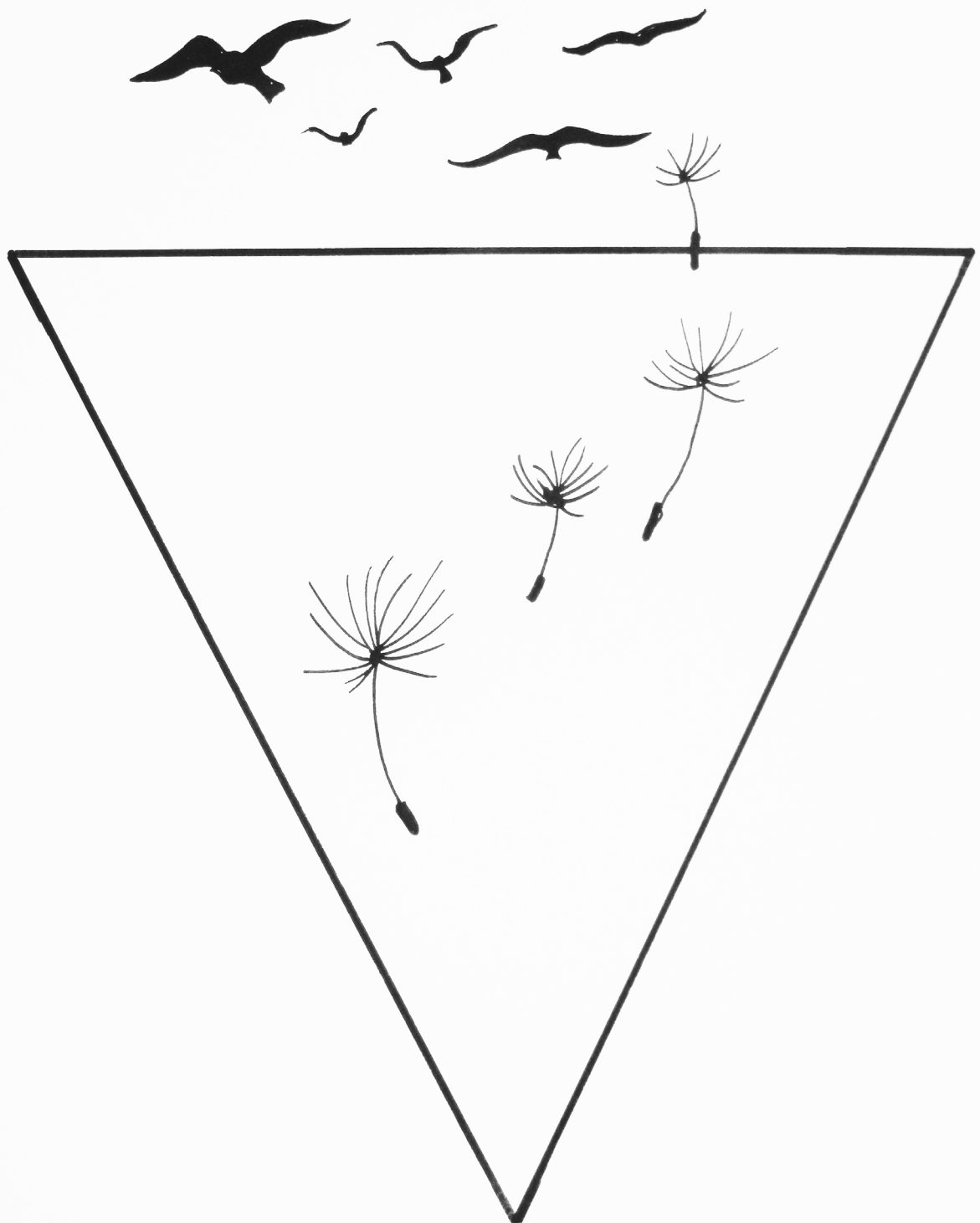


# lament





There is no escape from suffering. That isn't a secret. That is part of being human, especially being human in a fallen world. The only way you can never feel pain in life is to be completely numb.

God never hides pain from us. The bible is full of stories of people experiencing loss, sickness, disappointment, failure. And it's full of people responding to God in their pain— a raw, expression of grief and pain called 'lamentation.' There's an entire book of this wailing and crying, poetry created in the midst of suffering.

