Psalm 88

WHY DO I FEEL SO ALONE?

Depression is a form of suffering that can't be reduced to one universal cause. This means that family and friends can't rush in armed with THE answer. Instead they must be willing to postpone swearing allegiance to a particular theory and take time to know the depressed person and work together with him or her. What we do know is that depression is painful and, if you have never experienced it, hard to understand. Like most forms of suffering, it feels private and isolating. …Depression, and the host of feelings and thoughts that get crammed into the word, plead for a "why." Why is this happening to me? Why love? Why work? Why worship? Why believe? Why live? Why bother? …When the why questions appear, they will be religious—as all why questions are. They will be about God. Depression, of course, does that—it takes you back to the basic questions of life.

—Dr. Ed Welch, *Depression: A Stubborn Darkness*

Psalm 88 was written by Heman the Ezrahite. There appear to be two possible Hemans in the OT—either one of the chief musicians of David (1 Chron. 25:1-6) or a wise sage who lived during the time of the patriarchs (1 Chron. 2:3-6; 1 Kings 4:31). The psalm is a song of contemplation (*maskil,* cf. Psalm 33, 42, 44-45) regarding "afflictive sickness" (*mahalath leannoth*).

THE PSALMIST'S PREDICAMENT

1. His soul is _____ (88:3).

2. He feels close to _____ (88:3).

3. His strength is _____ (88:4).

4. He feels utterly _____ (88:5).

5. He feels like God is _____ him (88:6-7, 14-17).

6. His friends have _____ him (88:8, 18).

7. He feels _____ with no escape (88:8).

8. His eyes are _____ with grief (88:9).

9. His affliction has been _____ (88:15).

10. His closest companion is _____ (88:18).

> *On one matter at least all commentators who deal with this psalm are fully agreed: it is the gloomiest psalm found in the Scriptures.* —H. C. Leupold
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> *The flesh can bear only a certain number of wounds and no more, but the soul can bleed in ten thousand ways and die over and over again each hour.* —Charles H. Spurgeon
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> *I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth.* —Abraham Lincoln
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> *For all intents and purposes, the deeply depressed are just the walking, waking dead.* —Elizabeth Wurtzel
>
> *It is possible to be a child of God… and to have title to a crown, and yet feel to be immured in the depths of a dungeon.* —William Cowper
>
> *I think [Heman] gave utterance to those confused conceptions which arise in the mind of a man under affliction.* —John Calvin

PSALMIST'S PRAYER

- His prayer is _____ — *God of my salvation*.

- His prayer is _____ — *I have cried out.*

- His prayer is _____ — *I call to You every day*.

- His prayer is _____ — *I stretched out my hands.*

WHY IS PSALM 88 IN GOD'S WORD?

- **In this life we will go through _____.**

We live in a sin-cursed world in sin-affected bodies surrounded by sin-impacted people all within a cosmic spiritual conflict (cf. Rom. 8:18-23; 2 Cor. 5:1-8; 1 Pet. 5:8-11). Suffering is a given in this world (cf. Jn. 16:33). And God often uses suffering for His own purposes (cf. 2 Cor. 12:7-10).

- **We will not always have _____ to our questions.**

People throughout Scripture asked God "why?" and "how long?" Many times these questions were not answered but instead God brought them to a closer relationship to Himself (cf. Job 38-42). Faith is learning to trust God even in the darkness, even when we don't have any answers.

- **Prayer may not change our situation but it will change _____.**

The psalmist's situation did not change but praying, and writing out this psalm, began to shape him…and impact others. Prayer draws us to God, reminds us of our limitations, resets our focus, and enlarges our soul.

- **We have a Savior who not only knows and understands our suffering but shares in it and walks with us through it.**

Jesus lived the darkness, suffering, and sorrows of Psalm 88 and bore them upon Himself so that He can give us comfort, hope, and life. The One who cried "My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?" is the very One who will never leave you nor forsake you (cf. Heb. 2:14-18).

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:
- Have you ever gone through a dark time similar to the psalmist? If so, how did you get through it? What did God teach you in it?
- If you know someone going through a dark time, take time to listen to their heart, pray with them, encourage them with God's Word.
- Read the Practical Insights on Battling Depression handout. Mark insights or strategies that stand out to you. Discuss with someone.

No sin is necessarily connected with sorrow of heart, for Jesus Christ our Lord once said, "My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death." There was no sin in Him and consequently none in his deep depression.
—Charles H. Spurgeon

To address God as the God of his salvation is the operation of true though feeble faith. "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him," is the very spirit of this psalm.
—Alexander MacLaren

In the midst of his agonies he clings to his faith in God as the only source from which his salvation can come. —A. Cohen

You cannot isolate the spiritual from the physical for we are body, mind and spirit. The greatest and the best Christians when they are physically weak are more prone to an attack of spiritual depression than at any other time. —D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Christianity is about joy and assurance of God's love; but it is also about struggle and despair, and all points in between; yes, it involves a firm and sure confidence in whom we have believed; but it also involves living by faith in a world of contradiction and suffering.
—Dr. Carl Trueman

Somehow turning to God and trusting him with the mysteries of suffering is the answer to the problem of suffering.
—Dr. Ed Welch

Ten cures for depression are to go out and do something for someone else and repeat it nine times. —Martin Luther King, Jr.