and as you mentioned, there's a gap from where we are to the ultimate end of things. Whether it's coronavirus or Christ return that I think we skip over. I think a lot of us are not necessarily equipped to handle anger or uncertainty or really despair and grief in the face of God.

Dustin Moody ([06:50](#)):

So I guess my question is what can scripture teach us about being real with those emotions because I think a lot of times we equate anger with sin. So what does it look to be angry over a situation and not sin?

Ryan Tafilowski ([07:05](#)):

Yeah, that's a great question, Dustin. I think partially it's because we're instructed all over the place in scripture that we are to be joyful people. And you'll often hear pastors say that joy doesn't depend on your circumstances. It transcends whatever might be happening in your life, and that is true. And it's true also that joy is not synonymous with happiness, but just because we know the way the story ends, if I could put it this way, doesn't make it any easier to live out the plot in the meantime, especially in the throws of tremendous grief. So I think one thing the scripture can really teach us is that particularly in the New Testament books all these writers, the gospel writers and then Paul and John and Peter, they all envisioned the Christian life as being lived at the intersection between God's new age, which we call the kingdom of God and then the old age, which is ruled by the powers of sin and death.

Ryan Tafilowski ([08:05](#)):

So even though those powers have been defeated in the cross, they are still dangerous. And they still are wreaking havoc in God's world. And the New Testament writers are completely frank about that. They recognize that the evil one still has his designs and is still seeking to undo what God has done. So the end is coming. Their days are numbered of course. But they can still do tremendous damage in the meantime, which having that recognition that we live at the intersection of those two ages I think helps us to live in the tension between them.

Dustin Moody ([08:41](#)):

Yeah. So before we wrap up our transition, I'm curious for you personally but for believers in general, what does it look like to sit with grief, to sit with anger, to sit with pain? We don't want to belittle what people are going through. News came up this week, 16 million people in the US are unemployed. Where upwards of potentially couple hundred thousand people might lose their lives because of coronavirus. These are really problems for real people, and statistically none of us are going to be immune from some level of hardship based on this, whether it's job loss, family or friends that are connected to it. But it's going to be a long road from everything the experts tell us. What does it look like to sit with that without having an answer, an explanation?



Ryan Tafilowski ([09:24](#)):

Well, the first thing I think to keep in mind is that in a situation like this, we got to resist the temptation to speak too much. I work as a pastor as part of my work, and this is especially difficult for people working in ministry because you feel like you're being paid to say something, to have some sort of answer. But actually too much talk, especially in situations like this, can actually compound pain and bring more harm than good. So it sounds simple, but how do you dwell with it? Well, I think on one level is to do nothing at all, to just let the suffering be. Whether it's yours or someone else's, especially I think if it's someone else's because the last thing someone who just lost their job wants to hear or someone who's got a loved one suffering sick with this illness or perhaps has even lost someone is to say, "Well, God's in control. He knows what he's doing," or, "He's got something even better planned for you," or, "You weren't supposed to be in that job anywhere." All these kinds of platitudes that might be true in a vacuum in sort of timeless circumstances, but actually might even be untrue when someone is really suffering.

Dustin Moody ([10:32](#)):

And more hurtful.

Ryan Tafilowski ([10:34](#)):

And hurtful, yeah. These sorts of comforts actually can be cruel, even if we don't intend them to be.

Dustin Moody ([10:41](#)):

Ryan, thanks so much for your time today. Thanks for writing this blog. We'll link to it in the show notes, and stand well in the weeks and months ahead.

Ryan Tafilowski ([10:49](#)):

All right. Same to you. Thanks.

Jeff Haanen ([10:53](#)):

Hi. This is Jeff Haanen, the Founder of Denver Institute for Faith and Work. Thanks for listening to the Faith and Work Podcast and for letting me interrupt to share a request with you. I want to ask you to consider becoming a financial contributor to Denver Institute. Each day thousands of people listen to our podcast, engage our short courses, and grow spiritually as a result of generous donors like you. Each podcast episode is 100% funded by generous donors simply that work as a way to love God, serve our neighbors and demonstrate the gospel to our world. Well, for example, this episode cost about \$250 to produce. You may not think that making a financial gift makes a difference, but it does. We are deeply grateful for every single gift.

