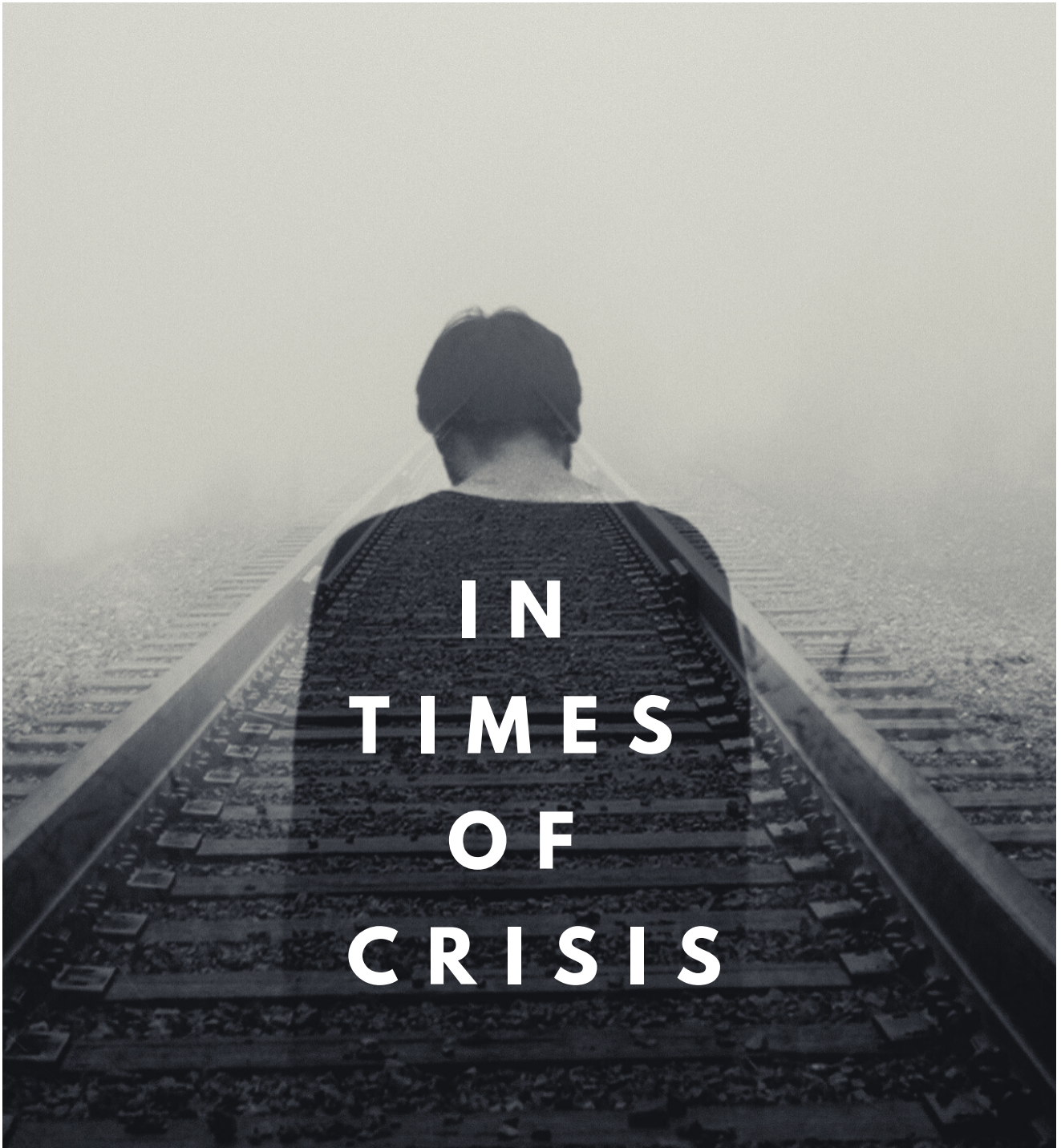




LAMENT



3 BIBLE STUDIES ON JEREMIAH



CONTENTS



03 INTRODUCTION TO LAMENT

05 HOW LONG...?

Jeremiah 12:1-4

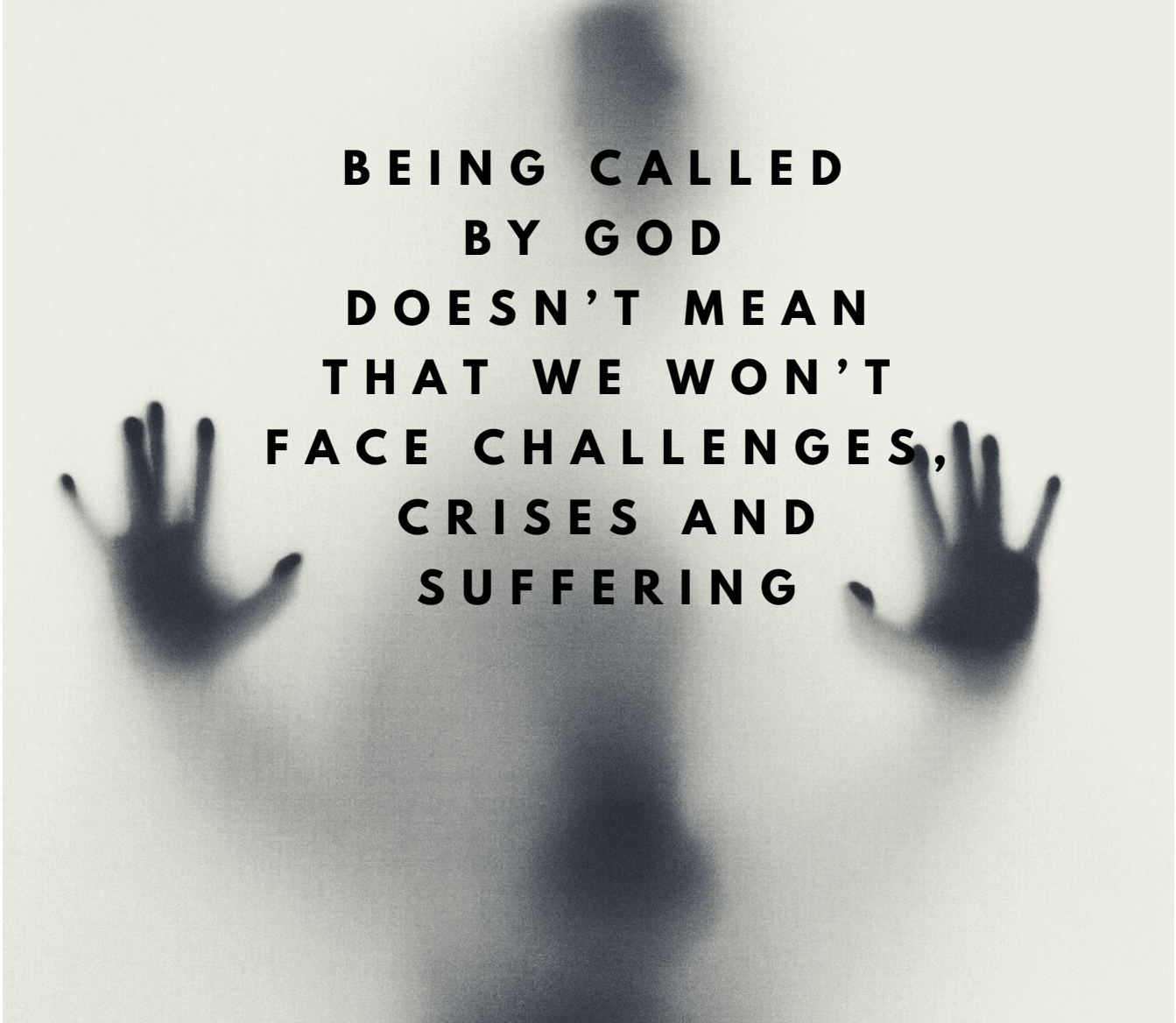
07 CONSTANT PAIN

Jeremiah 15:15-18

09 EXPRESSING MY LAMENT

Jeremiah 20:7-18

12 WHAT'S NEXT?



**BEING CALLED
BY GOD
DOESN'T MEAN
THAT WE WON'T
FACE CHALLENGES,
CRISES AND
SUFFERING**

INTRODUCTION TO LAMENT

alejandra ortiz | ana miriam peralta | ricardo borges

In this short series of Bible studies on Lament, we have decided to focus on the prophet Jeremiah, to help us reflect on God's word and invite everyone to express their sorrow in prayer. We will focus specifically on three of Jeremiah's five "Confessions"[1]. His Confessions are like a window into the prophet's life. They show us that being called by God doesn't mean that we won't face challenges, crises and suffering.

LWe can find prayers of lament in several books of the Bible, such as Psalms, the prophets, the book of Lamentations and also by Jesus and in the book of Revelation. Apart from thanksgiving and praise, lament is the most common way in which we are encouraged to talk to God. Lament is a spiritual discipline that has almost been forgotten, but without it we will be extremely limited in our desire to live a life that is faithful to God in a fallen world.

