

53 HOURS

The story of Daniel Kiran Seabrook

“The things we want are transformative, and we don’t know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration – how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?”

REBECCA SOLNIT in *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*

Facilitators Guide

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INTRODUCTION TO THE FILM

As a society, when death and birth occur in the same breath, we don't always know how to deal with those left behind. Across all communities around the world infant death is a reality. And because we don't know how to talk about it, families are left to deal with the pain and loss – often alone and in silence.

To lament is to mourn aloud; to express sorrow or regret; to cry out in grief; complain. The lament tradition appears throughout the bible particularly in the Old Testament. It is in the Psalms though where it is most noticeable. Walter Brueggemann contended that the basic intention of the lament in Psalms and other Biblical writings is to rehabilitate and restore those who are suffering, and that the form of the lament helps to realize this objective. It does this when it *'enhances experience and brings it to articulation and also limits the experience of suffering so that it can be received and coped with according to the perspectives, perceptions, and resources of the community.'*¹

Some argue that in recent years the church has lost the practice of lament and in doing so *'forfeits honest dialogue with God and silences the questioning of covenantal-injustices and the everyday pain of life.'*²

53 HOURS is, in one sense, a lament. A communal expression of grief that attempts to give voice to the most fundamental of human questions when life is threatened and falls apart. In making this film, along with David and Sarah, I have tried as much as possible to tell a story that does not try to make sense of, or 'neaten', the trauma, but rather one that allows a telling of it honestly.

Leasha Love (Director)
July 2012

¹ Brueggemann, Walter. *The Costly Loss of Lament*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 36 (57-71) 1986. USA

² Ibid

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Though this documentary was not made primarily as an educational resource, or tool to facilitate discussion, its contents may be useful to individuals or organizations (hospitals, universities, training programs, palliative care groups, support groups and churches) where infant loss (or loss in general) is being worked through.

This guide aims to provide a framework for discussion around some of the issues explored in the documentary. Exploration is best done in a group hence we encourage the viewing of this documentary in a group context. We are hoping that a safe space will be created where the viewers can firstly discuss and process the film – but then through this discussion begin to tell of some of their own stories – and in this way some of the ‘laments’ of life can be expressed in a bounded communal space.

This film contains images of dying and death and therefore should be viewed with care. If this film is being used for families who have experienced the loss of a baby it should be ascertained before hand if it is appropriate to show this film. Care should be taken in showing this film to pregnant women as the topic may generate unnecessary anxiety. In some instances it may be valuable for a family to view the film shortly after a baby dies, to provide a sense that they are not alone. Other parents may find they are only able to watch this much later, or not at all. Ideally this film should be watched in a safe and quiet place where either the individual or group members have time afterward to discuss the film in a supportive environment.

Brueggemanns article *The Costly Loss of Lament* is a central document and worth reading for further thought.

BEFORE WATCHING THE FILM

Discuss the following with the group for 5 minutes.

- Have you (the viewer) experienced a pregnancy loss, the death of a baby or a child of any age? (either directly or indirectly)?

View the film (40 mins)

Watch the film. Please note that this film contains raw footage of birth and death that certain viewers may find emotional.

Post viewing

Ask viewers to write down or think about what they are feeling immediately after watching the film. Share some of these thoughts.

QUOTES

Below are some quotes. Read them out one by one then share your initial thoughts for discussion.

David: Those words that we got at that Ashram, “expect a miracle”, were still fresh in my mind for everyday and we were living like that and I was expecting a miracle...we just wanted the child to be born and to be told everything is good, here is a miracle.

Q: Do you think it hurt to be expecting a miracle?

Sarah: I got out of the hospital bed and I lay flat on the floor in my hospital gown...just pleading, ‘God please let it come clear,’ and just hoping. But I got back in the bed and just said, ‘Miracle expected, Gods will accepted.’

Q: What are some of the ways we understand and talk about ‘God’s will?’

David: Do we believe that God is a God of miracles? Do we believe that God loves us? Do we believe that everything that God does is perfect? Do we believe that God has a plan? All the questions that you deal with theoretically up to then in your life suddenly become your real life decision and I was thinking what happens if through this I lose my faith? What if through this I realize that there is no God?

Q: Rebecca Solnit in “*A Field Guide to getting Lost*” writes about the idea of being or feeling lost. She writes the following,

“Never to get lost is not to live, not to know how to get lost brings you to destruction, and somewhere in the terra incognita³, in between, lies a life of discovery.”⁴

David: I think I came out of the experience with less doubt. But also less answers. I don’t understand how God works. I think I understand less how he works that I did before but that is ok. I realize that I do believe what I believe, that it is grounded in rooted in something extremely deep, that God was there, present making sure we knew it.

Q: Perhaps we can talk about the death of Christ here and more specifically Holy Saturday⁵. Peter Rollins says this:

“This day marked a moment of great uncertainty and darkness for the followers of Jesus. Yet it is precisely in the midst of a Holy Saturday experience that the

³ **Terra incognita** (in Latin "unknown land,") is a term used in cartography for regions that have not been mapped or documented.

⁴ Solnit, Rebecca. 2006. *A Field Guide to getting Lost*. Cannongate Books. GREAT BRITAIN

⁵ **Holy Saturday** sometimes known as **Easter Eve** or **Black Saturday** is the day after Good Friday. It is the day that Christ’s body lay in the tomb.

decision to follow Christ becomes truly authentic. A faith that can only exist in the light of victory and certainty is one which really affirms the self while pretending to affirm Christ, for it only follows Jesus in the belief that Jesus has conquered death. Yet a faith that can look the horror of the cross and still say 'yes' is one that says 'no' to the self in saying 'yes' to Christ."