Jeff Haanen ([11:36](#)):

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Dustin Moody ([12:14](#)):

Brian, welcome back to the Faith and Work Podcast. How are you doing in this season?

Brian Gray ([12:18](#)):

Yeah. It's good to be doing this again. I think we're doing okay. We are time of recording, what? About a month plus into stay at home season and feel like we've hit our strides. I celebrated my 16th anniversary during this time and gave my wife a horrible, awful looking mustache as her anniversary gift. Loved and made me keep throughout the entire team of stay at home. So what would we say, Dustin, these are strange times. I have a strange [crosstalk 00:12:50]

Dustin Moody ([12:49](#)):

Is she hoping for a longer stay at home or a shorter stay at home?

Brian Gray ([12:53](#)):

Yeah. She's probably the only person out there who's really hoping that stay at home extends for a couple of months because she wants the mustache to last that long.

Dustin Moody ([13:00](#)):

Well, good for Kelly.

Brian Gray ([13:02](#)):

Yeah, good for someone.

Dustin Moody ([13:04](#)):

Yeah.

Brian Gray ([13:04](#)):

We're doing okay though overall.

Dustin Moody ([13:06](#)):

Good. Let's dive into this topic of lament. We talked to Ryan a couple minutes ago about the biblical context for lament. Tell us a little bit about what this looks like emotionally and practically, and I'm asking this from your former context as a pastor. What does this look like in our daily lives in practice?

Brian Gray ([13:25](#)):

One thing to note at the very beginning, this is a part of my own personal journey in spiritual formation is I've had to come to terms with the fact that there is far more room in the scriptures in terms of permission for negative emotions and then my view of the God of the Bible had when I was younger. So what I mean by this is that if we read through particularly the Psalms, we see God allowing for anger, spitefulness, people's outright disappointment with him, pleading with God to not do things that don't seem like they're in the character of God. "Please don't take your spirit away from me." "Lord, brand this spear and javelin against my enemies who pursue me." These are all some very raw human emotions. I think what we see in that is that God has more space to be able to hold and deal with our emotions than we do, and so much so that he allows, if we could just use the textbook of the Psalms as an example, he



allows them to be captured throughout the scriptures. That gives us a ton of permission, not just biblically but emotionally for how we can lament.

Brian Gray ([14:39](#)):

I think lament can help us to avoid two extremes, either a really veneer optimism. "How's it going, Brian?" "Oh, everything's great." Or on the other side, "How's it going, Brian?" A hopeless cynicism, "Ah, this sucks. I'm so tired of this. Nothing's going to happen. It's never going to..." Blah, blah, blah. I think that lament finds this middle way. Lament finds a third way that recognizes the reality of difficulty around us but gives space for our own emotion to respond to that in a way that's in process and is not the complete and whole narrative.

Brian Gray ([15:16](#)):

So if we think about an idea that we talked about on the podcast a lot is that God is not just redeeming individual souls, forgiving them of sins that they spend eternity with him and have. Though that's a part of the gospel. But if he's really redeeming all things, and we start to look at what is all the brokenness around us and how are all the ways that God is bringing renewal out of this brokenness. And lament fits within that narrative. We look at say we face things that aren't resolved, whether it's risk of job loss or disrupted school or disrupted social life or all the different things that a lot of people are experiencing. These aren't resolved. We don't know when they're going to resolve, how they're going to resolve. Many of us expect the economic tail of this pandemic is going to be really long. But even without resolution, we can lean into this larger narrative that God is redeeming and renewing all that is broken and all that is incomplete. And I think therefore in that narrative, lament gives us a place to voice the reality of the brokenness and the hope of it's renewal together and not making those an either or proposition.

Dustin Moody ([16:26](#)):

One of the things that Ryan and I talked about was this emotion of anger that many of us are feeling right now. And you mentioned anger of job losses, anger over changed plans, anger over finances, being on the receiving end of things that we did not effect ourselves. Talk a little about where this idea of justice and lament intersect.