Lament helps us to express our deep emotions before God, so we can recognise them and pray for them. Lament also helps to accept the tension between a God who is good and the suffering that we experience in this world because there is pain and sin. In other words, the discipline of lament stops us from remaining indifferent and ignoring our pain and that of other people.

Jeremiah's Confessions teach us several things. The prophet questions God personally, complains, asks questions and makes requests that do not necessarily end in praise. This takes place in the context of a personal relationship between God and Jeremiah. We see clearly that being called by God doesn't suddenly make everything right, and we realise that it isn't a way of avoiding life's challenges. Jeremiah didn't only cry and share his own pain; he also prayed for the people's pain. He knew how to listen and was compassionate, and in the midst of that he found God's hope once again.

Here is a bit of context. Jeremiah was a prophet for over forty years, approximately between 627 and 580 BC. When he was young, he witnessed the height of the

Assyrian empire, but then he saw the growing power of Babylon, which ended up destroying Jerusalem and forcing the people into exile. God's word had been rediscovered not long before Jeremiah started his ministry as a prophet. The book of law showed that everyone was sinning – both the people and the authorities. Jeremiah brought God's message to them, with words and through his own life, warning them about God's imminent judgement and exile, and speaking words of hope to the people in exile, so they would know that were soon to be restored. The people didn't listen to Jeremiah and he suffered the consequences of strong opposition to his prophetic ministry. His own suffering and the people's suffering make the lament such an important part of the message in this book.

We suggest that before each study you find a safe and quiet place to spend time with God, and if it helps you can light a candle or look for any other symbol that helps you to be aware of God's presence.

[1] Scholars point out five moments in the book of Jeremiah where he pours out all his pain, complaints, confusion and anger before God because of what is happening to him and to his people.

Alejandra Ortiz, COMPA Regional Staff and member of the Engaging the University Team for IFES Latin America.

Ana Miriam Peralta, COMPA Regional Staff and member of the global IFES Scripture Engagement team.

Ricardo Borges, IFES Associate Secretary for Scripture Engagement

HOW LONG...?

Jeremiah 12:1-4



As a warm-up, let's take a few minutes to reflect on these questions: What thoughts and feelings are you having in this season? What are you doing with them?

When we start to read Jeremiah's confessions, we enter his complex inner world, in the context of his calling. In this first confession, Jeremiah starts a conversation with God in 11:18. He doesn't think it is fair that that he should be suffering, because he has been called by God and is doing his will. Meanwhile, the wicked are living at ease, even though they are plotting to kill him. Jeremiah is suffering because of his situation, but also because he doesn't understand what God is doing. The latter is often harder.

Read Jeremiah 11:18 to 12:6.

Then **reread** Jeremiah 12:1-4.

- What is Jeremiah complaining about?

- Jeremiah knows that God is righteous, but he can't see him doing anything about the situation. The prophet is confused and questions God's justice. Up to a certain point, we see that Jeremiah feels betrayed by God. Have you ever felt confused because God does not seem to be doing what you expected him to do in the world? How do you feel when you acknowledge this feeling?

- Jeremiah is experiencing the reality of injustice and impunity. The wicked are happy and they prosper. Jeremiah doesn't understand what God is doing. In the midst of his complaint, he is aware that God knows him. He doesn't hide his feelings before the Lord. How do you express your emotions before God? What do you do when you have doubts and feel like you want revenge? In what ways do you feel encouraged by verse 3, where Jeremiah is pouring out his feelings before God?

- Jeremiah tells God about his doubts and questions regarding the wickedness of the people. What would you like to ask God during the pandemic? What are you worried about or what questions have come up?

Further reflection:

In 12:5 and the following verses, we see how God answers Jeremiah. The Lord listens and replies. God does not chastise Jeremiah for complaining or asking questions; quite the opposite, he challenges him not to give up.

