

PSALM 8

INTRODUCTION

Are you familiar with Simon & Garfunkel's song, *The Sound of Silence*? It's a classic folk-rock song that has been covered by many over the years. It was written in the early 1960s by Paul Simon. It's a powerful and poignant commentary, I think, on the difficulty of being seen, heard, and understood. It wrestles with feeling alone and lost. Some lines of this song are as beautiful as they are sad. It begins with:

Hello darkness, my old friend
I've come to talk with you again

A little later, he desires connection but can't find it, even in the masses of people around him.

My words, like silent raindrops, fell
And echoed in the wells of silence

Darkness. Silence. These two words are often used to describe our feelings of confusion filled with questions—for some—deep questions about God and His concern for us.

I was listening to a podcast the other day that featured Lee Strobel¹. He is a former atheist who became a Christian while trying to disprove the Resurrection of Jesus. He wrote about it later in the book, *The Case for Christ*.

In the podcast, he was asked what is the greatest challenge for people today to come to faith in God. He quickly said, "The hiddenness of God." He is referring to a philosophy and to a perceived reality. The philosophy—a key part of atheism—says if God were real, then He would make Himself easily known—so known that no one could doubt His existence. Everyone would believe.

Most people who doubt God probably don't know or care about the philosophy of Divine Hiddenness but, rather, they experience a perceived reality of God's absence. It's experienced as darkness and silence. It's a problem that's not new. The Psalms are filled with confusion and questions about God's presence and concern for us. One of the darkest Psalms is Psalm 88, written by a man named Heman.

Poor old Heman. From other places in Scripture², we learn he was talented and blessed in so many ways, yet he struggled and felt abandoned by God. He doesn't correct that thought in his Psalm. Many Psalmists complain, but before it's over, they come back to praising God. Not Heman. Here are some of the things he says:

*I am overwhelmed with troubles
and my life draws near to death.
You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
Why, Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?
Darkness is my closest friend.*

¹<https://careynieuwhof.com/episode647/>

²<https://www.gotquestions.org/Heman-the-Ezrahite.html>

DISCUSSION

Hello, Darkness, my old friend. I've come to talk with you again. Could it be, though, that darkness really is our friend, when it comes to knowing God?

I want to think Heman comes back to praising and trusting God at some point, as the other Psalmists do. Maybe one night, Heman, in the silent darkness looked up and saw the stars and the moon. Maybe he had an experience like David in Psalm 8 and Psalm 19. Maybe he saw God in the stars.

Lee Strobel makes the case that God is not hidden at all. He cites Romans 1:20.

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

—Romans 1:20 NLT

Our problem is we tend to ignore God's stuff all around us, suppress it, and then ask for more and different. We end up with darkness and the sound of silence. Psalm 8 breaks the silence as King David enjoys the darkness of the night. Why? Because it allows him to see the beauty of moon and starlight.

Maybe he goes out late in the evening and sits where he can see the beautiful sky. Maybe he is reading Genesis 1. Maybe he rolls up the scroll and lays it aside. He leans back in his chair and looks into the heavens. Darkness is deepening. It's a cool crisp night, and there is not a cloud in the sky. There's a new moon—just a tiny sliver—but you can kind of see the rest of it faintly. The stars grow so bright. There are so many. They twinkle, and David wonders how many there are.

David is in awe. The stars and the moon are witnesses to God's glory and usher David into His presence. Inspired by God's Spirit, he picks up his pen and writes. Maybe, as he begins, he hears some children.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

You have set your glory in the heavens.

Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?

You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

—Psalm 8 NIV

David brings together what theologians call transcendence and immanence. Transcendence addresses the "otherness" of God. He is so beyond us, so different, so incomprehensible and mysterious. Immanence, on the other hand, says God is close, present, and knowable.

As David contemplates the marvelous majesty of God in the night sky, maybe he hears some children nearby. David marvels at how this mighty powerful God chooses to use the weak³, the simple, to accomplish His will.

³See 1 Corinthians 1:27.

I think David recognizes, and is saying that, God can and does empower the weakest to overcome the strongest of enemies. God's power is made perfect in weakness.⁴ It's about God's power working in the frailty of humanity.

As David looks at the stars in all their stunning beauty, he is amazed that God has chosen to make men and women the crown of all his creative work. It's a stunning thought!

"As I sit here and look at your heavens—the moon and the stars—how is it that you care for us? Why do you even think of us? You made us just below the angels and have given us dominion over this earth and its creatures. Why? Wow!"

Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Space and the stars that live there have always fascinated me. Growing up in Mitchell, I was quite familiar with Gus Grissom, who was also from Mitchell. Grissom was one of the very first astronauts, the second American in space, and had a real shot at being the first man on the moon had he not died in an Apollo 1 accident in January of 1967. Grissom's parents were faithful members of the Mitchell Church of Christ. So from my childhood, I knew them and had an interest in space.

I'm still intrigued by space. The vastness of space boggles my mind.⁵ We live in a galaxy called the **Milky Way**. Our solar system—our sun and planets—is a tiny part of the Milky Way.

- Our sun—93 million miles from Earth (it would take 19 years to fly there)—is just one of an estimated 100 billion to 400 billion stars in the Milky Way.
- Our galaxy is approximately 100,000 light-years in diameter.
- That means it would take light, which travels at 186,282 miles per second, 100,000 years to travel from one end of our galaxy to the other.
- Our solar system is 26,000 light-years from the center of the Galaxy.
- There are billions and billions of galaxies, maybe trillions; no one can see the end.
- Our next-door galaxy is Andromeda—approximately 2.5 million light-years away.

