

### Scripture Text

Psalm 88

### Context

The psalms are honest prayers that reveal God's character and man's response to him. While most psalms conclude with praise for God's breakthrough in either our circumstances or hearts, Psalm 88 begins with pain and ends with darkness.

### Observation and Meaning

- What do verses 1 and 2 tell us about the psalmist's relationship with God and view of him?
- Read verses 3 to 9. How is the psalmist describing his external circumstances and internal struggles? Who does he think is the ultimate reason for all these?
- What do you think the psalmist is petitioning for in verses 13 to 14? What is his deepest desire?
- The psalm comes to a close in verses 15 to 18 with further description of distress and darkness. The psalmist concludes that darkness is a better friend to him than anyone else, including God himself. Is this objectively true? While we are still in this broken world, why is the existence of a psalm like this in the bible so encouraging and uplifting?
- Read verses 10 to 12. In the psalmist's context, what do you think he is expressing through these rhetorical questions? For us today, do we know someone who went to the grave because of God's steadfast love, and rose again to the praise of God?

### Big Idea

Even in the darkest pit of suffering and pain in this broken world, God's faithful presence is always with us whether we feel it or not.

### Connecting to the Bible's storyline

God is light, and darkness in the bible is often used to describe the absence of God and his blessing. Darkness came over the land when Jesus was on the cross – he was cut off from God so that sinners can be forgiven to receive God's presence and blessing.

### Application

- How have you personally identified with the psalmist's experience of darkness in your own life?
- How is your prayer life like during the bleakest seasons? How can we be, like the psalmist in verse 1, persist in crying to the God of our salvation day and night?
- Where can we find and see God in the midst of spiritual depression? How does faith look like during such times of waiting?
- How can we be of good encouragement and companionship to those among us who are suffering from deep profound pain?

## Guide for Study Leaders

Use the C.O.M.A. (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application) method to work through the biblical text.

### Context

Pay attention to the surrounding verses, paragraphs, chapters, events, etc. to see how this passage fits within the context of this particular book of the Bible.

Note how this passage fits within the larger storyline of the whole Bible, i.e. how God is saving a people through Jesus Christ to live under his rule in his place.

### Observation & Meaning

Make careful observations of the biblical text. Notice details such as linking words (eg. "for", "if", "therefore"), repetition, dialogue, narrative, OT quotations, etc.

To understand the meaning of the biblical text, we need to discern the author's purpose or intent: Why is the biblical author writing this?

Helpful questions to ask include:

Who is writing and to whom?  
What is the situation of the author and of the readers?  
Are we made aware of any problems that need to be addressed?  
Are there any repeated themes, or a single idea that holds everything together?

### Application

Apply God's word to the heart. Move beyond merely addressing circumstances and behaviour by asking good "heart" questions. For example: Why do we do what we do? What do we really desire?

Always connect the gospel to application. For example, what difference does knowing Christ make to our obedience to God?

Ask what the passage teaches us about God, ourselves, salvation in Christ, the church, the world, etc.