

# Psalm Ch88v1-18 - Light In Our Darkness

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[ 0 : 00 ] One Friday evening I was with my wife and kids and I started to become very anxious. I quietly slipped upstairs and got into bed where I began to shake with nerves. After a couple of weeks I was feeling better again. It seemed the episode was over. Then one day soon after a darkness came over me. For the next number of weeks I was deeply depressed and anxious.

My thoughts were very troubled. I was scared it would never lift. These are the words of a pastor friend and they reflect the author's experience of Psalm 88.

Look at verse 3. I am overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death. Verse 6. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.

[ 1 : 19 ] At the end of verse 15. I have borne your terrors and am in despair. It seems that there is no shaft of light in this psalm. In fact, it ends with a crushing blow.

Look at the end of verse 18. Darkness is my closest friend. Death, depths and despair. It seems that darkness has the final word.

Now this may sound very bleak and hopeless, but that's how life can be. We can feel depressed for a time or we can suffer depression for a long time.

It's dark and it's real. It can lead to stressful days and sleepless nights as we cry out to God. Verse 1. Lord, you are the God who saves me. Day and night I cry out to you.

May my prayer come before you. Turn your ear to my cry. This psalm is one long desperate cry which descends into ever increasing darkness.

[ 2 : 35 ] Together we are going to enter into the experience of this writer as he shares his struggle. An experience that is common to us all at different times and in different ways.

We will follow the downward spiral from deep darkness to deeper darkness and into deepest darkness.

So first, deep darkness. When we are down and depressed it can feel like a living death. Verse 3. I'm overwhelmed with troubles and my life draws near to death.

Verse 5. I am set apart with the dead like the slain who lie in the grave. This feeling of depression, this state of mind can affect reality.

It can distort a correct view of God. This distortion, I think, is expressed in two ways in this psalm. First, that God has forgotten me.

[ 3 : 50 ] Verse 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.

You see, in such deep darkness, in times like this we think we are as good as dead to God. He doesn't care for me.

He doesn't remember me. He doesn't love me. I'm just a body in a grave. You see, if God was really compassionate, he would lift me out of this deep darkness.

A second distortion is not only that God has forgotten me, but that God is punishing me. Verse 6. You have put me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths.

Verse 7. Your wrath lies heavily on me. You have overwhelmed me with all your waves. We think God is angry and is bringing his judgment and his wrath upon us.

[ 5 : 00 ] I must have done something wrong. I must be dishonouring God. I'm not doing what I should be doing. I'm just a sinful person. You see, if God was truly kind, he would lift me up out of this deep darkness.

Feeling down and being depressed is a very real experience. And it can distort a true understanding of God. This is where the writer is.

He is struggling with his thoughts and his view of God has become twisted. Look at the end of verse 8. I am confined and cannot escape. My eyes are dim with grief.

He is struggling with his thoughts and his view of God has become twisted. Our struggle and suffering is so deep that sometimes we cannot see God clearly.

You see, we live in a world that is broken. And part of that brokenness means we will suffer physically, spiritually and at times mentally.

[ 6 : 18 ] Being in deep darkness can lead to a distorted view of who God is. And part of that brokenness means we are not completely different. It is.

It is. Second, deeper darkness. As the writer continues, so we descend into an even deeper darkness. Instead of getting better, it seems to get worse.

In the darkness, we call out to God. Look at the second part of verse 9. I call to you, Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you.

And what follows is a series of quick-fired questions which express how we feel. Each answer is a negative no. Verse 10.

Do you show your wonders to the dead? No. Do the dead rise up and praise you? No. Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in destruction?

[ 7 : 22 ] Never. Are your wonders known in the place of darkness or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion? Of course not. Again, all of this leads to wrong and distorted thoughts.

First, the writer feels he is abandoned by God. God doesn't show his wonders or declare his love or work his goodness to the dead.

No, God does his wondrous acts in the land of the living. And the fact that I don't experience God's healing and that God doesn't intervene means I must be abandoned.

I'm nothing to God. I'm dead to him. A second wrong thought is that I am beyond God.

Because God doesn't show his wondrous deeds, I'm beyond the reach of God. I'm too far gone. I'm beyond saving.

[ 8 : 26 ] I'm lost forever. Even if God wanted to save me, he can't. I'm stuck in this unreachable pit of deeper darkness.

You see, these experiences are real. And sometimes we cannot see any hope or light. Have you ever had moments like that?

You go to bed in deep darkness, only to awaken in a deeper darkness. I don't understand why God allows us to go through these seasons.

I don't know why God doesn't always intervene. But it's a reality. Sometimes we see no hope and no light.

Third. Deepest darkness. Experience tells us that sometimes we can fall into the deepest darkness.

[ 9 : 38 ] That seems to be where the writer has come to. Look at verse 13. Verse 14. But I cry to you for help, Lord. In the morning my prayer comes before you.

Why, Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me? The why question of verse 14 repeats the writer's theme song.

We find ourselves at our deepest yet. Looking back over his life he can see nothing but darkness. Verse 15.

From my youth I have suffered and have been close to death. I have borne your terrors and am in despair. Your wrath has swept over me.

Your terrors have destroyed me. It's bleak. Death. Despair. Destruction. His conclusion is clear. Verse 18.

[ 10 : 35 ] You have taken from me friend and neighbour. Darkness is my closest friend. Literally it reads, my closest friend is darkness. Darkness is the last word.

It seems the darkness has won.

It expresses how Job also felt when he suffered terribly. In his struggle to God he cried out, Why then did you bring me out of the womb?

I wish I had died before any eyes saw me. Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me God so I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return.

