Discussion Guide

Lament, Repentance and Redemption



This discussion guide is designed for 50-minute adult classes and small groups of 6–16 participants and is based on Today's Conversation podcast with Lisa Fields, speaker, author and film producer, and Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE.org/lisafieldspodcast). No prior listening is required, as the leader will draw out key ideas through discussion.

"The civil rights movement is a perfect example. They're committed to speaking truth to power, but they have a deep commitment to prayer. Their deep commitment to prayer actually fuels [the work], because prayer reminds you that it's not all on you ... Heart changes are the divine work of the Spirit. I could change the law, but if the heart doesn't change, people will find ways to create oppression outside of the law ... Martin Luther King, Jr. said, 'The law can't make a man love me, but it can keep him from lynching me.' Policy changes are needed and we also want the human heart to change, which is a divine work. We do those in collaboration, not picking either or."

—LISA FIELDS, FOUNDER OF THE JUDE 3 PROJECT

OPENING AND ORIENTATION (8 min)

FRAMING STATEMENT FOR LEADERS: In a time of ongoing reflection on our national story, Christians face a profound challenge: How do we hold together an honest reckoning with the failures of our nation and the church, a deep commitment to justice and healing, and a hope rooted not in politics but in the transforming power of God? Lisa Fields offers a path forward — prayer that is brutally honest, lament that is communally held, repentance that is personally embodied, and witness that is incarnational rather than merely argumentative.

"Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7).

1. Lisa Fields describes a faith crisis prompted by encountering the history of Christianity's failures and hypocrisy. Have you ever wrestled with the gap between what Christianity claims and how Christians have behaved? What helped you navigate that?

2. Fields says, "The presence of a counterfeit is the revelation that the authentic exists." How does recognizing the counterfeit versions of Christianity in our history actually strengthen rather than undermine faith?

Leader tip: *Begin gently. This session can surface grief, frustration or defensiveness. The goal is not to assign blame but to practice the kind of honest, communal lament that Fields describes as the foundation for genuine hope and action. Model vulnerability by sharing something from your own journey first.*

THE ANATOMY OF HONEST PRAYER (10 min)

Lisa Fields describes prayer not as a polished presentation to God but as an act of radical honesty: Get your frustration out, name your anger at injustice, and confess your deeper frustration with God himself. Only then can you move toward intercession for those who have caused harm.

This maps directly onto the psalms of lament and onto the Civil Rights Movement, where the Black Church's deep tradition of bringing sorrow and anger to God was the spiritual engine of social transformation. Fields argues that prayer does two things simultaneously: It gives you courage to speak truth to power, and it keeps your heart soft toward the very people you are confronting. Without prayer, accountability hardens into bitterness. With it, accountability remains redemptive.

LISA FIELDS ON THE STRUCTURE OF HONEST PRAYER

1. **Get it out.** Tell God your frustration and your anger, your sense that he hasn't been doing his job. "If you keep that penned up, it only turns to bitterness that taints your own soul."
2. **Lament.** "God, this is terrible. I'm thinking about the people who are harmed, the people who are dead because of this injustice. Don't you see? Don't you care?"
3. **Remember.** "Because you changed me, even in hard areas where my heart was hardened, I've watched you transform me. Would you transform them?"
4. **Intercede.** Pray for the welfare of those causing harm — not to excuse them, but because your wellness and theirs are wrapped up together (Jeremiah 29:7).
5. **Act.** Leave prayer "positioned with courage and humility and grace to speak truth to power with their redemption in mind."

"How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and day after day have sorrow in my heart? … But I trust in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing the Lord's praise, for he has been good to me" (Psalm 13:1–2, 5–6).

"I remember my affliction and my wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:19–23).

1. Fields says, "When bitterness takes root in your heart, truth gets distorted in your mind." Have you seen this dynamic in your own life where unprocessed grief or anger about injustice distorted the ability to think or act clearly? What helped bring healing?

2. Fields describes moving from frustration and lament to intercession for those causing harm. That is a daunting spiritual journey. What would it take for your congregation to practice that kind of prayer together, not as a performance but as an honest, communal act?

3. How does the discipline of prayer connect to the discipline of proximity? Can you have one without the other?

CARING FOR BOTH THE VICTIM AND THE VILLAIN (10 min)

One of the most challenging claims in Lisa Fields' conversation with Walter Kim draws on Hebrews 13:3 — a verse that calls believers both to identify with those who suffer and to care for those who are imprisoned. Fields calls this "a very challenging call": to hold the victim and the villain together, refusing to choose between them.

