

Poems, Prayers & Promises



How Dare You Speak To God that Way?

Key idea:

Jesus suffered all the forsakenness that infinite hell had to offer so that He could take your forsakenness to Himself. And now, even when you feel God-forsaken, He is present, never leaving you. There is nowhere you can go where Jesus isn't with you.

Key text:

Psalm 88

A song. A psalm of the Sons of Korah. For the director of music. According to mahalath leannoth. A maskil of Heman the Ezrahite.

1 Lord, you are the God who saves me;
day and night I cry out to you.

2 May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.

3 I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.

4 I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like one without strength.

5 I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.

6 You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.

7 Your wrath lies heavily on me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.

8 You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.

I am confined and cannot escape;

9 my eyes are dim with grief.

I call to you, Lord, every day;

I spread out my hands to you.

10 Do you show your wonders to the dead?

Do their spirits rise up and praise you?

11 Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?

12 Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

13 But I cry to you for help, Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.

14 Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

15 From my youth I have suffered and been close to death;
I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

16 Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.

17 All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.

18 You have taken from me friend and neighbor—
darkness is my closest friend.

Key points:

1. Despair can be praise and despair can be worship because despair can be prayed.
2. God accepts our complaints that are sincere and directed at him. Complaints about God directed to others are grumbling and result in making ourselves bitter and others embittered against us.
3. Faith doesn't come from blind acceptance, it comes from wrestling with the difficult realities of the universe. And wrestling with the ultimate reality of the universe, wrestling with God Himself.
4. All Christians struggle at least occasionally with a mixture of belief and unbelief because unbelief is at the root of all sin and none of us are perfect.
5. Faith is confessing my weaknesses and my need to rely on Jesus Christ. Psalm 88 teaches us that faith requires putting our voice to that need and expressing it.
6. The Bible lays out the problems with creation pretty realistically. It doesn't paint a rosy picture because it's not trying to sell you anything.
7. We build on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ, and then we love and we live and we hope as though we are immortal beings charged with making the world a better place because that's exactly what the Bible tells us we are and what we are to do.
8. When you realize Christ is all you have, you finally see that Christ is all you need. It's in the dark night of the soul that you finally find the grace and the power of God to work a miracle in you.
9. In the end, only one person truly prays Psalm 88 because only one person can keep being faithful no matter how deep the darkness.
10. God the Son actually takes God's forsakenness onto Himself and prays your sense of God-forsakenness back to God.
11. When darkness, despair and depression overwhelm you, there's only one thing that will overwhelm them: your response to the love of Jesus Christ.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What do you think it means, that the one-third of the Psalms in the Book of Psalms are Psalms of lament.
2. Do you think prayers about suffering and despair, even those asking God where He is in the midst of suffering, are acceptable to God?
3. Why is it a problem to grumble and complain about God to others?
4. Why is there such intense misery and suffering among so many people in the world?
5. Does it surprise you that faithful Christians sometimes feel estranged from God? What does that mean?
6. What do you think it means when we talk about wrestling with God? How does that grow our faith?
7. Do you think it's normal for Christians to sometimes struggle with their belief in God?
8. Does Christianity suggest that your struggles end once you become a Christian? Does the Bible teach that Christians have it easy while non-Christians suffer?
9. Can christians experience joy even in the midst of suffering? Why or why not?
10. Do you ever experience severe depression or a sense of hopelessness? If so, what are some of the ways you can address those feelings?
11. Given what we learn about Heman's life and how he was blessed by God, do you really think Heman was abandoned by God as he claims in Psalm 88?
12. Why is Jesus the only person who can truly pray Psalm 88?
13. In verses 10 and 11 of Psalm 88, Heman asks God in seemingly in ironic fashion, "Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do the spirits rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?" What do you believe are the answers to those questions? Why?