To the land of gloom and utter darkness. To the land of deepest night. Of utter darkness and disorder. Where even the light is like darkness.

[ 11 : 51 ] It seems that the darkness has won. Or has it?

You see, if we look carefully across this psalm, there is a ray of light that beams across. A light that draws us out of the deepest darkness.

It brings courage to the destroyed, hope to the despairing and life to the dead.

First, it gives courage to the destroyed. Look at verse 16. Your wrath has swept over me. Your terrors have destroyed me.

That's how we often can feel. Destroyed. Utterly broken. Nothing to give. Nothing to live for.

[12:52] We feel we are the only one who is like this. And like the writer says in verse 8. I am confined and cannot escape. We feel the darkness has trapped us and there is no way out.

But you are not alone. And there is a way out. That's why this psalm is written. It's been recorded and preserved for you today.

It tells you that darkness can and does descend. But that doesn't mean that God has hidden his face or has forgotten you or is punishing you.

Just because you cannot see God or just because you cannot feel God's presence, it does not mean God is not there. God is over you.

He has brought you to this path and he will bring you through this path. Despite the darkness, the words of Psalm 139 are still true.

[14:03] Turn with me just for a moment to Psalm 139.

Verse 7. The writer cries out, Where can I go from your spirit? And where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, Even there your hand will guide me.

Your right hand will hold me fast. If I say, Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light become night around me, Even the darkness will not be dark to you.

The night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. Despite the darkness, God is with you.

[15:21] To God the darkness is as light. He sees you. He has not abandoned you. He walks with you and holds you fast.

You are never beyond His reach. So let this flicker of light give you courage when you feel destroyed.

So first, courage to the destroyed. Second, hope for the despairing. Look back at Psalm 88, end of verse 15.

I have borne your terrors, and am in despair. As we go through this psalm, it descends into a greater and more intensifying darkness.

It can leave us despairing. But the greater the darkness, the greater the hope. Look how the writer prays. Verse 2.

[16:28] May my prayer come before you. Turn your ear to my cry. And despite the troubles, he keeps on calling out to God.

The end of verse 9. I call to you, Lord, every day. I spread out my hands to you. And although the struggles continue, he perseveres.

It's almost that as the darkness intensifies, so his prayers intensify. Verse 13. But I cry to you, Lord, for help.

In the morning my prayer comes before you. Why does he keep on praying in what appears to be an utterly hopeless situation?

He's either mad, or he has promised hope. Well, he does have hope. Look how the psalm starts.

[17:28] Verse 1. Lord, you are the God who saves me. Lord, written in capitals, is the name of the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God.

The one who has promised to save, and is loyal and faithful to his promise. That's the hope the writer has. That one day, despite the darkness, the Lord will save.

This is not glass half full kind of stuff. This is a sure and certain hope that God will do as he promised.

It's the kind of hope that Job expressed in his suffering. I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him, with my own eyes, I and not another.

[18:33] How my heart yearns within me. So, third, life for the dead.

Look at verse 15. From my youth I have suffered and have been close to death. I have borne your terrors and am in despair.

The darkness sometimes feels like death. It overwhelms. But yet life comes because God is the one who saves.

And he saves ultimately through Jesus. You see, only in Jesus does death become life. Only in Jesus does the darkness become light.

You see, through Jesus God entered into the darkness of this world. He descended into the deepest darkness ever for you and for me.

[ 19 : 43 ] The Gospel writers record for us that when Jesus died on the cross, he says, From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over the whole land.

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? At that moment Jesus, as he died on the cross, was taking my sin and your sin on himself.

The darkness of God's wrath fell on Jesus. He was utterly forsaken, abandoned, hid from the Father's face.

God did this because he loved you and he promised to save you. He did this so that you could be forgiven of all your sin and never ever be abandoned.

But more than this, Jesus descended into the depths of death and hell itself so that we would never have to. Three days later, he was raised from the dead.

[ 21 : 04 ] He defeated the darkness. He crushed death. He destroyed the grave so that we might have life with him forever.

You see, Jesus knows what it means to say, Darkness is my only friend.

He went through the deepest depths of darkness so that in your darkness he could be your forever friend, who never leaves you and never forsakes you.

Even though it is dark, the darkness will be as light to him. You see, there is no darkness so deep that we will not find our Saviour there.

You see, when we come to Jesus in faith, the darkness is reversed. The light of Jesus brings courage, hope and life.

[ 22 : 10 ] We can now read verse 10 with a declaration of yes. Look at verse 10. Do you show your wonders to the dead?

In Jesus? Yes. Do the dead rise up and praise you? Because of Jesus? Yes. Is your love declared in the grave?

Your faithfulness in destruction? Because of what Jesus has done? Yes. Are your wonders known in the place of darkness? Or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

Yes. Yes. And yes. Jesus has overcome. We are never beyond the reach of Jesus.

No matter how deep the darkness might be, he is present. He has not abandoned you. He loves you.

[ 23 : 11 ] He will bring you through. See the light of Jesus in the midst of our darkness.

I want to close by reading a hymn. Psalm 88 is a hymn. While this is a more modern hymn.

As I read, let it become your prayer and your longing as you cry out to God.

How long, O Lord, shall I complain? Like one that seeks his God in vain, Canst thou thy face for ever hide, And I still pray and be denied?

How long shall my poor troubled breast Be with these anxious thoughts oppressed, And Satan, my malicious foe, Rejoice to see me sunk so low?

[ 24 : 16 ] Whate'er my fears or foe suggest, Thou art my hope, my joy, my rest, My heart shall feel thy love and raise, My cheerful voice to songs of praise.

Amen.