Let's come back home to our galaxy for a moment and talk about something we can see tonight. You can go out tonight and find the **North Star**, also called Polaris. The Big Dipper constellation will guide you.

- The North Star is 323 light-years away
- If you traveled by jet, it would about 5 billion years to get there

It is amazing that a God who has such creative ability, such power, a God who is so vast and beyond anything we can imagine or comprehend, a God so transcendent, it is amazing that he created us and is immanent. He is knowable, and we know He cares for us.

O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

When you look at the beauty and majesty of God's creation, and then you look at us who often mess it up, you have wonder, like David, "What is man and woman that you are mindful of us, that you care for us?"

Sometimes He seems silent when things are so dark. But in that darkness, if we look up and see the North Star, we know this Almighty God cares. About 250 years after David wrote Psalm 8, Isaiah the 8th Century B.C. Prophet is called by God to initially be a prophet of doom—warning the people to turn back to Him.

⁴See 2 Corinthians 12:9.

⁵Most of the following information comes from nasa.gov.

They won't and they don't, so they are carried off—exiled—to Babylon.

Isaiah 40 begins by imagining the future in Babylon. The people are there, receiving punishment for their rebellion. I think they wonder if God still loves them and cares for them. So God speaks through Isaiah into this imagined future. He speaks words of assurance and comfort. As he does, he points to the stars.

Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

—Isaiah 40:26 NIV

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel, “My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

—Isaiah 40:27,28 NIV

Though so transcendent, and in so many ways incomprehensible, God chooses to be immanent, to be close, to be known. He says, “I know you're tired and weary. I know you're weak. But I will give you strength and power. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength and soar like eagles. You can run and not grow weary!”

In that same context, God goes on to say:

Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be discouraged, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand.

—Isaiah 41:10 NLT

Then a little later, in chapter 43, he says:

Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

—Isaiah 43:1-3a NLT

He says in verse 4, “You are precious to me, and I love you.” Gazing upon a star can usher us into the reality of God's unconditional love. The stars are numbered and named by God—trillions and trillions of them. This same God knows your name and mine. He knows everything about us and loves us still. Why?

The simple answer is He chooses to love us. It's not based on us—not how smart we are, how good-looking we are, how rich we are—it's not about any of that—it's not about performance. God created us out of love, wanting us to enjoy what he enjoys. He wants us to love Him, to learn from Him, and to follow His ways as revealed, ultimately, in Jesus.

This same God who numbers and names the stars is also concerned about our scars. He knows us, and He knows our grief, our sorry, our struggles, our sins—He knows it all—and cares deeply about it all. He is a God of compassion and concern.

Sometimes in the midst of all the things that cause us pain, God seems to be hidden and silent, and we may be tempted to say or sing, “Hello, Darkness, my old friend, I've come to talk with you again. You're my closest friend.” May I suggest, in those moments when it's dark, going outside and looking at the North Star?

CONCLUSION

Several years ago, I was researching the North Star, I came across some interesting information that I did not know. The Big Dipper constellation and the North Star—which always points North—played a huge role in the Underground Railroad. The Underground Railroad is the name given to the process of slaves escaping the South before and during the Civil War. It was a series of secret routes, places, and people who aided the slaves on their journey to Northern freedom.

There is a connection to Mitchell from the Underground Railroad. I cannot document or verify this, but there is an old brick house about 2 miles southwest of Mitchell as the crow flies. A childhood friend of mine grew up in that house. I've been told by a few that this house was a part of the Underground Railroad. It makes sense because it has little rooms and cubbies where people could hide. Also, an 1850 census shows a relatively large population of freed slaves living in that immediate area.⁶

Harriet Tubman used the North Star to liberate herself—then went South, as a conductor, over and over again, using The Star to liberate both family and strangers. The North Star was the key to navigation to be free. The Big Dipper was called the Drink Gourd—referencing a hollowed-out gourd that people dipped in water to get a drink

Slaves knew to look at the constellation—the Drink Gourd—and follow a line of stars that pointed to the North Star.⁷ They had a song they sang, “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” that kept them on track. They found the Star and followed that Star to freedom. Darkness was a friend to freedom because darkness allowed the starlight, the guiding light, to shine.

It's interesting in Revelation 22 that Jesus says, “I am the Bright Morning Star.” That Bright Morning Star—Jesus—is God in the flesh. He is the transcendent Creator of the stars who becomes immanent. He becomes knowable as He identifies with us—all the way from a peasant girl's womb to a Cross to a borrowed tomb. So much of it was dark. He shows us how to live, how to die, and how to live again. He shows us how to navigate darkness.

The Creator of the stars is the Light of the World. The Light of the World stepped down into darkness for our freedom. He died on the Cross to take our sins, to forgive our sins, and to free us from guilt. He knows us. He calls us by name. He knows your joys and sorrows. He is not hidden or hiding.

The next time you are tempted to say or to sing:

*Hello, Darkness, my old friend,
I've come to talk with you again.
You're my closest friend.*

Turn it around from a depressing thought to expressing hope. Go outside and look at the North Star. Darkness allows you to see so clearly.

COMMUNION

As we commune with Christ, we are reminded of His closeness and of His care for us.

ALLEN BURRIS JULY 21, 2024 SHERWOOD OAKS CHRISTIAN CHURCH—BEDFORD

⁶<http://lawrencecountyhistory.org/muscrnrmar2021>

⁷Locate the North Star: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=7DjJ3r4XG0E>