Brian Gray ([16:50](#)):

Yeah. This is a loaded question for me personally. I'm an Enneagram One, which means that anger is the pet go-to emotion. It's actually something I've had to come to terms with throughout all my life. What I've learned about anger I think can be instructive here. Anger is typically for most people, it's a cheap, easy go-to surface emotion, but it's betraying or hiding or masking some deeper, more integrated emotional realities beneath it. So as a metaphor, think about anger as a dashboard indicator light on your car that says... Cars, by the way, cars are these things that we all use to drive before the great pandemic, people. So think about they used to have a dashboard. Think about the dashboard indicator light metaphor that there's a check engine light that comes on, and anger can be something of a bit of a warning that there's something deeper for us to pay attention to. The deeper levels beneath anger for me or beneath many are legitimate sorrow, lament, or you brought up justice.

Brian Gray ([17:49](#)):

I give this concept to say I might feel angry right away, but down deeper is there both a legitimate issue of justice in the eyes of a God who would walk into the temple and turn over tables because people were profiteering off of religious practice. That is a legit anger with a legit justice motivation. Or is anger



connected to really silly justice things for me or for others. I'm angry because somebody cuts me off in traffic, and my typical tendency is like, "Ah, that's so unjust. That's so unfair." Really? That's not that big of a deal. That's not that unjust. That's not keeping the idea of justice.

Brian Gray ([18:32](#)):

So I do think that relationship between the two of these is that if we look at in this idea we talked about earlier, things that are not resolved still need a response for us. And a righteous anger or being angry about the things that we don't have control or influence over or being angry at some of the injustices, legit injustices that are happening. Whether it was early on in this when it was hoarding of food and hoarding of toilet paper, people extending this hyper individualistic American nature. Both culturally and Christianly, we see this hyper individualism. People extend it into the way that they've chose to buy, to keep, to hoard products, to do a number of things. We can look and say, "Hey, there's a place..." When we lament, we can actually say it combines this idea of anger and justice but it's not getting resolved. And yet it is something that's worthy of an emotional response.

Dustin Moody ([19:31](#)):

So you're getting close to talking about the practicalities of it. So what does lament look like in practice?

Brian Gray ([19:38](#)):

I think to connect it specifically to our work experiences, I think lament starts from a place for us where we need to choose the deepest expression of honesty that we possibly can. So what does this look like? Lament might look like for some people pausing, journaling, pursuing reflection when a destructured lifestyle for many of us or a lifestyle that is uncoupled from traditional work, rest, home rhythms. When that's been disrupted, reflection time can be a premium. So I think we have to really intentionally choose to be reflective and to be as honest as we possibly can. What is it that we're feeling towards God? What is it we're feeling towards neighbors? What is it we're feeling towards our employers? What is it we're feeling towards political leadership? What is we're feeling towards decision makers of all kinds? It doesn't mean that what we're feeling is the ultimate and right answer, but starting from this place of honesty does honor the biblical tradition of lament as a motive, honest, fully human, pretty gritty raw experience. So I think the first thing we do is we pause and we actually reflect and we get down to the depths of those.

Brian Gray ([20:51](#)):

If we started to apply this into the world of our work, which is something we obviously care a ton about. At the time of recording this podcast, unemployment rates are starting to approach 5%, and we've got about 22 million Americans unemployed. Most people are projecting that this is the beginning of a trend that is only going to continue. So for people who are listening to this who themselves are unemployed or feel the fear of employment risk, whether it's going to be we're going to be cutting our salaries or I'll have to have some of my time furloughed or forced vacation. Those are the easy versions of this. But people who are gig workers or contractor work based workers. I only have income when I work. I'm working much less now. As we start from those people in those types of situations, lament gives us a practical way to both to recognize in essence the injustice of being a really competent person who has gifts to steward on behalf of the world and not being able to because of things that are outside of our control.