This is not a call to moral equivalence. Fields is clear that caring for the villain includes holding them accountable. "A part of caring for someone is holding them accountable so they can be better." But it means praying and fasting for their transformation while simultaneously seeking justice for those they have harmed. Holding these commitments together reflects a distinctly Christian vision — one that seeks both justice and restoration in response to brokenness.

THEOLOGICAL FRAMING: The evangelical commitment to racial justice flows from the gospel itself. The same Christ who died for all people — breaking down the dividing wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14) — calls his Church to embody that reconciliation visibly and practically. This requires both prophetic truth-telling about past and present injustice and redemptive presence among those who have been harmed. It requires caring for victims and praying for the transformation of those who cause harm. It requires communities of faith that look like the kingdom of God: every nation, tribe and tongue gathered at one table.

"Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering" (Hebrews 13:3).

"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross" (Ephesians 2:14–16).

1. Fields says that God calls us to "care for the victim and the villain because that's what I do." In your own experience, which is harder: feeling genuine compassion for those who have been harmed, or praying for the transformation of those who caused the harm? What makes the harder one difficult?

2. Fields distinguishes between calling out wrongs "without the remembrance of our own wrongs" and doing it "with a spirit of humility, with their redemption as the end goal." How does that distinction show up in how Christians engage with racial history? What are some other areas of our history that require remembrance and redemption?

3. The NAE's "For the Health of the Nation" framework calls for "racial justice and reconciliation" as a gospel imperative. What would it look like for our congregation to hold those two words together in practice — not just justice, not just reconciliation, but both?

Leader tip: *This section may surface significant personal pain, especially for participants of color or those with experiences of racial injustice. Create space for those stories without rushing to resolution. The goal is to practice together what Fields describes: honest acknowledgment of harm alongside genuine hope for transformation.*

OUR WELLNESS IS WRAPPED UP IN EACH OTHER (9 min)

Fields critiques the individualism that shapes American culture. Drawing on Jeremiah 29:7, she argues that we have "untethered ourselves from the rest of the world or community" in ways that damage both our ability to pray rightly and our ability to act justly. "Our wellness is essentially based on theirs," she says.

Alan Cross, a Southern Baptist pastor and longtime advocate for the vulnerable, argues that evangelical advocacy includes growing fully into our identity in Christ, not just mobilizing ourselves and others to action: "We cannot be the kind of person who prays for the welfare of the city without first becoming the kind of person who sees their own flourishing as bound up with others." That kind of formation requires proximity, relationship and the slow work of learning to see your neighbor as genuinely part of your own story.

Fields also connects this to the challenge facing many young adults, including students on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) campuses who are drowning in despair, asking not 'Is Christianity true?' but 'Is it good? Is it good for me?' She takes an incarnational approach: "Tell them they are made in the image of God but then show them who God is. Let them see his character, his love, his community-forming power — and let them encounter that in you."

THEOLOGICAL FRAMING: The biblical vision of shalom — the flourishing of every person and every community — is not achieved by individuals pursuing their own good in isolation. It requires communities to take responsibility for others. The evangelical church is called not merely to charity but to justice — to address the systems and structures that produce poverty and exclusion, while simultaneously binding the wounds of those who have been harmed.

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited" (Romans 12:15–16).

"If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

1. Jeremiah 29:7 tells exiles to pray for the welfare of the city "because if it prospers, you prosper." Fields applies this to our individualistic culture: Our wellness is wrapped up in the wellness of others. How does that change how you think about different policy issues (e.g., religious freedom, vulnerable children and families, prison reform, etc.)?

2. Fields says that young people are not asking, "Is Christianity true?" but "Is it good — and is it good for me?" How does your church's engagement with foster children, people with disabilities, immigrants and others answer that question? Where might it fall short?

3. Fields argues that we cannot tell someone they're made in the image of God without showing them who God is. In your context, who most needs to see that reality? What would it look like to embody God's love rather than just argue for it?

