

Dying well and lament

By [Mihee Kim-Kort](#)

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It was coffee with a friend.

I could see she was on edge. She shared that the night before she had learned of the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer for a close friend. Their kids grew up together. They took family vacations together. His wife is one of her best friends. “I usually don’t want to go against God on most things but this time, I want to fight him,” she said.

My mind went back to my first encounter with cancer. It was a couple of months after I began serving at the church as a pastor for youth and children, and it was the mother of two young girls—one in middle school and the other in elementary school. She came to my office with her husband asking for prayer and good thoughts because she planned on defeating it and surviving it. I hugged her and said I was here for them for anything.

Fast forward almost a year later and she was at home on hospice. I hadn’t seen the two girls much—they were not plugged in to the youth group and busy with dance. I arrived at the door and the girls’ father opened the door with a gentle smile and hug welcomed me in and led me to her room. I went in and sat down.

And started bawling.

I had never seen cancer or imminent death. I had never been in the room with another human being whose body was so wasted and ravaged that I nearly didn’t recognize her. I held her hand, surprisingly warm, but so small, like a little girl’s as she talked quietly to me with eyes closed but that fluttered open here and there. I prayed with her and for her girls. And after a blubbering few more minutes I kissed her cheek, squeezed her hand, and left the room. Out in the living room I hugged the younger daughter and husband and left quickly. I was so embarrassed by my lack of professionalism—I was supposed to be one of their pastors.

And I couldn’t hold it together. After she died, and I attended the viewing at the local funeral home, I hugged dad and the girls again and sat in the car with face pressed

against the wheel bawling once more. I couldn't make sense of it. I couldn't figure it out.

Lately, I've been attending an adult Sunday school class on the practices of our faith where we've read some of a Dorothy C. Bass book and talked through everyday spirituality. The topics of conversation have lately been around heaven and hell, death and dying. And I keep thinking about what it means to [die well](#). To live well. And, how the line between the two is sort of fuzzy. And, about lament. My good friend April recently lost her mother, and [her blog is teaching me something new about that daily lament](#).

Is it possible that life is one big lament? If we are truly loving, loving deeply, loving vulnerably, loving with risk and abandonment, then suffering seems inevitable, and some kind of loss and death. And so, yes, lament—the necessity of it permeates our lives. Lament, certainly in terms of a verbal wailing and crying out as a response to death and dying, and loss, but also because “we value so highly God's gift of earthly life” (Amy Platinga Pauw). We lament over the physical permanence of death, and lament over the suffering of dying and losing, and we lament the daily dyings, the little deaths, the thousand deaths.

And lament is resistance, too. Because it's rooted in the hope of God. Lament is prophetic because it speaks to realities that we are called to bring to bear in the here and now. It is kingdom here. Lament is inconvenient because it makes us stop in the precipice between life and death where we see that it is a space that we all actually occupy simply by virtue of being human. **Lament is business-NOT-as-usual, it is stopping and blockading traffic, and it is hashtags and Twitter teach-ins because it leads us further up and further in.**

This is an strange season—I keep thinking about [vulnerability](#), suffering, dying, and living well. It's the thread of lament that compels me to see that the struggle is alive and real. For so many of us. And I wonder what it would be like to shape my ministry around spaces for this lament to happen in healing, transforming ways for individuals and the wider community.

Originally posted at [Kim-Kort's blog](#)