



Lent reflection for April 8, 2025

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Psalm 88: 1-12

*O Lord, God of my salvation,
when, at night, I cry out in your presence,
let my prayer come before you;
incline your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of troubles,
and my life draws near to Sheol.
I am counted among those who go down to the Pit;
I am like those who have no help,
like those forsaken among the dead,
like the slain that lie in the grave,
like those whom you remember no more,
for they are cut off from your hand.
You have put me in the depths of the Pit,
in the regions dark and deep.
Your wrath lies heavy upon me,
and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah*

*You have caused my companions to shun me;
you have made me a thing of horror to them.
I am shut in so that I cannot escape;
my eye grows dim through sorrow.
Every day I call on you, O Lord;
I spread out my hands to you.
Do you work wonders for the dead?
Do the shades rise up to praise you? Selah
Is your steadfast love declared in the grave,
or your faithfulness in Abaddon?
Are your wonders known in the darkness,
or your saving help in the land of forgetfulness?*

Today's reflection is from Carolina Toth:

This passage is very sad and morbid. The Psalmist is near death, and indeed feels like they are as good as dead already. It seems like maybe they have a bad sickness that is outwardly visible (e.g., being “a thing of horror” and

“eyes growing dim”). After reading this section through verse 12, I looked up the rest of the Psalm to see if it got any better in the final 6 verses, but no - the whole thing is just like this. They say they’ve been near death since their youth in verse 15. Maybe it’s a genetic illness.

Worse still than whatever is wrong: they think that death separates people from God - that God forgets about and cannot reach the dead. The rhetorical questions toward the end of the passage (e.g., “Do you work wonders for the dead? Is your steadfast love declared in the grave?”) don’t seem like real questions that the person is asking. They seem to know the answer already as “No.” Death is somewhere that God does not or cannot reach. Maybe worst of all, the Psalmist blames God for putting them in this good-as-dead situation: “You have caused my companions to shun me” and “Your wrath lies heavy upon me.” If we go with the idea that this is a genetic illness - they think that God gave them the illness in anger, maybe as a punishment, and intentionally.

How different this person’s perspective is vs. my understanding of God! My God does not cause suffering - he gives people strength and love through their suffering. God is not limited by death and has won victory over the grave - he could work wonders for this person even if dead. God has not given up on this Psalmist, and is with them even as they write.

The organization where I work serves people living in extreme poverty in Africa. Are these people in poverty because of God’s wrath? Of course not. Where is God? He is with them every day, and calls us to join Him as His hands and feet. What will happen when they die? God will bring them home to be with Him, and wipe every tear from their eyes.

In fact, I cannot relate to this Psalmist’s perspective almost at all. Maybe this is because I have been privileged to have a life of relative health and lots of blessings, and so have never felt as separated from God like they do. Or maybe it’s because Jesus has given us a clearer picture of what God is like, that this writer didn’t yet know about.



Carolina Toth lives with her husband, siblings, and two kids just a few blocks from the church. She works at GiveDirectly, giving unconditional cash grants to people in need.