Instead of openly expressing our pain, frustration, or grief, we often frantically look for reason in unreasonableness. Christians have a lot of self-imposed guidelines on how to properly suffer, and most of it involves looking like we aren't. Being honest about our circumstances is seen as weakness, and questioning God is called a failure of faith.

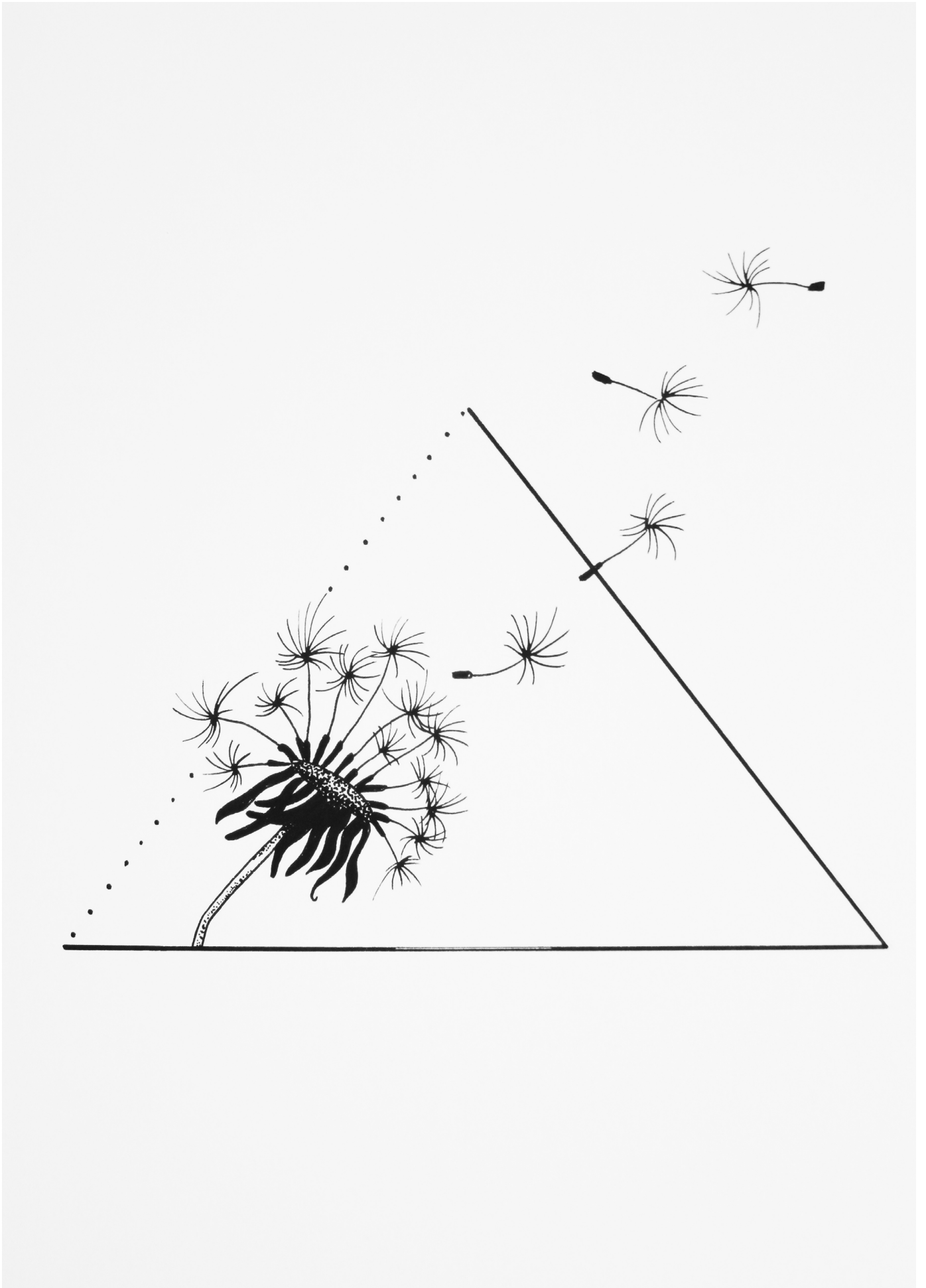
Being honest about where we are is the best thing we can do for ourselves, for our prayer life, and for many of our relationships. If we don't allow ourselves to feel the pain, we can't do anything to help ourselves move through it.