Brian Gray ([22:01](#)):



There's a really helpful diagram that's been going around. We could put this in the show notes. It is a friend of ours Lisa Slayten who we work with has shared this recently, and if everyone can imagine three circles. Again, you can look in the show notes. But imagine three concentric circles. Your center circle is what we're going to call the circle of control. Those things that you have direct control over. The next circle around that, a little bit less control, but that's called the circle of influence. So you do have some influence. These are the types of activities or experiences in your life that you participate in but also are interacting with other people or other systems. And then the outer circle of these is what we call your circle of concern. And that's a place where you just don't actually have influence or you don't have control. My circle of concern or for many of us the circle of concern is whether or not... Just to use the most pressing example during a time of this pandemic, whether or not you have other people in your life that are affected by or infected with coronavirus is in your circle of concern. You can call mom or dad say, "Mom, dad, stay home. You have to." You can try to influence them, but realistically there's a lot of things that are in that circle of concern.

Brian Gray ([23:16](#)):

If we use these things together, lament responds to those things practically speaking. We look at all the different things that are in that outside circle of concern, and lament allows us to respond to that circle of concern but with something that we can control or influence, which is ourselves, our own emotional experience, our own desire and need to be honest, to lace things before the Lord in hopefulness, in recognition that they're not resolved. And so I think that's a really important thing for people who are suffer with work.

Brian Gray ([23:53](#)):

A last thought at a practical level is lament... Let's go back to the normal days in the office, workplace, and just think back to how often you heard complaining at work or people being cynical towards, "This is always the way things are going to be," or "Things never change." Let's think about how much leer gossip has happened, how much coworker gossip happened in your workplace. Lament I think practically speaking stands as an alternative to those unhelpful complaining cynicism gossip. These are not helpful ways to deal with very concrete realities that people are perceiving. I think lament offers us a way to both recognize those but then to bring honesty before the Lord that results in a hopefulness and a dependence upon him. That for me is what lament looks like. I'm honest and all the emotions that come with it. But the end result is not a negative one but it's a hopeful one in God, and it is a dependent one upon God.

Brian Gray ([24:56](#)):

So I think practically as we're recognizing these things, postures of prayer with our hands held open and saying part of our lament is, "God, this is what I see. This is what I experience. This is what I feel." "It was hard enough to get a date before, but now what?" "I hated my job before, but now what?" As we hold those things before the Lord, what we're left with is, "Will you intervene? Would you move? My hope is in you alone. You are God and I am not." So I think this practically puts lament or puts lament to some of the experiences that a lot of us might be having either during normal work or during this very disrupted place of work right now.

Dustin Moody ([25:37](#)):

Yeah. We've got a couple resources we'll put on the show notes page. Brian, you've written about lament in our spiritual disciplines guide. We'll have that available as a download. We'll put the





illustration that you mentioned as well. As we close up, I'm curious, as a real example, how and what have you lamented in this season?

Brian Gray ([25:54](#)):

Yeah. I've had I'll just say personally practically. I lead what's called the 5280 Fellowship in Denver. It is an early to mid career professionals programs in spiritual formation, professional development, and civic engagement. And I have had to lament these technologies, for which I'm deeply thankful. Like Zoom, like a cellphone, like the ability to send quick messages by text in Slack. While I'm deeply thankful and increasingly thankful for those, I've had to lament the disruption of in person, face to face relationship. I over the weekend felt incredibly sad to not hug people or be hugged. I know that that sounds really small, but yeah, that's just a way to communicate value and companionship and like-mindedness. I've had a couple of friends that have had pretty significant life tragedies, and I'm left with a text or a Zoom phone call in response. It just destroys me to not be pastorally present or caring in those kind of ways for some friends.

Brian Gray ([27:02](#)):

So that's part of what I'm lamenting is, "God, are you going to take of your people?" Because apparently your God now and your God back then, even when we didn't need to depend on you in the same ways because we could reach out and we could say, "Hey, give me your hands. Let me pray with you." God was still God then. He's still God now, but there was just something about that ability to be present to one another pastorally. Even in celebration of great things or in really hard moments that is taken from a lot of us right now. I think that's my biggest point of lament that's just hurting me.

Dustin Moody ([27:34](#)):

Brian, thanks for your example. We appreciate it.

Brian Gray ([27:36](#)):

Yeah.

Speaker 2 ([27:40](#)):

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