

When You Feel Abandoned by God – Psalm 88

I. Psalm 88 Shows Us the Reality of Just How Dark It Can Feel and How Long It Can Last – Even for a Believer

A. Show Your Counselee How a Season of Darkness Can Happen Even to a Mature Believer

This is Heman and the Sons of Korah writing this Psalm! These are mature worship leaders who have written other Psalms like Psa. 84 and Psa. 45, so they have a history of knowing, loving, and trusting God. Yet, they find themselves in an incredibly dark place.

B. Show Your Counselee How the Darkness Doesn't Always End Quickly

This Psalm is for when the darkness drags on, because Psalm 88 seems to be talking about a prolonged season of suffering or some kind of chronic illness.

John MacArthur Study Bible – The title of this Psalm, 'Mahalath Leannoth,' could be referring to a musical instrument or it could be symbolic of a chronic illness or suffering, because the Hebrew word 'Mahalath' can mean to writhe or to be in anguish.

Psalm 88:15 "I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth up..."

V. 15 seems to indicate that whatever was going on in his life has been going on for a long time now.

- o Maybe your counselee has been struggling for years with **INFERTILITY**
- o Maybe they're struggling with one failed **ADOPTION** process after another
- o Maybe they've spent years now of sleepless nights, tossing and turning over an **ADULT CHILD** who is not doing well
- o Maybe your counselee has been living with an **ALCOHOLIC** or someone **ADDICTED** to drugs
- o Maybe they're **GRIEVING** the death of a child, a parent, or a spouse, and the absence of their presence in is still overwhelming.
- o Maybe, despite all the medical advances we enjoy here in America, your counselee now lives with some kind of **CHRONIC** health Issue that makes doing even basic, simple things in life painful and difficult.

Psalm 88 is a gift from God to every person who experiences suffering that drags on to the point that it throws their soul into turmoil, because they're more aware of the absence of God and unanswered prayers than they are comfort.

II. Psalm 88 Shows Us How Genuine Faith Can Be Tested and Forged in the Dark

A. Show Your Counselee How the Psalmist Still Prays to God Even though He's Gotten No Answer

v. 1 "O LORD, God of my salvation, I have cried out day and night before You."

The Hebrew word for 'cry' is the word 'tsaq' that means a shout of desperation from someone who's in distress.

v. 2 "Let my prayer come before You; incline Your ear to my cry."

The Hebrew word for 'cry' at the end of v. 2 is not the same as v. 1. This Hebrew word is the word 'rinnah' that refers to a loud utterance of emotion – especially when it's inarticulate.

The Psalmist is saying, "Incline Your ear to my emotional babbling! I can't even form complete sentences but I'm crying out to You!"

v. 13 "But to You I have cried out, O LORD, and in the morning my prayer comes before You."

The Hebrew word for 'cry' in v.13 is yet another Hebrew word, different from what we saw in v. 1 and 2, because I think this chapter is trying to show us that you can't express the depth of this kind of sorrow with just one word. So the Holy Spirit comes at it from several different angles.

The word for 'cry' in v. 13 is a word that means to cry out for help intensely. It's only used 22x in the Bible. 8x in the book of Job and 10x in the Psalms of lamentation.

v. 9 "LORD, I have called daily upon You; I have stretched out my hands to You."

The word ‘stretched out’ means to spread out something or to open it from a closed or folded position.

That’s faith in the midst of darkness! He is still lifting open hands to God, despite how long the suffering has lasted and how silent God has been. He has not resorted to clenched fists!

Don’t be overly critical of everything your counselee says. Even the best theologian will reveal some frayed edges during a prolonged darkness. Some of what’s coming out of the Psalmist’s mouth in Psalm 88 is ugly and inaccurate theology about God. But this man has lost his faith.

B. Show Your Counselee How the Psalmist Still Prays Without Any Felt-Sense of God’s Presence or Favor in His Life

Notice! He’s not crying out to God daily because he has a warm, fuzzy feeling. He’s already told us that he does not feel God’s presence or favor. In fact, he feels like God is against him and has become his enemy. And yet, faith can be forged in times like this.

“In the darkness we have a choice that is not really there in better times. We can choose to serve God just because He is God. In the darkest moments we feel we are getting absolutely nothing out of God or our relationship to him. But what if *then* –when it does not seem to be paying or benefitting you at all –you continue to obey, pray to, and seek God, as well as continue to do your duties of love to others? If we do that –we are finally learning to love God for himself and not for his benefits. And when the darkness lifts or lessens, we will FIND that our dependence on other things besides God for our happiness has shrunk, and that we have new strength and contentment in God himself. We’ll find a new fortitude, unflappability, poise, and peace in the face of difficulty.” *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller, p. 248-249, Dutton, 2013

Darkness does not have to destroy you. It could, in fact, be the defining moment that takes you to a spiritual place you’ve never been before.

But the real hope for your counselee is found outside of Psalm 88! Oh, use Psalm 88 to help them see that they’re not the first to suffer darkness, but don’t leave them there!

III. You’ll Need to Remind Your Counselee that the Darkness of Psalm 88 is Never the Last Word for a Child of God

If your counselee is a Christian, then Psalm 88 is never the ultimate or final experience, because they have something the Psalmist never had in the midst of his darkness. Your counselee has a Savior who experienced ultimate darkness for them on the cross.

This Psalm may be the darkest Psalm in Bible, but it’s not the darkest chapter in the Bible!

Matthew 27:45-46 “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?’”

Conclusion –

Psalm 88 gives us a context for the prolonged pain and suffering that some of our counselees are experiencing, but please don't leave your counselees in Psalm 88! You'll need to point them to our Savior – who was called a 'Man of Sorrows' and acquainted with grief.

The Bible never promises that we'll never feel abandoned by God. It promises that we never are abandoned by God, because Jesus experienced ultimate darkness and abandonment for us on the cross.