“If you have raced with men on foot and
they have worn you out,

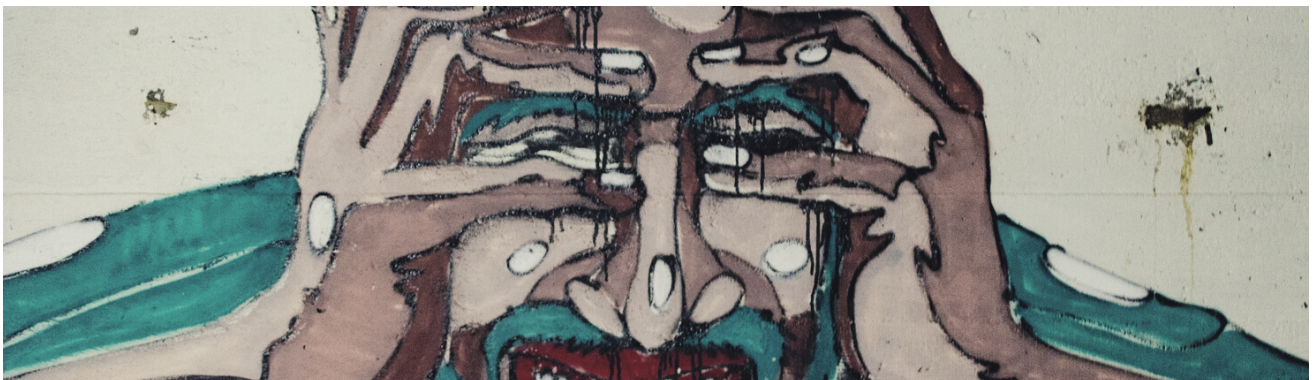
how can you compete with horses?

If you stumble in safe country,

how will you manage
in the thickets by the Jordan?”

Life is hard and Jeremiah is reminded that his calling is also difficult. We know that Jeremiah continues to walk with the Lord honestly and transparently.

The Lord invites us to carry on asking questions and recognising that he listens to us.



**LIFE IS HARD AND JEREMIAH IS REMINDED
THAT HIS CALLING IS ALSO DIFFICULT.**

CONSTANT PAIN

Jeremiah 15:15-18



Jeremiah continues his honest conversation with God. In chapter 15, the prophet hears tough words from the Lord, saying that his heart would not go out to this people (v. 1), even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before him. He also hears the Lord saying something that is not encouraging at all – he is tired of holding back, and he will destroy them (vv. 6-7). The promise that God would give Abraham numerous descendants is evoked in a very painful way (v. 8), saying that the widows would be numerous. Something that was going to be a blessing was now turned into a message of suffering and despair. But even in times of disaster, the Lord reaffirms his promise to care for Jeremiah and deliver him (v. 11). Would it be enough to relieve or end Jeremiah's suffering?

Read Jeremiah chapter 15.

Then re-read it, focusing on verses **15 to 18.**

- In our lament before the Lord, we want him to listen to us, to pay attention and understand what is happening, and care for us and protect us. Read the first part of verse 15 again::

“Lord, you understand;
remember me and care for me.

Take revenge on those who persecute me!
Because of your patience,
do not take me away”

- Is there a difficult situation in your life right now that you would like to bring to the Lord? What would you like the Lord to understand? From what dangers do you hope he will deliver you?
- What challenging things are happening in your context that may be difficult to accept? What things do you want the Lord to pay attention to?

We often want to come before God saying how we are right and claiming that we are innocent. And even more so if we are suffering because we are being faithful to the Lord – “think of how I suffer reproach for your sake” (v. 15b).

- Stop and reflect for a minute on how you also seek to “be right” before God. What would you say to God when that happens?

We usually find God's words in the Bible encouraging, we internalise them and use them as our own when we don't know what to say.

- What is your experience using Scripture in your prayers and petitions to God? How do you use these words of joy and delight (v. 16)?
- Are there any portions of the Bible that help you to express what you are feeling? What other words expressing lament or petition can you find in the Bible that you would like to use now to talk to God?

Jeremiah led a lonely life with hardly any friends and many enemies. And that was the result of following the Lord's calling for his life! In chapter 16, the Lord instructed Jeremiah not to marry and not to take part in other events in the community's social life.

- In what ways do you experience – without wallowing in self-pity – the pain of loneliness and opposition? What difference does the Lord's presence make in your life? Or at least, what difference would you expect his presence to make in your life?

Like Jeremiah, in our sorrow we recognise that, even if his Word and his presence are with us, we often find that the pain does not end and it looks like we can't trust the spring of living water, which is the Lord (Jer. 2.13). It looks more "like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails" (15:18).

- Have you asked the Lord why your pain or the pain of your people is unending? What would you say to the Lord in this season? Pour out your feelings honestly before him.

Further reflection

At the end of the chapter, once again the Lord promises to be with him, to protect and restore him. But first, he calls Jeremiah to repentance (v 19). Yes – it seems like we need to take responsibility for our words and actions before God and before the community. This is part of the restoration process that heals us.

At the same time, as part of our experience, we should carry on looking for ways to express ourselves, being completely honest before God, even when those tough feelings are still there. The Lord is present. Yes, he is present, and he listens to your lament!