Sometimes joy means grief, not happiness.

*a time to mourn  
and a time to  
dance*

*Ecclesiastes 3:4*

- *What is your first response when things start going wrong?*
- *Have you ever been so overwhelmed with goodness that you've been uncomfortable, or even hurt?*
- *Read Galatians 6:2*
- *If we refuse to share the lows as well as the highs, we take opportunities from others to show us compassion and grace. Can vulnerability be a gift?*
- *What kind of person do you look for when you need to be honest about your pain?*
- *How can you become that person for someone else?*



Avoiding negative feelings and insulating ourselves from pain is what most of us pursue at all costs. We numb, distract, eat, scroll. We throw ourselves into positive thinking, and congratulate ourselves for avoiding anything that makes us feel bad.

Identity today is so curated, that any display of emotion is public. We talk about our rough patches like a press conference, only showing weakness when it is safe, controlled, and on-brand. It is more important to appear the right kind of vulnerable than it is to actually be vulnerable. True exposure, laying oneself bare and being fully and completely honest, is total helplessness in a culture that only values strength. “Lamentation” doesn’t look like self care. Lamentation needs someone else to care for you.

Neglecting to be honest about our pain does ourselves a disservice, and leaves us woefully unprepared to face a grieving friend or address the suffering in the world.

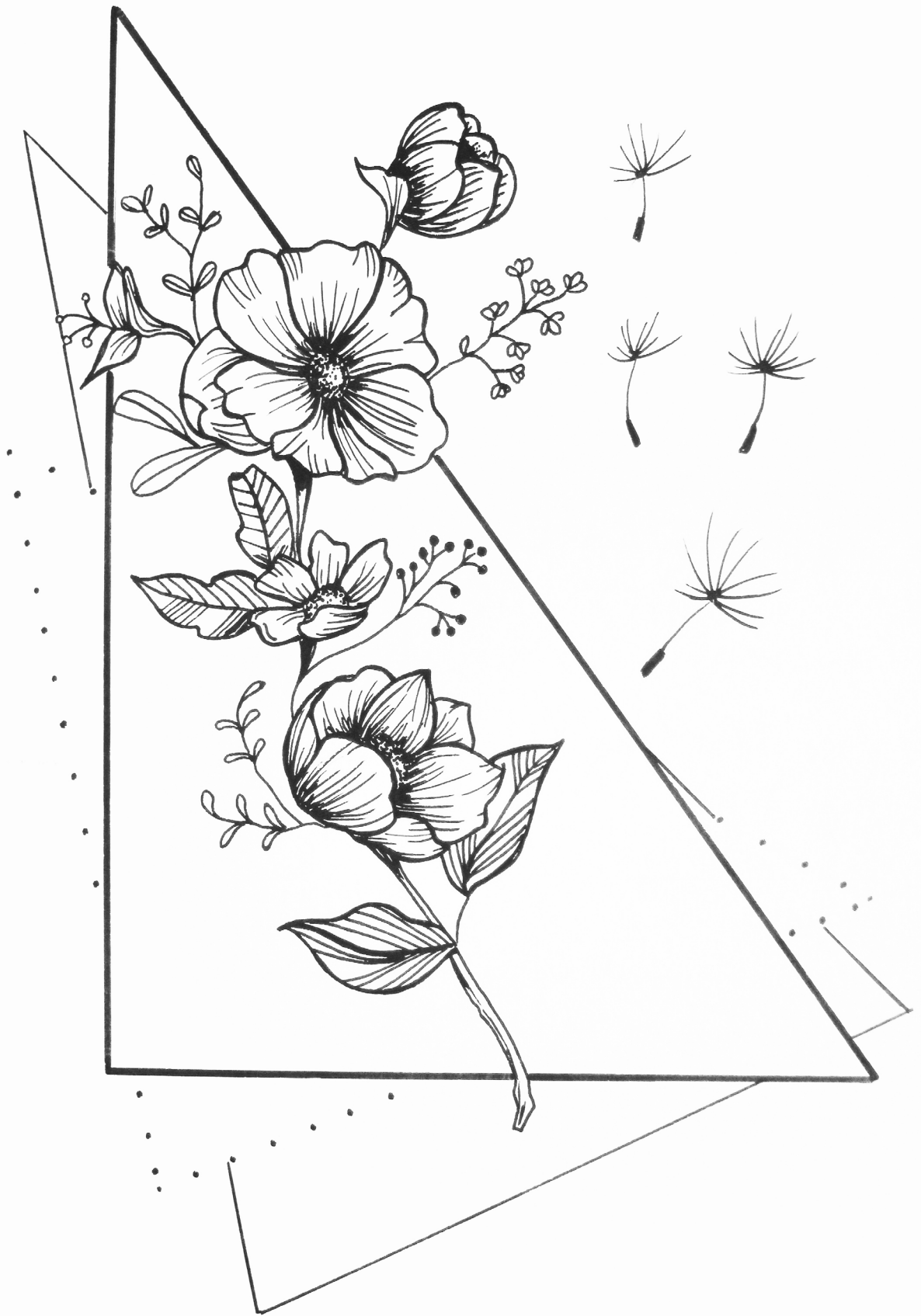
When we become so uncomfortable with seeing pain, we don’t know what to do with someone in the depths of it. How can you mourn with those who mourn, when you don’t allow yourself to be familiar with those feelings?

