

SERIES TITLE: **SURVIVAL SONGS**

PART SIX: **SURVIVING THE DARKNESS**

TEXT: **PSALM 88**

INTRODUCTION.

This series focuses on seven songs from the Hymnal of Scripture—the Psalms. This collection was written and compiled over a period of perhaps 1,000 years. King David wrote 75 of the Psalms. Asaph and the sons of Korah were also major contributors, while Solomon, Moses, Heman, and Ethan are also named. In 48 cases, the author is not identified. The seven psalms in this study have a survival theme. In each one, the human author expresses some desperate longing or need. We can identify with these feelings of abandonment, fear, guilt, and distress. These honest songs have much to teach us about how God works during such times.

DISCUSSION.

If there is no obvious good news in this Psalm, why might it be included in Scripture? What purpose could it serve? Have you ever heard it read aloud in church? Heard a sermon on it? Read it yourself?

EXAMINATION.

The song was written by Heman the Ezrahite. What can we learn about him? 1 Kings 4:29-31; 1 Chron. 6:33; 15:16-19; 16:41-42.

Vv.1-2 The word “cry” refers to a ringing shout of joy or sorrow. Is this expressiveness purely cultural, or should it be part of our experience? Why or why not?

Vv.3-5 His fullness of trouble may have included illness he had endured for many years (v.15). Examining what he says, how would you describe what the Psalmist feels?

Vv.6-9a Identify the things for which he blames God. Is it possible and reasonable that this is God’s doing, or is this just the misery talking?

V.9b “Spread out my hands” is as a little child stretches out her arms to daddy as she cries. True faith wrestles with God, begging for his help in prayer. Is this a practice that we tend to outgrow, feel we are too mature to do? If so, is that right?

Vv.10-12 There are four questions in these verses. All of them anticipate the answer “no.” What point is Heman making?

Vv.13-18a The entire song cycles back and forth between trust and doubt, prayer and accusation. The way that verse 13 starts with the adversative “but” is just one example. It is followed immediately by accusations that God has deserted him. What is the explanation for this opposing information? Is it contradictory?

V.18b What does this dismal ending have to teach us?

APPLICATION.

- This Psalm, like many others, expresses pain to God. Is that something you find difficult to do, or easy? Why?
- Compare the experience of Jesus on the cross with this Psalm (Matthew 27:45-46). How does the suffering of the Savior inform our perspective on suffering? Consider 1 Peter 4:12-13.
- Is it wrong for us to expect that every darkness will eventually be dispelled in this life? Why or why not?
- How has God answered all four questions in vv.10-12 through the cross of Christ?
- If there is no visible evidence that God is at work in your life, how can you stay encouraged, and how can you keep moving forward?
- FACT: What is a key truth that you understood from this passage?
- REACT: What did you feel?
- ACT: What are you going to do?