EXPRESS OURSELVES, BEING COMPLETELY HONEST BEFORE GOD

EXPRESSING MY LAMENT

Jeremiah 20:7-18



Spend some time reflecting on the following questions::

- How many times in the last six months have you felt discouraged or depressed?
- What made you feel that way? What thoughts and emotions did you experience?
- How did you serve God during that time?

Jeremiah delivers a very powerful message to the people in chapter 19: God's judgement is imminent. Jeremiah's message wasn't well received or accepted,

and it definitely didn't make him popular; quite the opposite, he was severely punished by Pashhur, the priest in charge of the temple, for giving such a message. Jeremiah was beaten and put in the stocks for obeying God's calling and delivering his message to the people. But the next day, when he was released from the stocks, the Lord sent him back to give Pashhur an even stronger message (Jer. 20:1-6). Then Jeremiah shares with us a complaint that comes from the depths of his physical and emotional pain. At the end of the day, these wounds are the result of a life of dedication to God's service. Jeremiah's emotions fluctuate throughout his complaint – first he protests and complains, then he praises the Lord and recognises who he is and what he does, and then he curses and cries out in despair. The call in chapter 1 to “uproot” and “plant” will apparently be a divine calling that will lead Jeremiah to feel the burning fire of God's word, but also burning pain. When we seek to serve God, it brings us moments of joy, happiness and visible results, even in hostile environments. However, a life of service to the Lord also brings us pain, loss, discouragement and disappointment. In the light of this passage, let's write our own version of Jeremiah 20.

Read Jeremiah 20:7-18 carefully.

Read it again to meet Jeremiah in the text and understand what he is experiencing.

Writing my own version of Jeremiah 20

Finish these sentences as you are open and honest with God. It is a conversation between you and God.

Lord, when you called me to serve you, I felt... (You can think of a crucial moment in your life when God called you, or when he called you to do something specific)

You overpowered me and prevailed.

Lord, I know that You have called me. I responded in obedience and love. But serving you has brought me...

However, if I say that I will not mention the Lord's word or speak any more in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire. It is like a fire shut up in my bones! I am weary of holding it in! Indeed, I cannot!

Lord, during this time I have felt ignored and not appreciated or understood, in those moments when...

Lord, even in the midst of my despair, pain and disappointment, I look back and see how You have been with me in many ways, and I can say that You are...

Lord, it is so hard to bear the pain I've felt, I confess the deepest thoughts that have crossed my mind and my heart...

Now that you have written your own complaint, you could also use an extra resource – an artwork like “The Return of the Prodigal Son” by Rembrandt, or even “The Prophet Jeremiah” by Marc Chagall (you can find these images easily online).

Come to the Father and lay all your discouragement and disappointment before Him. Seek refuge in His embrace. Repeat these words of Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:31-33 (in our own words):

“You don't cast anyone off for ever. Though you bring grief, you will show compassion, so great is your unfailing love. You do not willingly bring affliction or grief to anyone”

Remember what Jesus said:

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest”
Matthew 11:28

Rest in the Father.

REST IN THE FATHER

RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON | REMBRANDT

WHAT'S NEXT?



We think it is important to bring back laments to our own devotional time and as part of our liturgy as a community. Personally, it may help to write a journal where you record honest and transparent feelings and express them and bring them before the Lord. Some may prefer to write it on a piece of paper that you throw away or burn afterwards, like a simple but practical way of expressing that we leave it in God's hands. You can also try to write a poem, or make a sculpture, or a picture or painting. There are things that we can only manage to express to God through art, maybe because they come straight from the heart or because we are opening other channels beyond reason (which is also important) to communicate with God.

It would also be good to make room for laments in our community. When we

allow ourselves to express pain and sadness as a community, we help each other to be more sensitive to other people's past or present suffering. Remembering pain and suffering, as well as being therapeutic, helps us to avoid making the same mistakes in the future, and to remain firm in our search for God's kingdom and his righteousness.

We would like to encourage you, personally or as a community, also to remember that sin, injustice and death do not have the final word. That is, it is good to be honest when we express our sorrow, but we should not wallow in self-pity, thinking that there is no way out. Our lament can go hand in hand with a call to take responsibility, personally or as a community, and words of consolation and hope in the Lord.



**REMEMBER THAT SIN, INJUSTICE AND DEATH
DO NOT HAVE THE FINAL WORD**



free distribution material

© IFES

design

Communications IFES AL
may 2020

pictures shared in Unsplash

pág. 1: Gabriel E

pág. 2: Ryoji Iwata

pág. 3: Mwangi Gatheca

pág. 6: Aarón Blanco

pág. 12: Tom Holmes