*The Lord is close to the  
brokenhearted. He saves  
those whose spirits have been  
crushed.*

*Psalm 34:18*



- *Do Christians have a problem with not always looking like everything is okay?*
- *What is a "safe way" we tend to show weakness? How genuine is it?*
- *Which aspect of lamenting is the hardest for you? Accepting negative feelings? Asking for help?*
- *Read Matthew 5:4*
- *Why are those who mourn blessed? Does that seem like a fair trade-off?*



Being tossed around by the waves of the world, fighting internal and external anxieties, where do we put our frustrations? A natural response to being overwhelmed is to cry out, but cry out to who? And what do we ask? A deep, lingering fear at the back of our minds may be, “These feelings are shameful. Your faith is supposed to be bigger than these doubts. You should be able to handle this.” And we hide our struggles, if we could hide anything, from the one who could help us the most.

God is the safest person to bring these troubles to. You’re allowed to be completely honest, vulnerable, and hurt. Even when that hurt is a consequence of your own actions. He is not surprised, he does not recoil, he does not withdraw his love. The one who created you is powerful enough to see your ugliest moments, to hear your most selfish cries, to forgive your worst acts. Brutal honesty with God is never met with brutality in return.

*Cast your cares on the  
Lord and he will sustain  
you; he will never let  
the righteous be shaken.*

*Psalm 55:22*

- *Read Romans 8:31-39*
- *How can this affect that way you talk to God?*
- *What aspects of faith are the hardest for you to be honest about? Doubts? Fears?*
- *Do you ever avoid specific topics when you pray?*
- *What gives you comfort when you ask unanswerable questions?*



True, personal lamentation lies somewhere between being contemptuous of repentance, and being trapped in self-loathing. The book of Lamentations is written in response to the destructive consequences Israel experienced when they chose not to follow God. There is a time to grieve the pain and wretchedness of our own fallen nature.

Guilt and shame are often associated with this, but lamentation is not about blame. It is more of a step in the process of freedom. You can't throw off the chains until you accept that they're present. Lingering in self-pity, or even self-hatred, isn't repentance, it's pride. Part of humility is being willing to accept the grace that is freely offered.

