

Week Four: The Language of Lament

Lament / [luh-ment] *noun*: an expression of grief or sorrow. a formal expression of sorrow or mourning, especially in verse or song; an elegy or dirge.

Discussion Starter: What first comes to mind when you think of the word "lament"? What are some antonyms for "lament"?

Context: Psalm 88 is written by "the Sons of Korah." Korah was also a choir director appointed by King David. The voice in this psalm is of someone who has lived their life on the edge of death. The shadow that is cast does not lift, even at the end when most psalms offer a hopeful tone. Yet even in this heavy psalm, the psalmist grasps at hope by beginning with the words, "Lord, you are the God who *saves me.*"

Scripture and Discussion: Read through the psalm silently for a couple of minutes, then have someone from the group read it aloud.

Psalm 88

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.

1. What do you notice about this psalm? What ideas, images or words stand out to you?
2. What do you feel when you read this psalm? Does it surprise you that it is part of the Bible? Why or why not?
3. What can this psalm teach us about human nature? What do we learn about God and what He is like?

Group Prayer

Share your concerns and thanksgivings with one another and pray together. You could close your prayer time by reading verses 1-2 aloud together.

Throughout the week, practice turning Psalm 88 into a personal prayer. If you do not relate to most of this psalm right now, think of someone in your life who might. As you work through each verse, hold them in prayer, asking God to break through and make his nearness and love known to them.