INCARNATIONAL WITNESS: THE APOLOGETIC OF A HEALED LIFE (8 min)

Lisa Fields argues that the most powerful apologetic in our moment is not informational but incarnational — not the argument won, but the life lived. She draws on 1 Peter 3:15, noting that Peter's call to "always be prepared to give an answer" is embedded in a passage about how to treat your spouse, how to handle suffering, how to respond to those who mistreat you. The answer to hypocrisy is not a better argument. It is a better life, marked by repentance, forgiveness, humility and hope. If our public life flows from who we are becoming, then this moment calls for Christians who are themselves being healed by Christ — freed from bitterness, from ideological captivity, and from the distortions of unprocessed grief — so that we can become agents of healing in the lives of others.

PRACTICE HONEST PRAYER Set aside time this week to pray through Fields' five-step structure: express frustration, lament, remember God's work in you, intercede for those causing harm, and ask for courage to act with redemption in mind.	**SEEK HEALING FOR BITTERNESS** Fields says, "If you don't allow God to heal that bitterness, you won't be able to do the work of restoration." Consider meeting with a pastor, counselor, or trusted friend to process wounds that may be distorting your engagement.
BUILD COMMUNAL BONDS ACROSS DIFFERENCE Partner with a congregation, organization or neighborhood group whose racial, cultural or economic experience differs from yours. Seek the welfare of that community as if your own flourishing depended on it — because it does.	**PARTNER WITH ORGANIZATIONS DOING THE WORK** Connect with NAE partners doing both justice and healing work like World Relief (WR.org), Prison Fellowship (PrisonFellowship.org) and International Justice Mission (IJM.org).

1. Fields says, "I ask people all the time, 'Do you live with such a hopeful life that is attractive, that people begin to ask you about the hope that you have?'" What do people see in how you handle injustice, suffering and difficult relationships? Is it a witness to the hope of the gospel?

2. Fields describes her own healing as the foundation of her passion: "I've seen God change [my heart]. And that brings me hope." What is a specific area where you have seen God bring healing to you? How might that story be a witness to someone struggling with whether Christianity is good?

3. What is one thing your congregation could do to embody both justice and reconciliation — not as a program or a statement, but as an incarnational act that demonstrates what the kingdom of God looks like?

Leader tip: *Close this section by inviting participants to name one specific step they will take in prayer, in proximity, or in partnership with an organization doing the work. Small, concrete commitments matter more than large, abstract aspirations.*

CLOSING REFLECTION AND PRAYER (3 min)

Lisa Fields closes her conversation with Walter Kim with a deeply personal reflection: Her hope for others is grounded in what she has seen God do in her own heart. "That is why I'm so passionate about knowing that God could change hearts. Not just because I've seen him do it in others, but I've seen him change mine." This is incarnational witness — not an argument won, but a life transformed. It is the kind of presence the Church can offer our nation: not triumphalism or despair, but the quiet, costly, hope-filled work of people who have been healed and carry that healing into the lives of others.

CLOSING PRAYER: "Lord, we confess that we have too often chosen the outrage post over the prayer of lament, the tribal argument over the communal act of healing, the protection of our own comfort over the welfare of the city. Teach us to pray with the honesty of the psalms — to bring our frustration, our grief, our anger at injustice before you. And then teach us to intercede: for those who have been harmed and for those causing harm. Form us into people whose lives are so marked by your healing that others begin to ask about the hope that is in us. Make your church a place where every nation, tribe and tongue finds welcome, justice and the love of a God who cares for the victim and the villain alike. Amen."

LEADER RESOURCES AND FURTHER READING

NAE PODCAST Today's Conversation with Lisa Fields — listen before leading for richer context on apologetics, the Jude 3 Project, prayer and lament, and incarnational witness. NAE.org/lisafieldspodcast	**JUDE 3 PROJECT** Lisa Fields' organization equipping the church, especially African Americans, with apologetics and cultural engagement resources. Includes her documentary, Juneteenth: Faith and Freedom. Jude3Project.com
LISA FIELDS' BOOKS When Heroes Fall: Healing from the Aftermath of Sin; When Faith Disappoints: The Gap Between What We Believe and What We Experience	**FOR THE HEALTH OF THE NATION** NAE's comprehensive framework for Christian civic engagement, covering the sanctity of life, religious freedom, justice, immigration and more. NAE.org/forthehealth

Series note: *This is a discussion guide in Faith in America, a small group curriculum developed by the National Association of Evangelicals and based on Today's Conversation podcast with Lisa Fields and Walter Kim. Other guides in the series can be used on their own or as part of the full four-part series.*