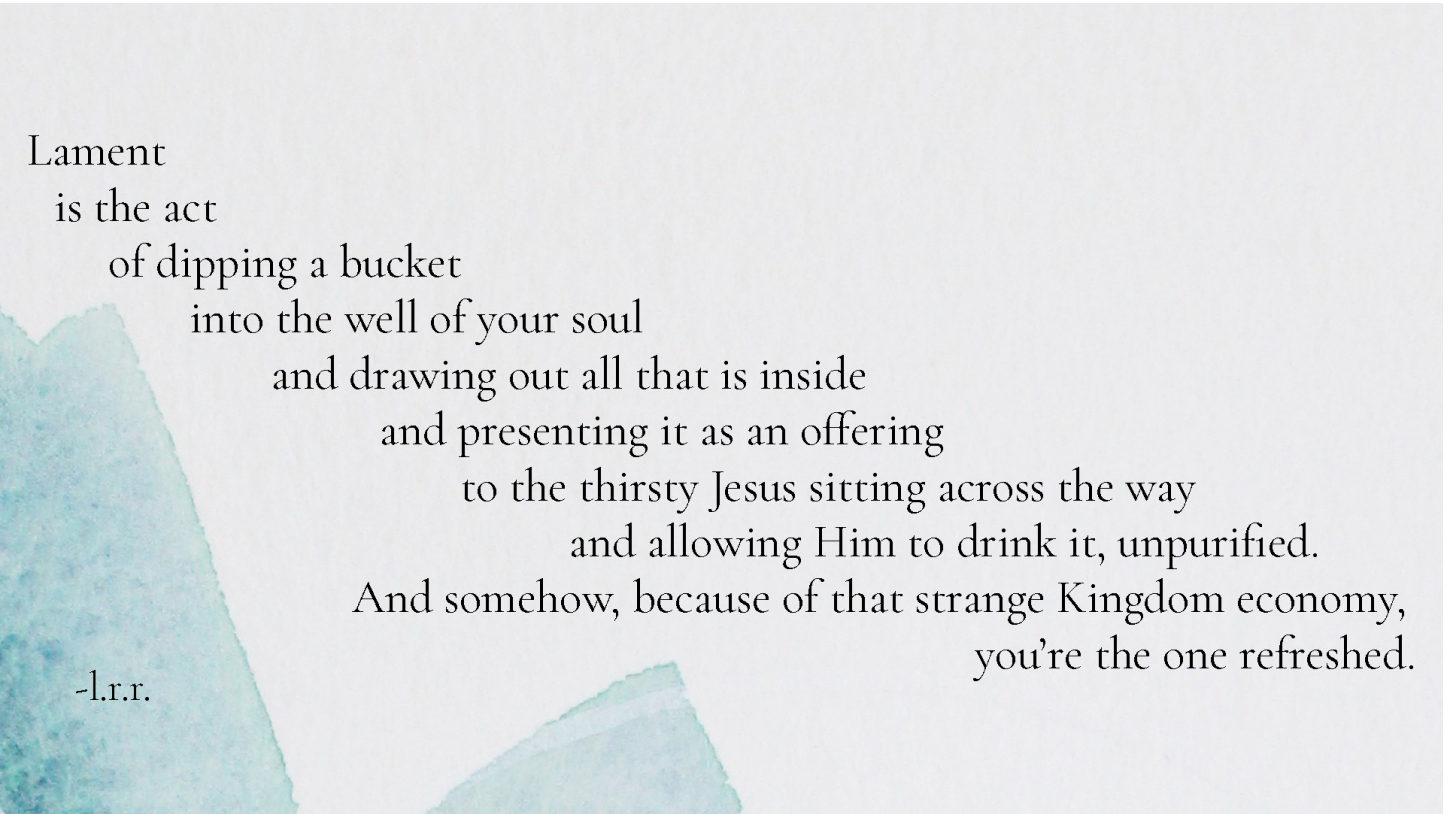
And just as there is a time to mourn, there is a time to dance. After confession comes forgiveness and freedom. Your sin, choices, or past does not make you damaged goods, forever irreparable. Nothing you've done or thought could ever affect your worth and identity as a beloved child of God, made in his own image. He does not love us in spite of ourselves. Chains are broken, gates are opened, and beauty rises from tilled earth.

*Though my flesh and  
my heart fail, God is the  
rock of my heart, my  
portion forever.*

*Psalm 73:26*



- *Have you ever practiced 'confession?'*
- *Part of the experience of lamentation is the abundant grace and safety of God. When have you felt this in your life?*
- *Joel 2:12-14*
- *How can we acknowledge our shortcomings while celebrating God's goodness?*
- *Which of your chains have you seen be broken?*
- *Take time in prayer to express gratitude for the comfort, forgiveness, and restoration of Christ.*



Lament

is the act

of dipping a bucket

into the well of your soul

and drawing out all that is inside

and presenting it as an offering

to the thirsty Jesus sitting across the way

and allowing Him to drink it, unpurified.

And somehow, because of that strange Kingdom economy,  
you're the one refreshed.

-l.r.r.

Art: Jessica Bernardin

Words: Emily Luttrull

Poetry: Logan Randall