A LAMENT

Definition: *A passionate expression of grief.*

Lamentations, or laments, are found throughout the Bible, especially in the Psalms, Job, Jeremiah, the crucifixion of Jesus and the Book of Lamentations. Over one third of the Psalms are lament psalms.

Q: What do you think 'to lament' means?
(For an example of a lament Psalm you could read Psalm 88)

Q: Do you think it is important to give voice and language to the experiences of suffering and why?

Q: Do you feel as though within the context of church / your faith community that the prayer of lament is noticeable and acceptable (for example in worship?)

To Ponder: Don Saliers asserts,

"Praise and thanksgiving grow empty when the truth about human rage over suffering and injustice is never uttered. Christian liturgy without the full range of the Psalms becomes anorexic—starving for honest, emotional range."⁶

Q: If you have experienced loss in this way did you feel supported by your church / faith community / community? Or did you feel confident in providing support for someone who has experienced this kind of loss?

To Ponder: Nicholas Wolterstorff writes in *Lament for a Son* (which is a love song and a lament to his 25 year old son who died in a mountain climbing accident.)

"Death is awful, demonic. If you think your task as comforter is to tell me that really, all things considered, it's not so bad, you do not sit with me in my grief but place yourself off in the distance away from me. Over there, you are of no help. What I need to hear from you is that you recognize how painful it is. I need to hear from you that you are with me in my desperation. To comfort me, you have to come close. Come sit beside me on my mourning bench."

⁶ As cited in Clergy Convocation 2001, "Through Hurt, to Hope, and Healing: The Place of Lament in Worship," <http://www.theologyandworship.ucaqld.com.au/Convocation01.htm>. Accessed 12/06/12.

A JOURNEY TOWARDS GOD

Lamentation is a journey towards God, not a final destination

Darel Fasching writes this:

“The covenantal understanding of faith as a dialogue in which the Jew was not only expected to trust and obey God but was also allowed to question (and even call into question) the behavior of God seems to have disappeared in Christianity. The complex dialectic of faith as trust and questioning came to be reduced in Christianity to a very different understanding of faith as unquestioning trust and obedience.⁷”

Q: What do you think of this statement? Do you feel comfortable to trust and obey God whilst questioning and challenging him and your ideas about him?

Q: When do you think ‘lamenting’ turns into grumbling?

To Ponder: One scholar says that one of the ways we do this is by omitting the specifics of why one is calling God to account:

‘We must be specific as to the reasons for our disappointment and frustration with God because giving the context of our complaints also provides a necessary platform for us to receive God’s reply that is specific to our lament’

In examining the theology of the complaint psalms, Floysvik contends that:

“...in all these psalms . . . the prayer is not directed only, not even mainly, toward a life of bodily health and social security. Their chief desire is the restoration of their relationship with Yahweh.⁸”

Read Psalms 13 and discuss the ‘movement’ that occurs.

Q: Have you (the viewer) ever experienced this kind of transformation? If you feel comfortable sharing with the group spend a couple of minutes doing this.

To Ponder: Rebecca Solnit in ‘*A Field Guide to getting Lost*’ quotes the pre-Socratic philosopher Meno as having said this,

“How will you go about finding that thing that nature of which is totally unknown to you?” She then goes on to explain the impact of this statement, *“The things we want are transformative, and we don’t know or only think we know what is on the other side of that transformation. Love, wisdom, grace, inspiration – how do you go about finding these things that are in some ways about extending the boundaries of the self into unknown territory, about becoming someone else?⁹”*

⁷ Darrell J. Fasching, *Faith and Ethics after the Holocaust: What Christians Can Learn from the Jewish Narrative Tradition of Hutzpah*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1990): 454.

⁸ Ingvar Floysvik. 1997. *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms*. Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO

⁹ Solnit, R. 2006 *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*. Cannongate Book, GREAT BRITIAN

WRITING YOUR OWN

As this session draws to a close, spend a few minutes quietly writing one or two lines of your own lamentation. If this is something that you feel will be of value to you then continue this lament / conversation in your own time. Think on how a particular experience or set of experiences have changed and 'extended' you and examine the effect they have had on who you are and your faith journey. See this as a conversation between you and God remembering that:

*'A lament involves the energy to search, not to shut down the quest for truth. It is passion to ask, rather than to rant and rave with already reached conclusions. A lament uses the language of pain, anger, and confusion and moves toward God.'*¹⁰

REFLECTION

Daniel would have turned three in July of 2012. A lot has happened in these three years. In particular, the birth of our beautiful twin girls Zoe & Abigail. Each year, we continue to celebrate the birth of Daniel and the memory of his life. Each year, I continue to ponder on the way of God and this journey. Time softens the pain and the joy of new life witnessed in our daughters is wonderful. However, every so often, I find my thoughts transported back to India in 2009 and the emotion surfaces again. I've stepped back a few times to understand this emotion and find the overwhelming element to be one of joy and gratefulness for time with Daniel and time with God. As we close this project of capturing this journey, I am grateful for the opportunity to explore my emotions and experiences through the "telling of a story" and have found it healing. Creative expression is always healing..

David Seabrook
January 2013
Houston
Texas

¹⁰ Belden C. Lane, "Hutzpa K'Lapei Shamaya: A Christian Response to the Jewish Tradition of Arguing with God," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 4 (Fall 1996), 584, 585.